

**AT A MEETING OF THE BOROUGH COUNCIL held in the Council Chamber - Town Hall, Maidenhead on Tuesday, 20th February, 2018**

**PRESENT:** Councillors John Lenton (Mayor), Eileen Quick (Deputy Mayor), M. Airey, N. Airey, Alexander, Bateson, Beer, Bicknell, Bowden, Brimacombe, Bullock, Burbage, Carroll, Clark, Coppinger, Cox, Da Costa, Diment, Dudley, D. Evans, Grey, Hill, Hilton, Hollingsworth, Hunt, Jones, Love, Luxton, Majeed, McWilliams, Mills, Rankin, S. Rayner, Richards, Saunders, Sharma, Sharp, Sharpe, Shelim, Smith, Story, Stretton, Walters, Werner, D. Wilson, E. Wilson and Yong

**Officers:** Alison Alexander, Alex Drury, Louise Freeth, Andy Jeffs, Mary Kilner, Russell O'Keefe, Rob Stubbs and Karen Shepherd

231. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bhatti, Dr L Evans, Gilmore, Ilyas, Kellaway, Lion, Pryer, C. Rayner and Targowska.

232. COUNCIL MINUTES

**RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That:**

- i) **The minutes of the meeting of Full Council held on 12 December 2017 be approved, subject to a note to be added that :**

**Hurley & Walthams Neighbourhood Plan – correctly minuted that ‘In July 2017 Cabinet approved the plan to go to referendum, at which over 50% of the community said ‘yes’ to the plan.’ However turnout for the referendum was only 16%.**

- ii) **The Part I minutes of the extraordinary meeting of the Full Council held on 29 January 2018 be approved.**

233. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In relation to the item ‘Budget Report 2018/19, Councillor Lenton stated that his son was a director at Deloitte’s technical department, the council’s appointed auditor. This would have no impact on future audits.

234. MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS

The Mayor submitted in writing details of engagements that he and the Deputy Mayor had undertaken since the last meeting, which were noted by Council.

235. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

- a) Richard Endacott on behalf of Helen Price of Park ward asked the following question of Councillor Lenton, the Mayor:**

Why are there prayers preceding a Council meeting?

The Mayor responded that the practice of saying prayers before a Council meeting had been a tradition and custom for most Council’s for many centuries. The practice of

saying prayers before RBWM Council Meetings had been applied since 1 April 1998 when the Royal Borough became a unitary Authority. The legal basis was given by the Local Government (Religious Observances) Act of 2015. The Royal Borough was a multi faith society and prayers could be, and had been, said by members of various faiths in the community. Future Mayors may wish to invite representatives of different faiths to say prayers before Council.

By way of a supplementary question, Richard Endacott commented that at the council meeting held on 29 January 2018 the prayers by Reverend Drake had included reference to wisdom, knowledge and understanding and that the work of the council would be pleasing in the sight of God. In view of what took place during the meeting, how would the Mayor assess the behaviour of council Members in relation to the prayers?

The Mayor responded that it was unlikely that God would wish to go into such detail of discussions at Council.

**b) Carole Da Costa of Clewer North ward asked the following question of Councillor Dudley, Leader of the Council:**

During a radio interview on the Andrew Peach show on 9 January 2018, Cllr Dudley stated that, "Everyone has been offered, high quality housing." He also said that he was going to visit the Southall unit. What Health and Safety Rating System does the RBWM use for its emergency housing including the Southall pay & sleep unit?

Councillor Dudley referred the question to Council McWilliams as Principal Member for Housing. Councillor McWilliams responded that all properties were inspected by a council officer before being used as temporary accommodation. This included checking that all the necessary certification was in place and the property was safe and suitable for use.

By way of a supplementary question, Carole Da Costa commented that the borough website displayed a link to the health and safety rating system. She had recently visited a family living in a band b where a heavily pregnant mother fell and fractured her leg due to cramped and overcrowded conditions. This was the least of her concerns when she had to take her two day old baby into the room with black mould growing up the walls and into their beds. Could the councillor explain why the housing paid for by the borough, far from being the high quality described did not meet the standards on the website, and did inspections include electrical wiring, water temperature and bathroom temperature?

Councillor McWilliams responded that the council's inspections met the national standards as required but if Mrs Da Costa had a specific case where she felt this had not been done then she could write to him with details and he would take it up with officers.

236. PETITIONS

None received

237. BUDGET REPORT 2018/19

Members considered the 2018/19 budget.

Councillor Saunders introduced the report. He stated that there was a growing maelstrom of councils, up and down the country, saying they desperately needed to increase their base council tax by the full 2.99%, plus the 3% Adult Social Care Levy. The council's innovative and prudent management enabled it to propose only a 1.95% increase in base council tax and the 3% Adult Social Care Levy. Residents would continue to pay the lowest council tax outside of London, and several hundred pounds less than neighbouring councils.

The borough's effective partnerships with councils and others, and the wider transformation programmes, enabled the council to continue to do more for less, protecting the needs of residents, particularly the vulnerable, and seeking to reward fairly the hard working council teams. The council had shouldered a rising demand to support more young and older vulnerable residents, with substantially more funding than raised by the Adult Social Care Levy and government grants, including the additional grant announced this month. The council was also allocating more to home to school transport for pupils with special needs and families on low incomes.

Protecting and enhancing generous benefits and reliefs to reduce Business Rates and the grants to community organisations had all been assured. Borough libraries continued to thrive, and all remained open and for more hours. A central grant had been secured to address the desperate needs of homeless residents. Significant investments in temporary accommodation at John West House and Braywick Lodge had attracted substantial government grant and the council expected to spend all of it by March 31, to help vulnerable residents and address the underlying causes of rough sleeping.

Time based parking charges for residents with Advantage Cards would not rise and, unlike neighbouring councils, resident parking permits remained free. Parking charges for season tickets and non-residents would increase, to half way between the current very low rates and the levels charged in comparable places outside the borough. Community safety continued to be a priority through the full funding of community wardens and the upgrade and expansion of CCTV coverage.

The council would continue to meet the huge demands for infrastructure investments in schools, roads, leisure centres and parking. This would facilitate the new full price, affordable and social rented homes in the submitted Borough Local Plan, the substantial regeneration of Maidenhead and Ascot, and the reinvigoration of Windsor ahead of the Royal Wedding. The council would continue to waive the council charge for arranging road closures for local community events where the Ward Councillors support the waiver, including for Royal Wedding street parties.

Councillor Saunders commented that, looking forward to coming years, there were many uncertainties. However, the council entered these challenging few years with finances fit for purpose. Revenue reserves remained significantly above the accepted minimum and the projected budget for 2019/2020 was currently balanced with a 1.95% increase in base council tax, no further Adult Social Care Levy, no use of reserves and assuming the dubious redistribution to other councils of Negative Support Grant was abolished.

