

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Wednesday 14 December 2022

Present: Councillors Gerry Clark (Chairman), John Story (Vice-Chairman), Simon Bond, Gary Muir, Neil Knowles, Helen Price, Julian Sharpe, Shamsul Shelim and Chris Targowski

Also in attendance: Councillors Andrew Johnson, Samantha Rayner, David Hilton, David Coppinger, Gurpreet Bhagra, Phil Haseler, Amy Tisi, Mandy Brar, David Cannon and Donna Stimson

Officers: Mark Beeley, Kirsty Hunt, Tony Reeves, Emma Duncan, Andrew Durrant, Kevin McDaniel, Adele Taylor, Andrew Vallance, David Birch, Elaine Browne, Lin Ferguson, Louise Freeth, Tracy Hendren, Chris Joyce, Lynne Lidster, Rebecca Hatch, Alysse Strachan and Adrien Waite

Draft Budget 2023/24 - Scrutiny Challenge Session

The Chairman introduced the budget paper and explained that all Members had been given the opportunity to submit questions to officers which would be answered. These questions had been answered and circulated to Panel Members ahead of the meeting, with the Panel meeting an opportunity for Panel Members to raise further and additional questions. The Chairman underlined that only Panel Members would be able to ask questions at the meeting.

Adele Taylor, Executive Director of Resources, gave a presentation which showed the approach for managing the council's resources. It was a challenging financial situation, with high inflation, interest rates and demographic growth impacting both the council and its residents. This had an impact on both revenue and capital costs. In year, there had been budget pressures identified from month 2 onwards, with a peak of £2.5 million overspend but this had been reduced by month 6. Assumptions at the start of the budget setting process had been for a 2% council tax increase, no adult social care precept, a 1% increase in pension contributions, reductions in some government grants and a 2% salary increase. However, since the Medium Term Financial Plan had been agreed, there had been some changes to assumptions. Council tax had increased by 3% and adults social care by 2%, which was worth around £830,000 for every 1% increase. Interest rate and inflation assumptions had been updated, while the pensions primary rate was increased by 1.5% but the deficit was reduced to keep to an overall of a 1% increase. There had been some reductions in government grants but the council was waiting for policy documents and the finance settlement to come through from the government which would provide further information.

Considering the approach to the budget, Adele Taylor explained that services had been asked to model growth, savings and invest to save initially. Services were also asked to model cash limited budgets except for two corporate issues, new obligations under the national transfer scheme and the cost of elections. Capital spending was limited, the cost of borrowing had increased significantly despite action taken by officers to protect against rising interest rates. There was a prioritisation of resources to align with priorities in the corporate plan.

## Appendix 7, Annex A

Kevin McDaniel, Executive Director of People, said that adult social care was around £40 million of the council's expenditure. There was a focus on independent living for all residents, ensuring that long term care worked, self-service assessment could be run and to ensure that there were fair contributions from all who should pay. Short term controls were needed while the budget was embedded in the Medium Term Financial Plan. Support would be reduced for some non-statutory service elements while there would be limited staff capacity in statutory, community and provider services. As a result of the pandemic, there were more people in residential and nursing homes now than there had been before and there was a £3.5 million budget shortfall at the start of 2022-23. Other opportunities were being explored, for example workforce recruitment and retention investments to reduce the risk of workforce options.

On housing and environmental services, Kevin McDaniel said that there continued to be a significant number of families that needed temporary accommodation. Skills would be combined across teams to provide a full service offer. Grant funding would be used as an opportunity to align the service with the corporate plan priorities, while it was planned that under-utilised properties would be used as temporary accommodation. On financial risks, Kevin McDaniel highlighted the loss of income on Hackney Carriage Licenses, the increased pressure on housing due to the cost of living crisis and increased demand for temporary accommodation.

Kevin McDaniel concluded by talking about the children's services budget. A new case management system would be implemented which would help to drive efficiency and provide new options for electronic ways of working. Legal support would be focused on the most needed cases, to ensure resource prioritisation. Family hubs would be scaled back to statutory only services and staff capacity would be limited by implementing agency limits.

Emma Duncan, Monitoring Officer and Director of Law, Governance and Public Health, said that core governance services would be prioritised to ensure that assurances could be given to the council on the governance framework. Resources were also being focused on key risk areas such as contract, procurement and democratic processes. The growth bid reflected the recommendations which had been made from the Peer Review, which has taken place earlier in the year. Issues and risks included levels of challenge to decisions made, recruitment challenges and staffing budgets.

Andrew Durrant, Executive Director of Place, said the main approach was to take a strategic and collaborative view across the service, maintaining essential and statutory services which were underpinned by quality. Priority setting had been done through the corporate plan and areas had been identified to maximise commercial activity and income generation opportunities. Risks included historic contracts, post pandemic behaviour and the national economic outlook. Opportunities like the Berkshire County Deal could open up new funding opportunities, while strategic relationships would help to maximise grant income. Andrew Durrant provided some detail to the Panel on the savings and growth bids for the place directorate budget.

Adele Taylor outlined the resources budget, there was a focus on contract management particularly around IT contracts, as these underpinned the whole organisation. Future years pressures would be around new external audit contracts and there would be improved debt management opportunities. Although not included in the service, there would be a number of 'below the line' items impacted by actions by the service, for example the amount of council tax collected.

Andrew Vallance, Head of Finance, explained that the capital review board had considered all capital bids which had been made by service areas and had made its recommendations to Cabinet. Fully funded schemes were agreed, these were mostly funded by government

grants, with as much CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) as possible, where appropriate. Considering affordability, the increased interest rates had a huge impact on revenue budgets, while there had been a reduction in new borrowing. Slippage was under constant review by officers. The total capital programme was around £40 million, with £27.5 million being funded through borrowing.

Adele Taylor set out the governing principles of the Medium Term Financial Plan, a number of these linked in with the aims of service areas when setting their budgets. The budget needed to be balanced legally, with the approach being to manage finances sustainably. It was anticipated that detailed financial information for local authorities from the government would be published the week beginning 19<sup>th</sup> December, estimates of government funding had been included in the draft budget. This would be refined following the government announcement and the policy statement which was due shortly.

Adele Taylor concluded the presentation by explaining the pathway to the budget being approved. The consultation had been launched and would allow residents to provide feedback on the draft budget. Cabinet would consider the engagement feedback and would propose the final budget in early February, this would go to Full Council at the end of February for final approval.