The prudently projected cash receipts from innovative development partnerships in Maidenhead would, in all reasonable circumstances, pay for all the investments and provide the opportunity to pay off all debt, including that inherited 11 years previously,

and fully fund the pension fund deficit. The future would not necessarily unfold precisely as had been forecast and projected, but the council had the integrity, agility and commitment to adjust its plans to accommodate future perils and pressures.

The administration was about delivery, and the budget was about fairness and focus, in particular:

- having the determination to spend where needed, to enhance the quality of residents' lives, especially vulnerable residents;
- having the competence to plan and deliver substantial funds for residents, from the regeneration of Maidenhead;
- and having the vision to reinvest those funds with fairness and focus, in schools, parking, leisure facilities and much needed affordable and social housing.

Councillor Jones, as the Opposition spokesperson on the budget, thanked officers for their hard work to produce the budget, and she expressed her thanks to Councillor Saunders for bringing a draft budget to scrutiny at the end of 2017. She also thanked both the Head of Finance and Councillor Saunders for the discussions she had had with them.

Councillor Jones stated that in the seven years that she had been presenting the response to the budget, this had been the hardest analysis to undertake. The restructuring, outsourcing, partnerships and moving of departments with service areas had made comparison with previous years impossible. The budget before members was technically competent for the next year. However she wished to draw attention to some areas of concern.

The 18/19 budget balanced and it allowed for service demand increases. In the report summary it set out that to balance the budget the council would need to make another £5.4m of savings in 18/19. She had been told that the £5.4m expected savings to be made had been pronounced achievable by officers, although there was £100,000 on page 149 that was a 'one off' saving that would have to be found again in following years as it had been taken off the base budget.

The report said that Advantage Card holders would not be affected by parking charges. She highlighted that Advantage Card holders who found it cheaper to buy a season ticket then there would be an increase. People who normally parked in car parks that did not have the machines that could take Advantage Cards, then there would be an effect until those machines were installed.

The report heralded that the council would maintain the street wardens (previously called community wardens). Councillor Jones wondered if this could be a nod to their expanding role and highlighted that the commitment by the administration was to double the community wardens.

The council did offer a range of services at ten Children Centre locations, unfortunately the range in some locations this was decreasing year on year. The council must ensure that the still concerning use of agency social workers did not continue to impact negatively on resources; she had been told that entering the AfC partnership would resolve this issue. Law and governance must be adequately resourced, and she looked for reassurance that this was dealt with. Schools were under pressure to cut costs, smaller schools (of which Windsor had many) had

already cut as much as they could and still delivered the education borough children deserved, but the impact would be felt. Despite this drastic underfunding the council still required its schools, even those who could not use the program, to repay the Apprenticeship Levy.

Councillor Jones explained that in 2011, when she joined the council, there had been 8 members of Cabinet. In 2018 there were 19 in the extended Cabinet: Cabinet Members, Deputy Lead Members and Principal Members, paid a total of £203,000 per annum. Councillor Jones asked, given the amount of outsourcing, joint partnerships with councillors paid to sit on boards and the reduction of in-house services, how could this situation be justified?

Assumptions had been made that could significantly impact the financial position going forward. Policy decisions taken in preceding years had an effect as did decisions taken for activity in the future. The background to the budget was the policy decision to push forward with Maidenhead regeneration, to borrow to facilitate development, with the express desire to pay back borrowing with capital receipts from development of council owned land. The council was looking at borrowing reaching £230m in 2020, reducing to a net debt of £4m in 2025. Councillor Jones asked where were the capital receipts coming from? Obviously the four Joint Venture sites in Maidenhead would bring in receipts, but developing brown field sites was expensive and there was some major infrastructure such as the leisure centre and multi-storey car parks to provide. The most significant receipt that would consolidate the financial situation was from the development of Maidenhead Golf Course. To enable this the site would need to be removed from Green Belt protection by acceptance of the Borough Local Plan (BLP). If the site was not removed from the Green Belt then extraordinary circumstance must be proven to allow development. If the BLP was not accepted or was delayed then the council would not receive those receipts and would have £133m of debt by 2025 and interest of over £5m per year that would have to be serviced by council tax.

To put that into context, Council Tax for a band D in 2010/11 was £1054, in 2018/19 it would be £1008. Comparatively, since 2010 Band D council tax had reduced by £46 per year or 90p per week, that meant that the council would have approximately £55.5m less to invest in the future of the borough over those 9 years

It had been highlighted that the borough had the lowest council tax outside of London. However the neighbouring authority, Bracknell, had a current Band D council tax of £1194, £186 more than the borough per year. If the council had levied as Bracknell, it would have had an extra £79.3m over those 9 years. Bracknell's decision had enabled them to ensure adequate infrastructure was in place that enabled development and a brand new town centre. The policy decisions taken by the administration were to reduce council tax, take a photo outside the town hall with a big banner, and had not left anything to pump prime the regeneration.

This meant the council needed the estimated £287m receipt from Maidenhead Golf Course to pay back the borrowing or it would be left with a large debt. For every affordable unit the council stipulated would be in the development the receipt would diminish. The full effect of providing adequate truly affordable housing was unknown, therefore how could the council be sure of the receipt?

Councillor Jones recommended that the council did not commit to any more major infrastructure projects until it was sure that the BLP was secure.

The budget set out a 4.95% increase to the Band D collection amount, from £961.46 to £1008.16. It was down to each individual councillor whether they were happy with the risk of an unsuccessful BLP and the resultant £133m debt. She had been told that the council was committed to all its capital expenditure included in the budget but had also been told that Plan B, should the receipts not be forthcoming, was that the council would 'cut its cloth accordingly.' The detail of how this would be achieved was not in the budget.

Councillor Jones stated that it was a technically competent budget for the next year, but she questioned if the council, over the years, had built the foundations to ensure that it could deliver the aspirations promised by the administration, underpinned by a deliverable and stable financial position. She wished she could be more positive about the future position but whatever the outcome of the budget debate the council was not talking about options that would make any significant difference to the underlying risk going now forward. Councillor Jones was therefore unsure how she would vote as it was unclear if voting for the budget was for this year, or to accept the risk going forward. This was a question every councillor had to think about.

Councillor Sharma commented that councils up and down the country had to walk a tight rope to meet public demand in times of fiscal austerity. There would be tough decisions and smart choices. The budget would deliver focus and innovation. The budget was a reflection of the Conservative vision to serve residents and to continually improve the quality of lives of borough residents. The council was doing its best to fulfil the hopes and dreams of residents and would continue to do more. It was keeping the vulnerable safe and the elderly warm. It was helping and supporting local businesses to survive and prosper. There was continued investment in schools and a number of ambitious transformation schemes including the golf club, the waterways and support for Crossrail. In Windsor £2.6m had been allocated to improve the fabric and appearance. £2.3m had been allocated for highways and infrastructure investment in 2018/19. Social and affordable homes that were much needed were top of the Conservative agenda. There was a successful and efficient bus network to meet the needs of residents. The council had focussed full attention on plans and policies to work for the resident. The budget lay the foundation for the future growth and prosperity of the borough.