The Panel heard from a member of the public, Mr Paul Hinton, who was representing the RBWM Climate Emergency Coalition. He felt that this was not the time to reduce the overall budget made available to deliver upon the commitments set out in the council's Environment and Climate Strategy, and the corporate plan's priority to tackle climate change and its consequences. In the draft budget, it was proposed that £100,000 of the £250,000 budgeted for supporting the Climate Partnership would no longer come from the revenue budget, this would instead come from CIL payments. Mr Hinton felt that this was equal to a £100,000 reduction in spend on the delivery of the strategy.

Mr Hinton said that the CIL payments were meant to remedy damage caused by development and should be in addition to projects delivered through the Climate Partnership. However, when used as defined in this budget, he felt that this was no benefit. Mr Hinton highlighted to the Panel that in order to meet the council's commitment to reduce carbon emissions, the budget would be relying on development, which was one of the activities that caused them. When RBWM had declared the emergency, the council committed to call on the government to provide additional powers and resources which ensured that the council could help deliver on national emissions targets. Mr Hinton asked if the council could confirm what had been done in this regard, to avoid a significant overall reduction in funds allocated to one of this Council's top three priorities.

The Chairman felt that some important points had been raised by Mr Hinton, the council needed to reduce its carbon footprint. Overall statements as part of the budget would be useful so that the Panel and public could understand where reductions would happen. It could also be something for another Overview and Scrutiny Panel to consider, should there be further questions.

Councillor Bond noted that transport was both a growth item and a saving, which involved S106 money. As this was the form of funding, it was classed as a capital investment and was designed to improve services above the current level, Councillor Bond asked if this presumption was correct. On adult services, he understood that the approach was to encourage residents to stay in their own homes for longer, although the risk was that some residents could need to stay in hospital. Councillor Bond asked if this approach had been shared with NHS partners, he suggested that this could be considered by the Health and

Wellbeing Board at a future meeting. He considered the savings that had been proposed, it was like a spectrum with the majority of savings affecting frontline services.

Andrew Durrant said that there had been some positive feedback received about bus services, there had been an offer of free bus travel in the build up to Christmas. The S106 funds that were being used were already in the budget and had been allocated to public transport. They could be both revenue and capital funds depending on the S106 agreement.

Chris Joyce, Head of Infrastructure, Sustainability and Economic Growth, said that bus companies were under a lot of pressure in the current economic climate. There had been a significant amount of funding provided by the Department for Transport to support bus services, the growth bid reflected the expectation that there would not be funding of this level from the government going forward.

Kevin McDaniel responded to Councillor Bond's questions on adult social care. The reason why the council wanted residents to be at home was because the outcomes were usually better, provided this was the correct choice. Moving patients straight from hospital to care homes often meant that more independence was lost. Kevin McDaniel confirmed that he would be happy to have an item come to a Health and Wellbeing Board meeting, in collaboration with NHS partners, which considered how the service could help residents lead independent lives. He had been in regular contact with the NHS RBWM Place Convenor about making sure the care system could work as well it could for residents of the borough.

**ACTION – Item to be submitted to the Health & Wellbeing Board for consideration at a future meeting.**

The Chairman commented on the adult social care reforms, he asked if there was any certainty that this would impact on the budget.

Kevin McDaniel said that until the detail was seen by officers, there would be some caution.

Adele Taylor said that they had tried to indicate where impacts would be felt from the savings that were proposed. Transformation could lead to savings, but savings did not directly lead to transformation, it was important not to transform just to make savings.

Councillor Price said at the last meeting of the Panel, there had been a report considered on a refresh of the corporate plan. However, she did not feel that the budget reflected what had been discussed at the meeting. Councillor Price had carefully considered the equality impact assessments and understood that around half of the budget lines would affect those that were elderly, those that were disabled and those that were poor. The residents survey also highlighted the groups of residents who were dissatisfied, it was the same group of people. Councillor Price noted that comments had been made in the consultation for the budget that it was focused on those most vulnerable in society, but this was not reflected on the equality impact assessments submitted by service areas. She asked if the assessments were therefore accurate and if the council received more money from the government, could this be invested in those groups of residents who needed it most.

Tony Reeves, Interim Chief Executive, said that the refresh of the corporate plan was due to be considered by Cabinet early in the new year. The council was faced with huge challenges on interest rates and the cost of borrowing, it had been difficult to set a legal, balanced budget. The equality impact assessments were in draft form and would continue to be developed, they identified the risks and challenges which were currently being dealt with by the council in the current economic climate.

## Appendix 7, Annex A

Councillor Price felt that residents were not being told the full truth, it would be difficult for those who were not healthy and well off. Community organisations would need to be provide more support to these groups as a result.

Tony Reeves responded by saying that there was support for residents provided by the council in the current economic crisis, new funding streams were coming in and the council was working closely with the voluntary sector to distribute this funding. Resources would be deployed against the priorities of the council, to ensure key services continued and that the council was also financially robust. A stable financial position would allow RBWM to make significant progress for residents over the coming years.

The Chairman suggested that Councillor Price could raise direct issues with any of the equality impact assessments with officers and Cabinet Members, to see if any improvements could be made.

Councillor Sharpe said that officers had attempted to deliver a balanced budget, he asked what the budget looked like for the average resident and also how the budget affected the use of services.

Adele Taylor said that it was a difficult question to answer, there were not many average residents as all circumstances were different. The council had a corporate plan and the budget provided the resources to deliver that plan, having a balanced budget allowed the council to control its own destiny. An unbalanced budget would only allow a council to deliver its minimum statutory services, RBWM was not in this position. Around 80% of the borough's funding was spent on the most vulnerable residents.

Kevin McDaniel said that it was clear on the website what services were provided for adult social care, to allow residents to continue to enjoy their lives and so that individuals felt empowered to live an independent life for longer.

Lin Ferguson, Director of Children's Services, added that the council needed to prioritise the most vulnerable. For young children, it was important to develop family resilience and communities could support vulnerable people. The council could intervene where there were gaps, officers were keen to work with voluntary organisations and families to build resilience and increase independence.

Councillor Sharpe said that the emerging need from residents should be considered, so that the council was aware of where challenges would be coming from. He commented that the budget was only balanced if all savings which had been proposed were achieved, Councillor Sharpe asked how confident officers were that savings would be achieved.