Councillor Hilton commented that given the difficulties many councils faced across the country, the budget was remarkable. Northamptonshire had recently issued a section 114 notice; the first council to do so in 20 years. A recent article had stated that at least 10 other councils were in a state of preparedness to also issue such a notice. 95% of councils were proposing to increase council tax, many to the maximum level allowed of 5.59%; not so in the borough that was proposing a 4.95% increase. Eight out of ten councils lacked confidence in the sustainability of local government finance. 75% of councils had had to use reserves to balance their budget. The Lead Member was confident there would be no need to do this in the borough in the next year. The majority of councils stated that the greatest demands came from children's services. Of the 101 councils who had released their proposed budget, 57 were planning to reduce children's services. In contrast the borough was proposing to improve the offer to young people through Achieving for Children (AfC). There were a number of examples where the borough continued to support services that other council's struggled to maintain: parks and gardens, a brand new leisure centre, libraries were flourishing, full funding for the Intensive Family Support Service, funding to keep bus routes open. The council was rightly proud that council tax in the borough was the

lowest outside London, which had been achieved by prudent management. The quality of services was the underlying theme of the budget. Councils needed to employ a degree of innovation, which required a high level of political leadership. This administration had such political leadership. He thanked all officers and councillors who had worked to transform the council to a more efficient partnering organisation that allowed this budget to come forward.

Councillor Richards joined the meeting at 8.10pm

Councillor Hunt commented that the budget was a budget for everyone. In Hurley and the Walthams a few years ago the council had purchased a piece of land to help prevent unauthorised usage. That land was now open space and the budget included funding for a playground area following a local consultation. The budget gave people what they wanted.

Councillor Hill stated that the budget was predicated on a measure of debt loading. In 2018/19 the debt was forecast as £141m, peaking at a quarter of a billion in 2023. This would then be followed by land sales, if they came off. Many were in his ward. Oldfield was suffering from overdevelopment, with up to 9500 dwellings in 15 years. The golf club had originally included 960 dwellings but this was now up to 2000. There was a profound lack of real infrastructure delivery including transport links. With this budget Maidenhead was at risk of becoming a high rise dormitory town. Oldfield ward residents had many times asked to be heard, however the leadership had ignored their plight. The key beneficiaries would be the developers who stood to make stellar profits. Councillor Hill commented that he viewed the budget as insanely speculative and a deplorable way to run the borough finances. He asked the leadership to think again and find another way.

Councillor S Rayner commented that she was delighted to offer the funding to the Hurley and Walthams play area. As many councils were closing libraries, the borough was keeping them open longer. A further £435,000 had been allocated for structural and internal improvements. Continued investment had brought more resident services into the libraries. She was thankful for the hard work and dedication of staff. In 2018/19 the council proposed to invest £540,000 in an upgrade of slides at Windsor Leisure Centre. The first phase of Braywick Leisure Centre was underway. This would transform the cultural and sporting opportunities in Maidenhead, paid for by the St Cloud Way development.

Councillor Rankin referred to Members of the Opposition who had raised questions about the significant capital investments to which the Royal Borough was committing. To build a borough for everyone, development was needed. However, too often development was embarked upon and completed without the necessary infrastructure in place. The budget invested significantly, in a focussed manner, to ensure that necessary infrastructure was indeed in place. The council would invest around £350m by 2025 in education, transport, leisure and other infrastructure to fully support the Borough Local Plan and the regeneration of Maidenhead. This included expanding schools, enhancing the transport infrastructure, a CCTV upgrade, state-of-the-art leisure facilities and enhancements to the buildings where residents used community services. The budget provided the necessary infrastructure to transform the borough over the next 10 years. Councillors Jones and Hill had raised the sustainability of this proposal. In Councillor Rankin's view, it was unsustainable not to get the infrastructure in place ahead of development. Councillor Saunders has clearly articulated how

conservative and credible expectations of capital inflows would meet this requirement, and further honour the commitment to borough staff by funding their pensions, and cover the borough's longer term debt. Through efficiency and careful financial planning, the council continued to ensure delivery of the services most valued by residents, and was ready to transform the borough in the next 10 years.

Councillor N. Airey commented that the budget reflected the council's aspirations to ensure that all children and young people in the borough were able to flourish and achieve the very best outcomes, regardless of their background. She was passionate that borough children and young people had access to the best services, whether that be in universal services such as their schools and education, sports and leisure, or time spent in borough children's and youth centres; or whether that be the more vulnerable youth who needed additional support from Children's Services and other directorates across the borough to meet any additional needs.

Councillor N. Airey stated that 2017-18 had been a big year for Children's Services. In August, the council joined with Achieving for Children, a significant step for the service and the valuable staff, and a step taken to help secure long-term positive outcomes for residents. At the same time, there were extremely high numbers of children in need, and particularly children on child protection plans. This was now 88 children but at one point had been over 150. These high numbers required additional social workers, independent reviewing officers, increased legal costs, and multi-agency meetings to take families through process. For that reason, and due to some members of staff unfortunately being on long-term sick leave, the council had had to maintain its use of agency staff to ensure appropriate cover within social care. However, she wanted to assure Members and residents that officers in Achieving for Children and in the Commissioning team worked closely to carefully manage the budget and to monitor the workload to ensure the right level of investment and staffing was in place.

The council continued to invest in recruiting foster carers beyond the original scope, using in-year investment within existing budgets in order to continue the work to help give children in care the best placements and to also assist in driving down ever-increasing placement costs. Furthermore, the council was one of the first councils in the country to implement the council tax exemption for care leavers, and went further, backdating this to 1 June 2015. Additionally, the council had maintained discretionary services for children and young people despite many local authorities around the country having long-since cut these, and would continue to do so in the 2018-19 budget. These services included universal children's and youth centre provisions which were run across the borough, and the Youth Voice, Youth Choice annual budget of £20,000 which was run by young people, for young people.

In relation to Councillor Jones's point, Councillor N. Airey explained that there had been a reduction in a session at the Old Windsor Children's Centre, based on a reduction in demand. As a hub centre, this required two members of staff to be available, and there were only three families who wished to use the session. Therefore, instead of running the session at the centre, the families were offered transport to another centre they may wish to use to ensure those three families did not miss out on services, but that staff time was also used wisely. The council continued to invest in the school estate across the borough, to ensure young people could receive their education in excellent facilities, and was completing the over £30m schools expansion programme undertaken since 2016. She clarified that about thirty schools in the borough were still maintained and therefore RBWM undertook their



payroll so the apprenticeship levy applied. It was not that these schools could not access the benefits, the issue was scalability for small schools. The council was working on a small school strategy to assist schools in collaboration. Since a question had been raised last year the Director of Children's Services had met with the Oxford Diocese to see how schools could share an apprentice such as a caretaker.

The Home to School Transport base budget had increased by £296,000 to ensure that those pupils with special needs and families on low incomes could access the right education safely and appropriately. There had also been significant investment in the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Service, including £450,000 from the Better Care Fund split over the next three years and investment agreed at the Schools Forum from the high needs block.

The impact of the budget on borough children and young people was not limited simply to the Children's Services budget itself. From the £540,000 on new water slides at Windsor Leisure Centre to the £22,000 for school crossing patrols, the budget was set to see young people thrive, and enjoy living safely in this great borough. The budget continued the council on the trajectory of delivering ever-improving services for residents who, for the most part, could not yet vote, were least likely to respond to consultations, whose voices the council had to work extra-hard to ensure were heard in council life and policy-making, and who could be some of our most vulnerable and for whom, in some situations their interactions with the borough could be the difference between life and death.

Councillor Carroll commented that he was pleased the council was seeking the full 3% adult social care precept so the council could ensure services for the most vulnerable residents were provided. There was an urgent need for a national debate on how adult social care would be funded across the country. The borough would contribute to the upcoming Parliamentary inquiry. In relation to public health it had been decided to use a portion of the precept along with the Better Care Fund to invest in preventative services. This would essentially offset reductions in public health spending that had been forced on the council due to the reduction in national grant funding. This helped keep the council's public health budget neutral, unlike other councils.

Councillor Grey commented that he was overjoyed by the investment of £775,000 for the replacement of outdated machines in borough car parks. The new machines would enable payment by a variety of methods. The skilful increase in fees and charges meant no increase to residents. Even with the increases proposed, the borough was still 50% cheaper than neighbouring boroughs. Councillor Grey highlighted £1.3m investment in CCTV which backed up the efforts to address anti-social behaviour. He announced that an additional six Community Wardens and a Warden Supervisor (a total of seven) would be funded. This would be at no extra cost to the taxpayer through clever use of internal funds. The waste contract would be up for renewal in March 2019. The weekly bin collection would remain when 78% of other councils were moving to two or four weekly collections. The residents of Datchet were thankful for funding for Christmas tree lights and a heavy duty electricity box. The public riverside area had been transformed and another £70,000 allocated to maintain the 150 year old storm drains in the village.

Councillor Werner stated that the budget was fundamentally based on £133m of debt moving to £241m. The future of the borough's finances rested on risk and were predicated on the sale of the golf club. There was also a risk that the BLP would not

be approved as the employment areas were not big enough, there had been last minute changes, and the consultation had been flawed. All were agreed there would be a period of uncertainty. This was a 'gamblers budget' and each councillor needed to decide if they were a gambler. Councillor Werner felt the report summary was flawed as he referred to efficient and careful planning yet was based on speculative investment. A council tax of 1.95% plus the 3% precept was above inflation therefore broke a manifesto commitment. The proposed savings were not guaranteed. Advantage Card holders would be affected if they had a season ticket. Seven Community Wardens had been promised but the manifesto commitment was to double the number. He was pleased with the CCTV upgrade, for which he had 'walked over hot coals' and fought for. Councillor Werner felt the budget could be called a 'gamblers budget,' a 'debt budget' or a 'risk budget; in any case he did not support it.

Councillor Brimacombe thanked the Lead Member and officers for the early work on the budget and for keeping all 14 libraries open, including investment in stock and buildings. However he wished to highlight a number of issues. The total forecast debt at the end of the year was £141m; of this £62m was new debt and operational running costs of £86m. Therefore the extra debt was equivalent to 73% of the annual cost base taking the total debt to 164% of the annual cost base. He was not disputing the need for expenditure but wished to highlight that a 1% increase in council tax was usually referred to as being worth £750,000. A ten year repayment figure of £6.3m per annum plus interest would require an additional 8.4% extra on council tax for ten years. This would equate to a £77 increase per annum on a Band D property. The budget did not seek to pay down any of the debt, but push it forward against future speculative sales of council land. The opportunity cost was the retention of the land for truly affordable rented housing stock for local residents whilst meeting house building quotas and a future sustainable revenue stream for the council. The risk was the number of variables in land deals. Another issue was whether it was right for council tax payers now to receive free benefits at the expense of future generations, in terms of the permanent loss of assets sold to pay down debts and the cost of a missed opportunity for a truly affordable housing stock. Whilst the budget was technically sound, the underlying policy and risk was less so.

Councillor Burbage highlighted the cut in precept by Datchet Parish Council and also that of Hurley. Unfortunately the biggest percentage increase was the bill for the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and Thames Valley Police at 7.5%. Councillor Burbage asked if, given the maximum the PCC could add was £12, had the borough offered a view to the PCC on this proposal?

Councillor Smith highlighted that the majority of the developments in the town were joint venture enterprises so criticism could not be both that developers would receive all the benefits and that the budget was speculative. The borough's Band D charge was 9% lower than the London average and 23% below the national average and 26% below the Shire average.

Councillor D. Evans highlighted that there was no increases in parking charges at the Nicholson's car park for those with an Advantage Card, and an increase from £2 to £2.10 for visitors. In Reading a similar car park would cost £4. May of the members of Cabinet had had responsible careers and jobs in business and were therefore able to weigh up the risks and make careful, thought out decisions. Those who spoke about borrowing concerns were rejecting the regeneration of the town to provide much needed affordable housing and social housing. The council was also investing in the

Waterways scheme and the station forecourt. Provision for temporary car parking had also been made whilst the rebuilding of the Nicholson's car park took place. The budget underpinned the regeneration of Maidenhead.

Councillor Da Costa thanked officers and Councillor Saunders for the open discussions at an early stage on the budget. He was concerned with the flawed policy rather than the workings of the budget. The budget was predicated on ambitious development plans through to 2026. He used Bracknell Forest as a benchmark. If the borough had followed Bracknell it would have collected £20m more in council tax this year and in previous years. If you looked to the end of the £430m capital programme, the extra money collected would amount to £400m which would almost entirely pay for the capital investment. The major concern was about debt and project risk. If the golf club development did not work it could result in a loss of green belt land, no affordable housing and substantial debt.

In relation to homelessness and rough sleepers Councillor da Costa commented that in 17/18 £140,000 had been included. The Council then received £1.1m that was all used on temporary accommodation, a total budget of £1.54m. In 18/19, excluding the Flexible Housing Support Grant (FHSG), the budget for homelessness dropped to £423,000. He had been told that all of the £1.2m FHSG for next year would also be used for temporary accommodation. Therefore the budget had failed in terms of homelessness and rough sleepers. In December the Leader had stated that 80 families were in temporary accommodation. At the Windsor Town Forum the previous week this figure was reported to have risen to 120 families. The cost of private landlord accommodation was £100-£140 per night. Councillor Da Costa asked if £3.7m of unspent developer contributions allocated for affordable housing had been considered. He therefore questioned if a budget of only £423,000 was realistic. If the BLP failed or was delayed there would also be a loss of developer contributions. The numbers did not add up and the budget was therefore wishful thinking by the administration.