Councillor Knowles passed on his gratitude to the finance team, it was hard to set a balanced budget and make decisions on trimming services. He was concerned about the staff headcount and the increased pressure that some staff would be under, this would not help retention. Councillor Knowles hoped that the questions which had been submitted and answered in advance of the meeting would be published as they contained detail on a number of budget lines. A lot of savings were marked as 'explore', or 'investigate', and this needed some clarification. Councillor Knowles suggested that each line should be considered by either the People or the Place Overview and Scrutiny Panels, as appropriate, which would allow for focused discussion. On interest rate and debt assumptions, Councillor Knowles asked what risk mitigations were in place should these assumptions not be correct.

Adele Taylor confirmed that the questions and answers could be published as a supplement to the agenda after the meeting. The Audit and Governance Committee had an oversight role of the treasury management strategy and the capital strategy, there had discussion at

the Committee about how to de-risk rising interest rates. The council worked closely with their financial advisors, Arlingclose. The impact of interest rates had been mitigated through borrowing throughout the year, along with long term fixed borrowing.

Councillor Knowles felt that each overview and scrutiny panel would be able to consider the budget with fresh eyes which would ensure more productive scrutiny, it was not possible for the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel to consider all the budget lines at this meeting.

Tony Reeves said that the council did not yet have the financial settlement from the government, the budget was still in draft form. The cost of borrowing had changed dramatically in the last few months and could change before the budget was set. The budget consultation process offered both Members and residents the opportunity to provide detailed feedback. Having each line considered by each Panel would distort the process, it should be viewed as a whole compared to the priorities set out in the corporate plan.

The Chairman said that concerns had been raised by Members as part of the questions which had been submitted in advance of the meeting and these would be picked up officers and Cabinet Members to consider if any changes to budget proposals were needed.

Councillor Knowles felt that further scrutiny was required, as the answers to these questions could not be challenged further and some answers needed some clarification.

Adele Taylor highlighted that the page for the budget consultation had gone live, she encouraged all Members to share this link with residents, voluntary groups and other organisations. A single email inbox had been set up to deal with and answer questions on the budget for councillors, any additional questions that Members had would be answered as soon as possible by the finance team. A briefing session would take place with each political group, which provided a further opportunity for questions to be asked.

Tony Reeves added that all feedback received through the consultation would feed back in to the revised equality impact assessments. This was a transparent process, Full Council set and agreed the budget.

Councillor Story thanked the finance team for providing the answers to all of the questions which had been submitted by Members. There was a lot of uncertainty around the next financial year, with some of the answers given by officers not giving an exact answer as further work needed to be done, this was understandable. However, Councillor Story asked in light of this uncertainty, how confident were officers that the savings outlined in the budget could be delivered.

Adele Taylor said that the budget was in draft form, if some of the work did not have deliverability it could be altered before the final budget was submitted to Full Council. She needed to also produce a section 25 report, this was a personal statement from the Executive Director of Resources which discussed the robustness of estimates and described the methodology which had been used. Potential risks would be included and this also included risks external to the council. Officers believed that they could deliver the estimates in the budget.

Tony Reeves added that throughout the process of developing the budget proposals, the Corporate Leadership Team had been challenged extensively to ensure that any optimism bias had been removed and the budget was as robust as it could be, at the current stage.

Councillor Story noted that around 80% of council tax was spent on adult social care, he asked if this was similar to last year.

## Appendix 7, Annex A

He was informed that it was a slightly greater proportion of council tax being spent in this area, compared to the last financial year. It had been around 78% previously.

Councillor Story asked how this compared with other local authorities.

Adele Taylor said this figure was comparable with other local authorities, it was slightly higher due to the low council tax base in RBWM.

Kevin McDaniel said that considering the amount of money spent per person who needed support from the council, RBWM was a good value authority. The council was an outlier on specific services, for example placements for young people and residential placements for adults.

Councillor Story commented on unaccompanied asylum seeking children, there was a figure in the budget of £713,000. He understood that the council had an obligation to accept a certain number of children, Councillor Story felt that the council was doing more than other local authorities.

Kevin McDaniel said that an unaccompanied asylum seeker under the age of 18 was treated as a child in care. The council received £1,000 a week up until the child was 18, the average across the country was that money would pay for the accommodation of the asylum seeker, but not the cost of the teams that supported asylum seekers. The number of children in care from local families was at around 100, while there were 35 unaccompanied asylum seekers. RBWM received no infrastructure costs to cover the 35 asylum seekers, £713,000 was the investment the council needed to make. In total, the council spent about £1 million a year on unaccompanied asylum seekers, Ukrainian families were not included in this as they were covered by a separate government grant. RBWM was one of two councils in the south east running at 100% of the target in this area.

Councillor Story asked if there was any prospect of government support to help the council with the £1 million investment it had earmarked for unaccompanied asylum seekers.

Kevin McDaniel explained that at the current point in time, there was no intention from the government to change any of the support grants or policy statements.

Councillor Story asked about reserves, he said that the purpose of reserves was to mitigate financial shocks.

Adele Taylor said that all council's needed reserves to cover unforeseen incidents, this was called general fund reserves. RBWM had historically low reserves, being previously close to the minimal level recommended. This level was calculated by the financial risks in the system. In years where the contingency sum had not been used, this had been put into the reserves. The council also had ear marked reserves, these were reserved for specific purposes, for example an election.

Councillor Story concluded his questions by asking about council tax. He said that RBWM was very low compared to neighbouring authorities, for example, Reading Borough Council was over £600 more a year for the same council tax band. Councillor Story asked if this would be the same for the next financial year.

Adele Taylor said that she could not comment on the council tax policies of other authorities, but she imagined that most would take the opportunity to increase the amount charged by some level. However, a 5% increase for RBWM would raise less money than a 5% increase for an authority which already had a higher rate of council tax. The government assumed that local authorities would raise their council tax by the maximum amount possible, if an

authority chose not to do this it could lead to a greater erosion of finances. Residents should be aware of the support that could be provided, like the council tax reduction scheme.

Councillor Shelim said that the consultation gave all residents the opportunity to be part of the budget proposals. He asked why the council was looking to recruit a full time scrutiny officer.

Emma Duncan said that the peer review recommendations highlighted that a scrutiny officer would provide extensive support to the scrutiny function. Scrutiny was an important part of making sure that decisions were made in the right way, resources had therefore been focused on this function.