Councillor Dudley thanked all officers in the council without whom the budget would not be possible. The distinction was clear: a good Conservative council or high tax socialism. Resident had worked hard for their money and already paid tax on it. Councillor Werner had said he had walked over hot coals for CCTV. Councillor Dudley highlighted the Monitoring Officer's decision in relation to a breach of the code of conduct by Councillor Werner involving the release of information relating to CCTV cameras. Councillor Dudley highlighted the commitment to maintain the weekly bin collection and the investment in combatting anti-social behaviour. An Inspector had already been allocated for the BLP, with an enquiry expected for May or June and adoption in August. He accepted that certain capital expenditure could not take place until the de-risking phase had been completed. A number of Members had spent the last two days in meetings with representatives from five major developers, who had all been very positive about the golf club opportunity. Economic vibrancy was needed to enable the council to protect vulnerable residents. Local democracy would be addressed by the boundary review; the recommendations from which were due on 6 March 2018. As a result there would be less councillors and therefore a reduction in the cost of local democracy.

Councillor Jones commented that Members were present to discuss the budget. She felt she had put her points across fairly and clearly and that personal attacks were not needed.

Councillor Bicknell commented that the Opposition view was pessimistic and proposed taxing residents to the maximum. There had been no mention by Councillor Da Costa of the 40 families that had been rehoused recently. The council had brought forward £2.6m from next year's budget to undertake works in Windsor town centre, which would host two royal weddings in 2018. Attempts were being made to smarten up the hostile vehicle mitigation barriers. Resurfacing would take place in Thames Street and Castle Hill, alongside paving works. Councillor Bicknell highlighted a number of other investment proposals in the budget: £3m for infrastructure and road repairs; £100,000 for electric vehicle charging points; £450,000 in Dedworth; increased parking bays in Sunningdale; £4.5m for Maidenhead station forecourt. He concluded by stating this was a value for money resident focussed budget.

Councillor Bateson highlighted that £300,000 had been allocated for grants to voluntary organisations. She expected all wards would benefit in some way. This was important when other councils were reducing their grant funding.

Councillor E. Wilson explained that when he had been elected a ward councillor the area was unkempt with broken road signs and lights not working. At a Cabinet meeting last year he had highlighted the need for a ring-fenced budget for Dedworth and Clewer. The budget included £450,000 for the area, thanks to Councillors Bhatti, Pryer, M. Airey and Dudley.

Councillor McWilliams commented that he was excited to see funding for Thriftwood Farm. Three areas of Green Belt had been defended in the ward. He referred to a Liberal Democrat leaflet advocating 50% of houses on the golf club to be truly affordable. If 50% was allocated as social housing the development would be completely unviable. There was a need to be clear with residents as to what was realistic. The BLP committed to 30% affordable housing. He was pleased that the Homelessness Strategy set out in 2017 was fully funded.

Councillor Beer commented that Datchet had been favoured by a substantial property bequest a few years previously that yielded a good income and therefore enabled a reduction in the precept. He commented that Old Windsor had paid for its own Christmas lights. He did not feel the budget was a budget for everyone as the proposals for affordable housing were abysmally low and there was very little affordable rented accommodation included. The SHLAA report said that Maidenhead should provide 76% of affordable housing as rented properties. This equated to 434 houses out of an annual figure of 712, equating to 61%. The council was aiming at 30% on the largest sites; given this would not apply to smaller sites the 30% figure would not be achieved. He expected the Planning Inspector to pick this issue up and therefore the BLP would be put in jeopardy.

Councillor Saunders stated that he wished to reflect on Councillor Jones' plea and he was more than happy to speak to her in the rational and reasonable way she had commented on the budget. He was genuinely grateful for the Opposition's acknowledgement of the technically competent budget, and the personal support which officers and he had provided to facilitate scrutiny of the budget over the last four months. He would investigate further the £100,000 of savings Councillor Jones suggested may be in doubt. He fully respected Councillor Jones' concerns about the uncertainties over the next eight years. The investment in the budget was funded without reference to the Maidenhead Golf Club receipts, so there should be no

meaningful concern about the budget being approved. He had discussed with Councillor Jones the expectations for further investment beyond next year and the clear commitment to re-phase and adjust the investment to match the latest deliverable receipts from the Maidenhead developments.

Councillor Hill had labelled him as insane for his budget. As the council's Mental Health Champion he queried the dubious slander. He had a well-known sub clinical bipolar condition, and he regretted those with a contempt for mental health challenges might ignorantly label this as some form of insanity. He would nonetheless devote whatever time Councillor Hill requested to discuss the cash projections, so he may reflect on its sanity. Councillor Saunders stated that the comments by Councillor Beer were just wrong. If Councillor Da Costa had asked his questions before the meeting he hoped he could have answered them. Councillor Werner had heard many budgets, but he had not listened. The additional debt in the budget of £63m and the debt added of £22m, and maybe some of the £57m inherited eleven years ago, was all scheduled to be repaid from reliable contracted cash receipts, without reference to the golf club development. Those jibing about gambling and risk overlooked the fundamental demand from residents. Investment in infrastructure was needed before adding new housing. This required a council prepared to invest in that infrastructure, and be competent enough to finance it securely. The alternative was no new infrastructure and no new housing, social, affordable or otherwise. More people with nowhere to live. Those dismissing the budget had no faith in Maidenhead and were condemning residents to an underfunded, underserviced and unloved future. The budget backed the borough, backed Windsor, Ascot, the Sunnings and believed in Maidenhead.

Councillor Jones requested clarification after the meeting as to the context of the word 'insane' used by Councillor Hill. Councillor Dudley commented the reference was insensitive. Councillor Hill responded that he had not alleged that Councillor Saunders was insane; he had said that 'the budget was insanely speculative'.

Councillor Saunders proposed an amendment to the recommendations to remove line CV33 in the capital programme, Appendix J.

It was proposed by Councillor Saunders, seconded by Councillor Dudley, and:

**RESOLVED:** That Council notes the report and approves the:

- i) Detailed recommendations contained in Appendix A which includes a Base Council Tax at band D of £933.42, including a 1.95% increase of £17.85.**
- ii) Adult Social Care Precept of 3% (an increase of £28.85 on the £45.89 precept included in the 2017/18 budget) to be included in the Council's budget proposals, making this levy the equivalent of £74.74 at band D.**
- iii) Fees and Charges contained in Appendix E.**
- iv) Capital Programme, shown in appendices I and J, for the financial year commencing April 2018, subject to the removal of line CV33.**
- v) Prudential borrowing limits set out in Appendix L.**
- vi) Business rate tax base calculation, detailed in Appendix P, and its use in the calculation of the Council Tax Requirement in Appendix A.**

- vii) **Deputy Director and Head of Finance in consultation with the Lead Members for Finance and Children's Services is authorised to amend the total schools budget to reflect actual Dedicated School Grant levels.**
- viii) **Responsibility to include the precept from the Berkshire Fire and Rescue Authority in the overall Council Tax charges is delegated to the Lead Member for Finance and Deputy Director and Head of Finance once the precept is announced.**

**(42 Councillors voted for the motion; Councillor M. Airey, N. Airey, Alexander, Bateson, Bicknell, Bowden, Brimacombe, Bullock, Burbage, Carroll, Clark, Coppinger, Cox, Diment, Dudley, D. Evans, Grey, Hilton, Hollingsworth, Hunt, Lenton, Love, Luxton, McWilliams, Mills, Muir, Quick, Rankin, S. Rayner, Richards, Saunders, Sharma, Sharp, Sharpe, Shelim, Smith, Story, Stretton, Walters, D. Wilson, E. Wilson and Yong. 3 Councillors voted against the motion; Da Costa, Hill and Werner. 3 Councillors abstained: Beer, Jones and Majeed.**

Members congratulated Councillor Burbage on the birth of his son Henry.

Councillor Burbage left the meeting at 9.26pm

238. APPROVAL OF THE UPDATED PAY POLICY STATEMENT FOR 2018/19

Members considered the updated Pay Policy Statement for 2018/19.

Councillor Coppinger introduced the report in the absence of Councillor Targowska. He explained that the policy demonstrated the faith the council had in its employees. The Localism Act required the council to annually review and publish its policy by the end of March. The policy had been updated to reflect the chief officer structure, the pay ratios and the median and mean average salaries. Changes would still be required in relation to exit pay arrangements when government guidance was published.

603 people were now employed by the council and the pay multiples had reduced from 12 to 8.31; this was as a result of shaping the workforce to meet the needs of the borough. The council used market comparability to ensure it was not over or under-paying key roles.

It was proposed by Councillor Coppinger, seconded by Councillor Bicknell, and:

**RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That Council notes the report and:**

- i) Approves the updated Pay Policy Statement for 2018/19.**
- ii) Notes that further revisions will be required to the statement following the implementation of the Government's reforms to public sector exit pay arrangements.**

239. POLITICAL BALANCE AND ALLOCATION OF SEATS

Members considered the political balance and allocation of seats on the Standing Panels/Forums which had been reviewed following the resignation of Councillors Hill, Majeed and Brimacombe from the Conservative Group.

It was noted that the following Councillors had formed a group for administrative purposes called 'Not the Administration' (NTA): Councillors Jones, Beer, Werner, Da Costa, Hollingsworth, Stretton, Hill, Majeed and Brimacombe.

It was noted that, as a result of the resignations, the following vacancies (Conservative seats) have arisen: Employment Panel, Berkshire Pension Fund Panel.

The changes in political balance has resulted in three seats formerly held by the Conservative Group being allocated to NTA.

Councillor E Wilson commented that he understood the administration to be the members of the Cabinet only, therefore he questioned the name of the new group.

Councillor Jones stated that all nine members of NTA were individual councillors and not a group. Each decided how they wished to vote and had individual views, which they were quite happy to express with others. Councillor Hill commented that the arrangement had been made to satisfy local government law. The system was set up for a classic two party system. Councillor Dudley suggested that if NTA was not a group, the Opposition Leader should waive her Group Leader allowance. Councillor Jones responded that it was an administrative group of politicians. She still had to attend meetings with the Managing Director and senior officers and administer the group of individuals. Councillor Stretton commented that the name was suggested by a legal officer as being the one thing that connected all nine councillors. The group held meetings, debated issues and then entered the chamber and voted with their conscience.

It was proposed by Councillor Dudley, seconded by Councillor Bicknell, and:

**RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That:**

**i) Councillor Majeed (NTA) be appointed to the Licensing Panel, Councillor Hill (NTA) be appointed to the Borough-wide Development Management Panel and Councillor Stretton (NTA) be appointed to the Local Plans Working Group.**

**ii) Councillor Walters be appointed as Vice-Chairman of the Maidenhead Development Management Panel**

240. MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

**a) Councillor E. Wilson asked the following question of Councillor Bicknell, Lead Member for Highways and Transport:**

Will the Lead Member advise the role of the Traffic Commissioner in dealing with changes to the Number 2 bus that runs through Dedworth?

Councillor Bicknell responded that all new or changed bus services had to be registered with, and agreed by, the Traffic Commissioner prior to the services being authorised to commence. Cessation of services were also required to be advised to the Traffic Commissioner.

First Buses contacted the Traffic Commissioner on 4 December 2017 to advise they were de-registering the number 2 service. The timescale for this process required 56 days' notice, which would mean the service stopping on 30 January 2018. Reading

Buses applied to the Traffic Commissioner to take on this service on a commercial basis in early January 2018, thereby retaining the service following the withdrawal of First Buses. Reading Buses applied for this to be done as a short notice application, which was used in emergency situations, so they could start the route as soon as First Buses stopped, meaning that there would be no gap in service for customers. The Traffic Commissioner contacted both the Royal Borough and Slough Borough Council for comments on this application, which both council's supported.

Courtney Buses also applied to register the number 2 service as a commercial operation on 12 January 2018, also under a short notice application. This was refused as the Traffic Commissioner only permits one such application from an operator under this process, which had already been granted to Reading Buses. Courtney Buses was going through the full 56 day notice process to start a Monday to Saturday operation on the 11 March 2018.

Courtney Buses had applied to the Traffic Commissioner to operate early morning and late evening services (Monday to Friday) and an all day Sunday Service on the number 2 route. This was in addition to the core times being operated by Reading Buses. This application was submitted under a short notice application to ensure customers were provided with an enhanced service. Similarly, both the Royal Borough and Slough Borough supported this application which was approved enabling the new service to commence on the 30 January 2018.

In addition, Courtney Buses applied to operate a very similar service to route 2 (operated by Reading Buses) in direct competition as a short-notice application. This required approval by the Traffic Commissioner and was declined as there was no technical requirement why the registration should be approved at short-notice as there was little detriment to the customer as an equivalent service operated by Reading Buses was in place. However, legislation encouraged competition and the Traffic Commissioner had approved the operation of the service following the 56-day registration period.

In essence, Reading Buses submitted the application first which was approved at short-notice to maintain services to customers following the withdrawal of First Bus.

By way of a supplementary question, Councillor E. Wilson commented that in the eyes of the resident it was the council that licensed and run bus services. He asked the Lead Member to consider putting a brief note on the website to explain the situation.

Councillor Bicknell responded that he would be happy to do so.

**b) Councillor E. Wilson asked the following question of Councillor Bicknell, Lead Member for Highways and Transport:**

Can the Lead Member for Highways advise what surveys are undertaken on bus punctuality in Dedworth?

Councillor Bicknell responded that all vehicles used for the various bus services had Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI) equipment on board that tracked the vehicles. The equipment enabled the bus operators to monitor the punctuality of the services to check whether bus services were running late or early. In the longer-term this information could be used to inform timetable and route changes to improve



punctuality. In the short-term, the information enabled communications to be issued to update passengers. This was in addition to the real-time information which was displayed on the roadside displays.

The data was collated and used by the bus companies to provide the Royal Borough with punctuality figures on a quarterly basis, to monitor and manage the levels of service being provided against the published time tables. Punctuality data could also be requested by the Traffic Commissioner to monitor service performance

By way of a supplementary question, Councillor E. Wilson asked if the data was available to members of the public.

Councillor Bicknell responded that it was not currently available but he could ask the operators if they would be prepared to publish it on the website.