Councillor Werner said that there were a number of savings lines in the budget which increased the risk of the welfare of children and young people. He had noted an admission earlier in the meeting that the resources of the budget did not allow all of the corporate plan priorities to be fulfilled. Reducing services in the family hub to statutory only would have a significant impact on vulnerable families and would increase spending. Without the family hubs, Councillor Werner felt that it would be difficult to teach family resilience. There were a number of items in the budget that were labelled as 'review', which came to a total of approximately £5 million, with a number being amber or red in terms of achievability. Councillor Werner believed that the budget was not balanced, he felt that the review lines were put in to give the appearance of a balanced budget. It was a scary budget and needed further scrutiny, he felt that lines of the budget should be considered by each of the relevant scrutiny panels.

Tony Reeves said that it was not regarded as a scary budget by officers. The budget was at an early stage and there were a couple of months to go before the process concluded, the council would have an updated position on the financial settlement from the government which would provide further clarity. Officers were as confident as they could be currently.

Kevin McDaniel said that the children's services budget was still £27 million, with the majority of this money prioritised on those children that were at immediate or significant risk of harm. The budget did not reduce the amount of money available for early help and prevention services, transformation would help to ensure that less was spent on the crisis service and more was spent further down the line. Kevin McDaniel said that he was happy to have any meetings with Members to answer any further detailed questions on the children's services budget.

Councillor Werner asked a number of detailed questions:

- On the reduction in education welfare support, new statutory requirements for attendance support had been put in place but were not funded by the government. He asked if this saving would reduce the support to the new statutory level in order for the council to meet the cost rather than schools.
- On youth offending, much of what the team did was statutory so there was very little that could be cut. The team could not be restructured without consultation from the Youth Justice Board to ensure that the council met statutory duties, caseloads had increased 66% in the past year and this was expected to continue to rise. How confident were the administration that the council would be able to fulfil its statutory duties after this saving was made.

- On the SEND service team, this was being reduced to the statutory level which was to consider EHCP applications within 20 weeks. Officers expected timeliness would reduce from 80%. Councillor Werner asked how would the increased risk of expensive parent led tribunals and complaints be managed within the budget.
- 2485 pupils were classed as SENCO on the SEND register and they would now not be eligible for support. Councillor Werner asked if this was correct and could be justified.
- On the removal of non-statutory children's hub services, Councillor Werner asked if the only statutory services that the family hub had to provide were in relation to children in care.
- The overall cost of non-statutory family hub services was more than the £480,000 saving in the budget. From initial questions, it was suggested that £450,000 of the family hub budget was from the strengthening families funding which was specifically for early help interventions. Councillor Werner asked if this money was ring fenced for early help only, and what would happen to this funding if the council ceased to provide more than statutory services.
- Councillor Werner asked why were the health visiting team being offered as a substitute for non-statutory family hub services.
- Councillor Werner concluded his questions on asking what would happen with the child sexual exploitation and criminal exploitation work that protected young people and how many young people could be put at risk.

The Chairman advised Councillor Werner that these questions could be submitted to officers and the relevant Cabinet Member after the meeting, as they were complex and would require detailed answers.

Kevin McDaniel said that he was happy to answer the questions after the meeting and for the answers to be circulated to the Panel and published as a supplement to the minutes.

**ACTION – Answers to Councillor Werner's questions to be circulated and published once they were ready.**

Councillor Price asked how many full time employees would be affected by proposals made in the budget. She noted that the Panel were not told which items were not changing or what the amount would be, for example she did not know if community grants would be changing. Councillor Price felt that she would have more confidence if lines which were still under review were discounted from the budget, she asked if this had been considered by the finance team.

Adele Taylor said that the number of affected RBWM employees was in the single digits. Optalis and Achieving for Children were separate companies, but Adele Taylor was happy to provide the exact figure after the meeting for RBWM. There had been challenge sessions with the finance team to ensure that review lines were challenged effectively. The budget was still in draft form and could change, there was also a contingency line in the budget, this would deal with non-delivery of savings where an alternative could not found along with one off items that could occur. This was included in the budget every year.

**ACTION – Adele Taylor to provide the number of RBWM employees affected by the budget.**

Andrew Durrant confirmed that community grants would continue and was in the budget going forward, work was being done to investigate the benefits of a community lottery. He was happy to see if he could help any organisation which needed the support of the council.

Councillor Price said that the budget showed which areas had increased and decreased. However, she felt like she could not make a decision on whether there were enough community wardens, for example, as she did not know how many there currently were.

Adele Taylor clarified that the decision that Full Council would make would be on the budget with detailed additions and reductions to the existing budget. Resources were linked to outcomes, if priorities in the corporate plan were not being achieved, growth bids would be added to the budget. It was the role of the finance team to ensure that there was enough resource to fulfill the corporate priorities.

Councillor Price proposed that all items in the budget related to the place directorate would be considered by the Place Overview and Scrutiny Panel and that all items related to the people directorate were referred to the People Overview and Scrutiny Panel. This was seconded by Councillor Knowles.

A named vote was taken.

<b>Refer all place items to the Place Overview and Scrutiny Panel and all people items to the People Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Motion)</b>	
Councillor Gerry Clark	For
Councillor John Story	For
Councillor Simon Bond	For
Councillor Gary Muir	For
Councillor Neil Knowles	For
Councillor Helen Price	For
Councillor Julian Sharpe	Against
Councillor Shamsul Shelim	Against
Councillor Chris Targowski	For
<b>Carried</b>	

**RESOLVED: That all items in the budget related to the place directorate were referred to the Place Overview and Scrutiny Panel and all items in the budget related to the people directorate were referred to the People Overview & Scrutiny Panel.**

Councillor Davies thanked Paul Hinton for his comments on climate change in the budget at the start of the meeting. Taking action to prevent climate change and its consequences was one of the council's top three priorities in the corporate plan, she asked if the Place Overview and Scrutiny Panel could take a closer look and consider the impact on the community.

The Panel agreed that this could be added into the recommendation, highlighting that the Place Overview and Scrutiny Panel should pay particular attention to how action on climate change was being funded in the budget.

**RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the Place Overview and Scrutiny Panel would consider the climate change budget lines in further detail.**

## Appendix 7, Annex A

Adele Taylor advised that if there was the removal of a saving, alternatives needed to be considered.

Councillor Stimson, Cabinet Member for Climate Action and Sustainability, said that difficult decisions had to be made on the budget. Over 80% of council tax funding was spent on vulnerable children and adults, if this funding was removed then it would need to be found from somewhere else.