**c) Councillor Hill asked the following question of Councillor D Evans, Lead Member for Maidenhead Regeneration and Maidenhead:**

The Community Centre in York Road, Maidenhead is a valuable Community Asset used by countless residents each week. Why as part of the York Road Regeneration Project is the Community Centre being demolished and not re-instated as vital Community Asset as part of the Regeneration Project?

Councillor D. Evans responded that he wished to assure residents that the council was committed to ensuring the vital services the centre provided continued going forward. A meeting had been held with Members and officers to get a better understanding of the services provided. The council was committed to ensure the activities continued after redevelopment, however he was not wedded to the bricks and mortar.

By way of a supplementary question, Councillor Hill asked for more specifics about where the services would go. It was very important they stayed in central Maidenhead or a similar location as lots of people who used the centre had no transport.

Councillor D. Evans responded that the site was in the third phase of development therefore there was plenty of time to make the right decision. A number of options would be looked at including the upgraded Desborough Suite. There was no imminent threat to services on the site.

**d) Councillor Da Costa asked the following question of Councillor McWilliams, Principal Member Housing and Communications:**

**Can you tell me how many rough sleepers were offered accommodation during the period 1st December 2017 to 1st February 2018, and of those, how many were offered out of borough accommodation?**

Councillor McWilliams responded that between 1 December 2017 and 13 February 2018, 40 people had been offered Severe Weather Emergency Protocol assistance. Of that 40, 31 had emergency accommodation. 5 people have been accommodated in Borough and 26 out of Borough in Slough, Southall and Reading. The remaining 9 people did not want SWEP assistance. This assistance was refused before the placement address was known.

By way of a supplementary question, Councillor Da Costa commented that the council received £1.1m of FSG in 2017/18 which was entirely used to fund temporary accommodation. It was set to receive a further £1.2m in 2018/19. Given the purpose was to support the full range of homelessness services including employing a Homelessness Prevention or Tenancy Support Officer, did the Principal Member feel the council's Homelessness Strategy failed to plan for residents' needs and could he give a timeline for the new plan, including when third parties, stakeholders and councillors would be consulted, and how much money would be made available to provide all the services needed and procure decent accommodation locally.

Councillor McWilliams responded that he would shortly give an update on the strategy. In relation to the budget the Lead Member had stated if Councillor Da Costa had detailed questions he would be happy to sit down and explain it to him.

**e) Councillor Da Costa asked the following question of Councillor Dudley, Leader of the Council:**

The recent public record of the Audit and Performance Review Panel shows: 2 meetings held, 3 meetings withdrawn or cancelled. This means no oversight since September 2017 and until the end of February 2018 (a 5 month gap). Are you content with this, and if so why, or do you see it as a missed opportunity?

Councillor Dudley responded that he understood, due to a small number of items to be considered on the agenda, that there had been a number of cancellations of the Audit and Performance Review Panel. One of the meetings set for the year, at the end of September, was only included tentatively to deal with any problems completing the annual accounts. He was pleased to say there had been no reason to need to use this meeting. Much oversight of the council's activities were also carried out by robust overview and scrutiny panels on a regular basis. However, he had asked that the Head of Finance produces an annual timetable which would include all of the expected items that would be brought forward during the year. The Chair of the Panel would review the timetable at the beginning of the financial year and in advance of each panel meeting.

By way of a supplementary question, Councillor Da Costa commented that the Panel was a key scrutiny as it had the power to review anything. Its pivotal role was augmented by the major changes in the council and ambitious plans for the future. Councillor Dudley effectively appointed the Chairman therefore was responsible for their performance. Was he content that the Chairman had been receiving the Special Responsibility Allowance since May but had only chaired one meeting and had not produced an agenda for other meetings.

Councillor Dudley responded that a constitutional review was underway to ensure the council was running in the most efficient way with the most appropriate allocation of resources. Councillor Luxton did a fantastic job as a chairman, but she could only chair when there were things coming on to the agenda which needed to be debated, not to have a talking shop.

**f) Councillor Bowden will ask the following question of Councillor McWilliams, Principal Member for Housing and Communications:**

Will the Principal Member for Housing give an update on his plans to update the Homelessness Strategy?

Councillor McWilliams responded that he firmly believed that just one person without a roof over their head was one too many, and it was vitally important that the most vulnerable people in society were helped to get their lives back on track. That was why the borough had a strong offer, including going above and beyond its SWEF duties and commissioning a range of accommodation and support services.

The council had listened to what local residents and stakeholders had to say about the recently published Rough Sleeping and Anti-Social Behaviour paper. It had been agreed that the council needed to be clear on not conflating two issues, so the decision was taken to split the paper into a specific paper looking at anti-social behaviour, which was a behaviour based approach, and an update to the adopted Homelessness Strategy, which was people centred.

Under the existing Homelessness Strategy, the Council had a strong record of prevention: it had helped hundreds of families to avoid homelessness, whether through offering interest free loans to secure private rented accommodation, having officers attend court with tenants who were being evicted, providing assistance to those struggling with their mortgage, or mediating parents who could no longer accommodate their grown child. Housing options advice and support was being delivered seven days a week through the Library and Resident Service Hubs, where each person was given a personal housing plan which set out needs and next steps for that individual and weekly information surgeries were held in partnership with local charities.

The council also had a strong record in providing support services for the factors that contributed to homelessness and rough sleeping. In 2017 the council commissioned Resilience, following the great work Councillor Carroll and officers carried out with the Drugs and Alcohol policy, to provide advice, support, treatment and recovery for anyone experiencing alcohol or drug problems in the borough; the council had helped to establish Brighter Berkshire; CAB were funded to provide advice on a range of matters including housing, debt, financial and employment advice at their offices in Maidenhead and at the library in Windsor, whilst Bracknell CAB provided support at Ascot Library;

In terms of supply, the council commissioned specialist accommodation for residents. This included 25 flats in Maidenhead for young people/adults, where skills learning and support services were provided. There were 17 flats in Windsor which were used as temporary accommodation and had on-site support staff available to assist with the residents' needs. In 2017, the council opened John West House, a 24/7 shelter, where support and skills learning were provided; and a new facility with intermediate living spaces to enable people to move from emergency housing to sustainable housing and living solutions. He was delighted that the council had recently submitted the Borough Local Plan with the firm aim of achieving 30% affordable housing on all eligible sites, providing for a long term supply solution.

The Allocation Policy, which was due for review in 2018, would draw on best practice and the council was awaiting updated guidance from the Department for Housing, Communities and Local Government. Further details would follow, however the aspiration was to have the new allocation policy in place in the autumn. Despite all of the great work, there was always more the council could do to support some of our borough's most vulnerable residents.

Homelessness, particularly those who were rough sleeping, was a multifaceted and complex issue with no single solution or short-term fixes. Only with a long-term plan to provide each individual with the support they needed could the council ensure it gave appropriate assistance to each person, as no case was exactly the same as the next. It was also the case that no one institution, whether it be the local authority, the police or local charities, had all the answers or the solutions. Only by working together in partnership could the council help society's most vulnerable.