Emma Duncan said that the Place Overview and Scrutiny Panel could make recommendations to Cabinet on which savings should be removed, but Cabinet had a duty to set a balanced budget.

Andrew Durrant clarified that the council was not looking to reduce the £250,000 which had been committed to the climate partnership over three years. The budget was showing that £100,000 of this funding would come from S106 money, which the council already had. Therefore, there was no change to the amount of money which was being prioritised in this area.

Councillor Hilton, Cabinet Member for Asset Management, Commercialisation, Finance and Ascot, addressed the Panel. He thanked all Panel Members and officers for their time and input into the meeting. Comments on the budget at the meeting were welcomed and would be considered by officers and Cabinet, the budget could be changed before it was agreed by Cabinet and put forward to Full Council in February.

Councillor Price asked if the process for asking questions at the Panel meetings in January could be outlined, for example would non-Panel Members be able to ask questions.

The Chairman agreed that all Members being briefed on the procedure would be useful if appropriate, in advance of the meetings taking place.

People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Thursday 19 January 2023

Present: Councillors Sayonara Luxton (Chairman), Maureen Hunt (Vice-Chairman), Clive Baskerville, Catherine Del Campo, Carole Da Costa, Neil Knowles, Julian Sharpe, John Story and Amy Tisi

Also in attendance virtually: Councillor Gerry Clark

Officers: Becky Oates, Kevin McDaniel, Lynne Lidster and Lin Ferguson

Officers in attendance virtually: David Birch, Carl Griffin and Tracy Hendren

Draft Budget 2023/24

Kevin McDaniel, Executive Director of People Services, gave a presentation to the Panel on the proposals for People Services within the current draft budget.

Adult Services had a proposed growth bid of £3.816m and targeted savings of £4.899m. This would be achieved through a focus on independent living for all and looking to discharge home first. The service would look at reviewing its use of agency and other staffing, while looking at the longer-term impact of working collaboratively with Health.

Housing and Environmental Services were looking at a growth bid of £0.120m and savings of £0.853m. This would be achieved through combining skills across housing, licensing, environmental health and trading standards teams to maintain a full service offer. The service recognised the loss of income on Hackney Carriage Licenses and the increased pressure on housing and temporary accommodation while looking at how to use property in a smarter way across the entire Council portfolio.

Children's Services had a proposed growth bid of £2.992m and targeted savings of £3.571m. Fundamentally, the service looked to continue good progress on ensuring that children weren't brought into care when they didn't need to be. More was needed to replace the case management system (CMS) in order to increase efficiency. In the short term, the scale of the family hubs would be reduced.

The proposals for the Capital Review Board were to continue to support the fully funded scheme using as much as money from developer contributions in the form of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and s106 payments as much as possible and as appropriate. A focus would be kept on capital programmes that were affordable. Within the programme were two significant IT investments in replacing the CMS for both Adult's and Children's Service as significant drivers of long-term improvements in the way the borough worked with families and became more efficient over time.

Kevin McDaniel highlighted the key dates for the budget. The consultation portal was open until the 24 January 2023 and was available on the RBWM Together website. After the consultation ended, Cabinet would consider this feedback and propose their final budget on 9 February 2023, which would then go to Full Council for approval on 22 February 2023.

## Appendix 7, Annex A

The Vice-Chair asked how schools were faring as concerns had been raised at the Schools Forum meeting on 19 January 2023 about government funding being reduced, and asked if this would impact on the draft budget.

Kevin McDaniel confirmed that the schools' budget did not impact the budget being discussed currently. There was a separate ringfenced budget for education of £151m in the coming year for RBWM. Schools were rightly concerned that the budget had not increased with the level of pay offer that was under discussion, but there were very few lines that crossed over between the two budgets.

Councillor Knowles asked if the pay rises overall for staff was a generalised 3%.

Kevin McDaniel stated that a flat percentage of the pay pot had been modelled, which is where this figure had come from

Councillor Baskerville asked why there had been a loss of income on Hackney Carriage Licenses.

Tracy Hendren, Head of Housing, Environmental Health, and Trading Standards, confirmed that one of the main factors was that during Covid, many taxi drivers had to find alternative jobs as the taxi service was not running in the way it used to. As things returned to normal, many taxi drivers did not return to the trade.

The Vice-Chair asked if the domiciliary care contract had an impact on the budget.

Lynne Lidster stated that looking at the cost pressures in the current budget, most of these were on residential and nursing placements, which meant that there wasn't currently pressure on the domiciliary care budget. At the beginning of the year, the department were looking at a £1.1m overspend which hadn't materialised, which was good news. A good response from providers was evidenced, with there currently being around 12 providers up from an original 7. There was a decreasing number of people placed outside those providers decrease over time, demonstrating that the contract was working well despite pressures in the workforce and communities.

Councillor Carole Da Costa asked if pressures on the budget were being felt from different geographical areas of the borough.

Lynne Lidster stated that there was a fixed rate of £19.40 across the borough which was brought in from 1 August 2022. There was no particular difficulty felt in areas such as Ascot. It was more difficult to find workforce in certain parts of the borough, with Ascot traditionally being one such area, but capacity was being achieved across the borough.

As of 23 January 2023, a provider would be starting to work on the hospital discharge programme on a 370-hour contract which would support people coming out of hospital and aim to get those people mobilised within 5-6 weeks.

Councillor Sharpe stated that this sounded like really good news as the system seemed to be working as it was intended to work. If residents were able to be moved out of the hospital and into a care system, it was good for the borough and good for the NHS.

Councillor Hunt added that this was thanks to the hard work of officers.

Councillor Knowles commented that one ongoing problem was that many residents didn't have anywhere to go after leaving hospital, and this would require a long-term solution.

Kevin McDaniel added that there was a national agenda around getting people out of hospital so that they could treat those who absolutely needed urgent care. The domiciliary

care contract was part of an investment in the RBWM area between the borough and the NHS. This would enable the flow out of hospitals. It was not a case of people being taken directly from hospital to a care home but trying to take people back to their own homes with the support that was needed in order to live their lives independently for as long as possible.

Councillor Carole Da Costa commented that taking people from hospital to recover into a care home was the most disabling thing that the borough could do. The period of support within the home to enable people to get back to their pre-hospital selves would be very important in order to assess longer term needs.

Councillor Tisi stated that the budget item that concerned her the most was the removal of non-statutory Family Hub services, given that this would be an 80% reduction in Family Hub services. Councillor Tisi asked what the long-term impact on families and the demand for statutory services would be if this early help offer was removed.

Lin Ferguson, Director of Children's Services – AfC, stated that the current proposals would mean a significant reduction in Family Hub services, primarily staffing. This impact would mean that Family Hubs couldn't deliver the breadth and volume of services currently delivered. Research showed that the earlier that Family Hubs were able to intervene, the more likely this could prevent families needing statutory services and additional support. Early help was a valuable resource which kept the majority of families in this service from needing statutory support.

Councillor Tisi asked how the percentage of children receiving statutory support within RBWM compared to neighbouring authorities.

Lin Ferguson stated that statistically, children in care were measured per 10,000 of the child population. RBWM were statistically lower than the national average and those of local authorities for children in care. Research suggested that if a borough had a robust early help service, it was likely to have fewer children in care, but it was difficult to establish cause and effect.

Councillor Tisi asked about the financial implications for the authority if the number of children in care increased.

Kevin McDaniel stated that if a child came in to the care of the borough, their life chances were significantly reduced compared to others. If the child was in the care of their family, extended family and/or with a local fostering family, this care would cost around £50,000 a year for the council. If the child was placed externally, this cost could easily reach £150,000 a year. The number of children currently in care was very low, and whether this number would increase was difficult to determine.

Councillor Tisi stated that in the framework for Ofsted evaluations of local authorities, a local authority would be likely to be 'good' if it included early help. Councillor Tisi asked what the perceived risk to the authority's 'good' rating would be if this part of the criteria could not be fulfilled.

Lin Ferguson stated that if these savings were to be realised, it could have an impact on regulatory outcomes. Although it was hard to say for certain and could not be predicted, it could have the potential of the authority not being able to retain its 'good' rating.

Councillor Sharpe commented that it was important to realise that the authority did not want to make cuts to the budget, but it had been put into a position where these cuts were necessary. It was a question of how resources could be used most effectively to deal with the problems which the borough faced, and how the budget could be used in such a way as to prevent these things happening. Research showed that preventative measures were a

good way of keeping costs down but more importantly, it was the best way to look after people who were in need of help. Councillor Sharpe asked officers to paint a picture of what the services would look like if these proposed cuts went ahead, in order to understand the real impact on the level of service.

Kevin McDaniel stated that if the draft budget passed in its current form, those in the most critical need would still get the support that was needed. The risk with this budget was those who currently engaged with early help at the earliest stages may not find the support that was needed and may find that their issues escalated to the point where they would be in a worse position before engaging with services.

Councillor Sharpe asked if any work was being undertaken to deliver alternative services that would support the community, such as remotely delivered mental health support.

Kevin McDaniel stated that this was a professional job, with families expecting to be able to get a service which takes money. A lot of work had gone into making family hubs as efficient as possible. This saving was the least worst thing for the borough to do, though it was not being recommended as a good thing to do.

Lin Ferguson added that these cuts would mean relying on other services within the borough in order to support families with this being achieved through signposting.

Councillor Sharpe stated that it was important that all services were as joined up as possible with regards to every family to ensure that services were delivered in the most integrated way.

Lin Ferguson stated that Achieving for Children would continue to scrutinise their own budget to ensure that the money available was going to the right place.

Councillor Del Campo said that with regards to reablement, she supported the idea of helping people stay in their homes for as long as it was appropriate and safe, and emphasised the role of signposting. Councillor Del Campo asked how this would be monitored to ensure that people who were still in their homes were not just surviving but were also thriving.

Kevin McDaniel stated that Councillor Del Campo was right to recognise that signposting was something that the borough could do better at, as the earlier people understood they can help themselves, the better the outcome for residents. With regards to reablement, the service had been improving and developing with reablement occurring for a particular group of adults.

David Birch, Chief Executive of Optalis, added that over the last year, Optalis had been revamping the service to maximise capacity and productivity in order to access as many people who need that service as possible. An external review had been commissioned which indicated a number of areas where capacity could be increased. Some non-reablement services had been stopped to ensure that specialists were dedicated to working in the area they were specialising in. The Home First initiative would help to free up additional capacity as it meant that the assessment phase was being carried out by a multi-disciplinary team rather than just the reablement team. Additionally, a significant recruitment campaign was ongoing to increase the size of the team by 15-20 people over the next year.

David Birch stated that Councillor Del Campo's point about finding people who were struggling was well made. The challenge was how to identify people who were struggling but not wanting to bother anybody. Discussions were ongoing with health colleagues and community groups in order to identify these people in a non-intrusive way to provide them with the support they need.

## Appendix 7, Annex A

Councillor Del Campo stated that when care home resident savings fell below a certain threshold, the borough stepped in and paid an appropriate amount for their care. Councillor Del Campo asked for clarity on the base budget figure and what percentage of this figure had come about through a deprivation of assets scenario.

Kevin McDaniel responded that there were many care home beds within the borough that people chose to put themselves into and paid for, rather than being put into the state-funded places. There was a significant price differential in the beds that were paid for, with these differences sometimes being as much as a £1000 per week.

In the cases where somebody had run out of money to pay for their care, the borough would step in to make sure that they had care, but it would still be the good quality care at the same amount of money that was paid for those who didn't have the wherewithal to pay for their own care. This saving covered individuals who may have been in care for a short term and had run out of money, in which a sensible conversation would be needed. If a third party, normally the family, were not able to pay, then the borough's policy was to ask people to move when it was safe to do so.

Lynne Lidster stated that the borough used to see under 10 people per year who would run out of money. However, this position had changed quite dramatically with this number almost doubling and more and more people running out of money. Lynne Lidster stated that this may have been a result of the pandemic, which resulted in people going into care homes far earlier than they normally would have. It was hoped that these high numbers would start to come down, but the number of people running out of money was significant.

In these cases, the first thing would be to negotiate with the provider where the person is currently residing. Every step would be taken to keep people where they were, but in instances where the provider was unwilling to negotiate, the family were unable or unwilling to top-up costs, and it was safe to do so, the individual would be moved to a different location which was more affordable for the authority. In these instances, a personal budget would be set which could meet the individual's needs, which would enable the person to choose where they would go.

Councillor Del Campo asked about if deprivation of assets was a particular issue for the borough and if so, what the scale of the issue might be.