Councillor McWilliams was proud to say that in taking forward the approach to supporting homeless people including rough sleepers, the council would be consulting widely, including forming a fully formalised Homelessness Forum bringing together all the key stakeholders in the local area to work on the approach, contributing to the updating of the homelessness strategy. Invitations would be going out shortly.

The council was making a big open offer to partners and stakeholders: come and talk to us and together let's help find sustainable solutions and reinforce our shared commitment to supporting rough sleepers. In the light of the council's aspiration to listen to views and consult widely, it would be updating the homelessness strategy in the autumn thereby giving the time and opportunity to deliver the best for the most vulnerable residents

By way of a supplementary question, Councillor Bowden asked if the council recorded the details of individuals who refused SWEP and the reasons why?

Councillor McWilliams responded that he was sure the information was available if Councillor Bowden wished to ask officers.

Councillor Hunt left the meeting at 10pm

241. MOTIONS ON NOTICE

Councillor N. Airey introduced the motion. She highlighted that, two weeks previously, the UK had celebrated that on 6 February 1918, the Representation of People Act granted some women in the UK suffrage for the first time. The law said that women over the age of 30 who were registered property occupiers (or married to one) could now vote. That was 8.5 million women - or about 2 in 5. However, had Councillor N. Airey been alive 100 years ago, she would have been one of the 3 in 5 who still did not have the right to vote, never mind the opportunity to be elected. In 100 years, society had come a long way for which she was very grateful, but there was more to do.

The Plan International UK report 'The State of Girls' Rights in the UK' posed the question, 'What is the current state of girls' rights in the UK?' and concludes that the answer was clear: not equal. By exploring the real experiences of girls in the UK, the report found that whilst the UK may be the fifth-richest country in the world, it was failing its girls, and failing to meet international standards set out in human rights frameworks and the United Nation's new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The report also compared girls' rights in the UK at local authority level, which showed that young women had different experiences depending on where they lived. Geography played a significant part, and whilst the borough was not in the worst 10 local authorities to be a girl, it was not in the top 10 either. It was known that access to excellent education, public health services, living in a safe environment free from the

fear of harm, and more, were all essential factors for young people to thrive. The borough held to the vision that a person's background, family income, ethnicity, postcode or any other circumstance should not be a limiting factor in their future outcomes or wellbeing.

The purpose of the report was that policy makers and decision makers could recognise the reality of the state of girls' rights in the UK was not where it both could and should be, and then act. She was bringing the motion to Council so that the borough could make a difference on its own patch and aspire to be the very best local authority to be a girl in the UK. This was something Councillor Airey wanted to ensure happened from the grassroots and not just top-down. Therefore, the motion sought to redress the balance in RBWM, and to establish a Girls' Policy Forum.

The aim for the Girls' Policy Forum was that it fed into policy making, not after the event, so the council was proactively seeking to listen to girls where previously their voices had not been heard. She requested that the first meeting of the Girls' Policy Forum should appoint a 'Girls' Rights Champion' as the report recommended. She invited any girl aged 0-18, and those with LDD up to age 25, to be a part of the forum, and the motion requested that the Leader writes to all schools, colleges and youth groups to invite them to appoint a representative.

Councillor N. Airey stated that she looked forward to the day where an evidence-based report stated that both young men and women had equal and excellent input and outcomes, and a motion such as was proposed was not needed. However, in the interim, she was delighted to put forward the motion which sought to enable the council to do what it could to help promote the voices of young women, and for them to be able to enjoy all the rights that living in the borough and the country afforded, in equal measure to their male counterparts.

Councillor Saunders highlighted a number of statistics from the report including:

- 94% of sexual assaults in schools were committed by males; 66% of victims were female
- 89% of rape cases were committed to females; 23% were aged 15-19 and 16% aged 10-14.
- 1 in 3 UK teenagers had received a sexually explicit text message from other children
- Half of 11-18 year olds could name a friend involved in sexting
- 30% could describe the adverse effects of sexting
- Two thirds of sexting was directed at girls.

Councillor Saunders commented that girls were increasingly at the sharp end of the ever more connected world. They were victims of abuse were amplified by the pressures and stress of limited aspirations, limited voices and an inheritance and legacy of mostly innocent but outdated older prejudices. He supported the motion to ensure girls in the borough had the clear, unambiguous and confident voice they deserved.

Councillor Diment commented that the report set out that girls' rights were compromised by poverty, gender inequality, poor education, ignorance and stereotypes. The UN Sustainable Development Goals focussed on girls rights to be free from violence, to have a voice, and choice and control in their lives alongside a

quality education and the skills and support they needed. She supported the establishment of a Forum to ensure young girls got the best support possible as they transitioned to adulthood. She supported the creation of a Girls Right's Champion to work with the existing groups to ensure all could reach their potential and no one was left behind.

Councillor Quick commented that this was a genuine opportunity to pass a motion and follow it up with work that could make an enormous difference. In doing so this would also help older female relatives who could see what was possible. There were pockets of deprivation in the borough and the aspirations of girls could be seriously low in these areas. The number of female councillors, MPs and business leaders was pitifully low, not through a lack of ability or intelligence. She suggested a report back to Council to demonstrate what had been achieved.

Councillor Dudley highlighted that the local MP and current Prime Minister had previously been Minister for Women and Equalities. His 21 year old daughter would fully support the motion. There were not enough women in the council chamber, in Parliament or in top professions.

Councillor Jones thanked Councillor N. Airey for bringing the motion and making her aware of the report. She offered her time and personal support if needed.

Councillor Brimacombe also offered his support. The modern world meant every girl faced problems that were difficult to shift. Girls needed help and support. He referred to the Corporate Parent role held by all councillors and suggested a report should come back to Council to show the body with highest authority in the council supported the actions.

Councillor N. Airey commented that she appreciated the offers of support. She hoped the first meeting of the Girls' Forum could be held within 6 weeks. She would bring reports back to Council and to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panel to ensure the council was held to account.

It was proposed by Councillor N. Airey, seconded by Councillor Saunders, and:

**RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That this Council:**

- i) Notes the Plan International report 'The State of Girls' rights in the UK' and the increasing coverage of issues where women experience a different climate to men.**
- ii) Notes its leadership role and establishes a new 'Girls' Policy Forum', operated by our youth services, so that the voices of young women and girls play an active role in shaping life in the Royal Borough.**
- iii) Asks the Leader to write to the schools and youth groups in the Borough to make them aware of the Forum and appoint representatives, and to commit to taking the views of the Forum into consideration when making decisions.**

242. CONTINUATION OF MEETING

At this point in the meeting, and in accordance with Rule of Procedure Part 4A 23.1 of the council's constitution, the Mayor called for a vote in relation to whether or not the meeting should continue, as the time had exceeded 10.00pm.

Upon being put to the vote, those present voted in favour of the meeting continuing.

243. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC

**RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:** That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting whilst discussion takes place on item 13 on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1-7 of part I of Schedule 12A of the Act