Lynne Lidster stated that that she didn't have an idea on the possible scale but added that it was very hard to prove that someone had either been deprived or had deprived themselves of their assets. Reasonable assumptions and investigations were made to try and detect any self-deprivation, but it did occur. In instances where a third party had deprived somebody of their assets, this was a safeguarding issue which would be dealt with and potentially referred to the police. It was more difficult to see if people were depriving themselves of their own assets.

Councillor Del Campo stated that she was concerned about the cuts to Meals on Wheels, and asked officers to describe the value that this service provided.

Lynne Lidster stated that some of the people who received Meals on Wheels were reluctant to have formal care. The company used were specially trained to work with people, look at what was in people's homes, complete risk assessments and so forth. Meals on Wheels was a means of keeping an eye on somebody who was reluctant to enter the formal care system, and may result in that individual being more likely to eventually accept support. It was a valuable service, especially for those people who were at risk and were vulnerable.

Councillor Del Campo asked if Meals on Wheels could potentially help people who might otherwise fall through the gaps.

Lynne Lidster stated that the other side of the coin was that people would only ever pay their assessed charges. For instance, if an individual had an assessed charge of £50 per week and received services of £200 per week, they would still only pay the initial assessment of £50.

Kevin McDaniel confirmed that for the final budget he was proposing that this saving be made in a different way, with an increase in the meal price but still making the service available.

Councillor Del Campo asked the Chair if she could propose a recommendation to Cabinet now, or if this was better suited to the end of the debate.

The Chair confirmed that it would be better to propose any motions at the end of the debate.

Councillor Carole Da Costa stated that she came from a medical background, and every service would look to intervene as early as possible to make longer term savings and better outcomes for individuals. She stated that she couldn't support a budget that would look at removing those early help interventions, particularly when looking at CAMHS waiting lists of almost two years. One of the justifications for family hubs was that support could be put into place while people were waiting to see some kind of counselling. Councillor Carole Da Costa added that to take away the early intervention would be doing a disservice to the Council and its young people.

Councillor Carole Da Costa suggested looking again at this savings line and trying to reserve as much of the non-statutory Family Hub service as possible, as well as looking at ways to recruit and retain good quality staff so as to decrease reliance on agency services.

Councillor Knowles stated that he was involved as a trustee of two almshouses and had a vested interest, referring to savings lines AHH01S and AHH021S. During the pandemic, he was involved in supporting older residents through this period. Councillor Knowles knew how passionate most people were about independence and staying in their own homes, so the drive towards increased reablement was something that should be supported.

Councillor Knowles stated that the shared lives scheme in budget line AHH03S was quite brilliant, and asked if there had been any trials of this in the UK as it was often the norm for older people to remain with their families in other countries such as Germany. Councillor Knowles also asked how this would be managed, as it was a complex method that may pose safeguarding risks.

Lynne Lidster said that shared lives in the UK was primarily for people with learning disabilities, so was tried and trusted. The scheme was regulated through the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and would involve the borough partnering with another local authority to deliver this scheme. The scheme was originally launched in the borough around 7/8 years ago but wasn't successful, so the aim was to try again.

In terms of the personal care aspects, it would be the same as individuals living in their own home. The scheme was not registered for personal care so if the individual needed personal care, an agency registered to deliver this kind of care would come in to provide it. With regards to safeguarding, checks were carried out on the family and the individuals living in the home in the same way that Children's Services would do for foster carers.

Councillor Knowles asked if the level of safeguarding was the same as that required in care homes.

Lynne Lidster confirmed that this was the case.

Councillor Knowles stated that he knew many senior friends who were recipients of Meals on Wheels, and a reduction in this service would mean a reduction in mobility and support. Councillor Knowles's main worry was that he was concerned about an overall reduction in a level of staffing and what this would mean if gaps were needed to be filled by agency staff. Councillor Knowles stated that the People Service was very important as this related to people's lives, and if there was any slack in the original grant, it should be directed into these services as a priority.

Kevin McDaniel stated that he agreed with Councillor Knowles's statement but would reflect on other services of the Council which were equally as important. Many services were also becoming leaner in terms of staffing, but this was the nature of the budget.

Councillor Sharpe asked for clarification that the recommendations proposed in the draft budget would result in the savings stated in the papers. If these recommendations went through, Councillor Sharpe asked about the number of people who would be made redundant and if there was the option for redeployment off these affected staff.

Kevin McDaniel explained that at this stage of the budget proposals, none of the processes that would be necessary had begun. In all areas, the borough had looked to minimise the number of redundancies of permanent employees of the council or its partner companies. Within the borough, there was a very clear set of policies around reskilling and reasonable alternatives that wherever this option was possible it would be carried out. However, within People Services, there was a significant amount of training and development that would be required to move an individual from a non-specialist professional position to some of the more specialised roles.

The Vice-Chair asked for clarification on the need for, and cost of, a new CMS.

Kevin McDaniel explained that at present, a shared system (PARIS) was used by both Adults and Children's Services which provided the electronic record keeping of all interactions, particularly the statutory interactions with adults and children. This CMS enabled these services to ensure that they were effectively able to provide the right services and demonstrate the progress over time. In many cases, this CMS provided statutory data returns to the government and demonstrate through external reviewers that services provided were good quality.

The CMS was last purchased around 12 years ago, and the borough was one of three councils left using the system, and the supplier had stated that they would no longer be updating and developing the software. Therefore, two new CMS would be required with one for Adult's and one for Children's. The cost indicated was how much it would take to complete a migration of the computer system so would be a one-off cost, however the borough did pay a couple of hundred thousand pounds a year to run these tools and systems.

The Vice-Chair asked if the cost of providing care for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children would decrease next year.

Lin Ferguson stated that the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) had become mandatory at the beginning of 2022. During 2022, the NTS increased the quota of the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people from 0.07% to 0.1% [of the 0-18 age population]. For a small borough, this meant taking on significantly more young people. Information indicated that not all south-east authorities were at the same quota. A decision had been made that at the current time, unless the borough had the capacity to safely

support and care for any additional young people, they would not be taking any further young people through the NTS. Therefore, it was expected that these costs would go down. The young people received through the scheme were offered support and care in the same way as any other young person would, and it was important to highlight that these young people arrived with very significant needs due to trauma and required additional support.

Lin Ferguson explained that there were currently two hotels in the borough for asylum seekers, and if any young asylum seekers presented themselves outside the NTS, the borough had a responsibility to support these people and the borough would do so as it would with any other young person.

Kevin McDaniel added that one of the issues was that these young people arrived with no additional resources over and above the base budget for any council. Councils were provided with around £1000 per week to cover the cost of accommodation for these young people, but this did not provide support for the cost of their care. The borough had continually spoken with the Home Office, who had responsibility for this group, to explain that if the resources provided were increased then the number of young people that the borough took on could be increased.

Kevin McDaniel noted that as of 1 February 2023, the Home Officer were paying a one-off £15,000 per young person who was taken in as an incentive, in addition to this £1000 per week that was also provided. The borough was at capacity so would not be taking any more young people, but it may serve as an incentive to boroughs which did have the capacity but lacked the resources.

The Vice-Chair asked why the figure indicated in budget line AHH19S, review policies for access to care, was so high.

Kevin McDaniel explained that the first few lines in Table 4 added up to well over £3m. This was some of the people who had gone into care earlier than they needed to, and this was the figure that would need to be spent if this continued. The policy review was a saving the borough hoped to achieve by placing people into the right locations.

The Vice-Chair asked for an explanation on budget line CHI01S.

Kevin McDaniel and Andrew Vallance, Head of Finance, confirmed that this would be responded to outside of the meeting.

**ACTION: Written response to the Vice-Chair's question to be provided.**

Councillor Tisi asked if the borough were aware of the strains and stresses that were being put on agencies and the voluntary sector, and whether anything could be done to help.

Kevin McDaniel stated that, anecdotally, he had heard that in the voluntary sector, for the right bid there was quite a lot of money out there, with quite a lot of benefactors willing to support families and young people in particular. Work on the borough's side in order to improve signposting and join organisations up could be improved.

Councillor Tisi explained that she had submitted questions ahead of the original Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Panel's session on the budget, to which she had received detailed replies. Councillor Tisi stated that she would be happy to send the answers to her written responses to panel members.

**ACTION: Councillor Tisi to send Panel members answers to her written questions.**

Councillor Tisi proposed a motion that Cabinet uses £500,000 funding from the additional budget settlement to remove the amount of savings required of the non-statutory Family Hub

## Appendix 7, Annex A

services (savings ref. CHI20S) and create a new growth bid of £20k for the Family Hubs to ameliorate increasing demand on the service. This motion was seconded by Councillor Carole Da Costa.

A named vote was taken.

<b>To recommend that Cabinet use funding from the additional budget settlement to remove the amount of savings required of the non-statutory Family Hub services (savings ref. CHI20S) and create a new growth bid of £20,000 for the Family Hubs to ameliorate increasing demand on the service (Motion)</b>	
Councillor Sayonara Luxton	Abstain
Councillor Maureen Hunt	Abstain
Councillor Clive Baskerville	For
Councillor Catherine del Campo	For
Councillor Carole Da Costa	For
Councillor Neil Knowles	For
Councillor Julian Sharpe	For
Councillor John Story	Abstain
Councillor Amy Tisi	For
<b>Carried</b>	

The result was 6 votes in favour and 3 abstentions, therefore the motion passed.

Councillor Baskerville stated that he was glad to see that the borough recognised that by maintaining lower levels of council tax, it was missing out on additional revenue.

Andrew Vallance explained that it was the Council's policy to cut council tax for several years in the early 2010s. If it had taken the full increase every year that was allowed under that scheme, there would be an extra £30m in the budget.

Councillor Story asked if the £500,000 figure for unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children was part of the total £1m figure that was given for the total cost of all asylum seekers, and if the other £500,000 was for adults.

Kevin McDaniel stated that much of the expense came to Children's Services, but AfC had responded during the year with increased efficiencies to the structure. The total cost was £1m, but some of this was a cost that would have been necessary. Most of the costs associated with asylum seekers related to hotel costs.

Councillor Story asked for clarification on the process for the budget moving forward.

Andrew Vallance explained that the administration would put forward a revised budget, which was currently being prepared and would be published on 1 February 2023 as part of the Cabinet agenda. This budget would incorporate what the administration wished to do with the extra £3.6m worth of funding. The results of the consultation, which ended on 24 January 2023, would also be considered at Cabinet alongside any recommendations from all three Overview & Scrutiny Panels.

Cabinet would then vote to recommend a final budget to Full Council in February, at which the budget would be debated by all political groups and any amendments to the budget could be proposed.

Councillor Del Campo emphasised the importance of Meals on Wheels in terms of safeguarding and supporting residents.

Appendix 7, Annex A

Councillor Del Campo proposed a motion to strike savings line item AHH22S from the budget. Councillor Tisi seconded this motion.

A named vote was taken.

<b>To recommend that Cabinet strike savings line item AHH22S from the budget. (Motion)</b>	
Councillor Sayonara Luxton	For
Councillor Maureen Hunt	For
Councillor Clive Baskerville	For
Councillor Catherine del Campo	For
Councillor Carole Da Costa	For
Councillor Neil Knowles	For
Councillor Julian Sharpe	For
Councillor John Story	Abstain
Councillor Amy Tisi	For
<b>Carried</b>	

The result was 8 votes for and 1 abstention, therefore the motion passed.

Councillor Knowles proposed that a risk assessment was kept on the impact of reduction of staff on services.

Kevin McDaniel confirmed that the Council ran both a corporate and directorate level risk register, with financial and staffing stability both being included on those registers.

The Vice-Chair proposed a motion that Cabinet approved the draft budget.

Kevin McDaniel clarified that the draft budget had already been approved by Cabinet on 1 December 2022.

Councillor Sharpe stated that it was appropriate for discussion to finish as two motions had been proposed and passed.

Councillor Del Campo asked if it was just a matter of Cabinet taking the minutes of this meeting into account when considering any recommendations to the budget.

Becky Oates, Democratic Services Officer, confirmed that it was just a matter of Cabinet taking the minutes into account.

The Chair thanked all for their contributions.

Place Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Wednesday 25 January 2023

Present: Councillors John Bowden (Chairman), Gerry Clark, Maureen Hunt, Sayonara Luxton, Shamsul Shelim, Leo Walters, Joshua Reynolds, Mandy Brar, Gurch Singh, Jon Davey and Parish Councillor Pat McDonald (Co-Optee)

Present virtually: Councillor Helen Taylor (Vice-Chairman)

Also in attendance: Councillors Gurpreet Bhangra and Phil Haseler

Also in attendance virtually: Councillors Donna Stimson, Karen Davies and David Coppinger

Officers: Laurence Ellis, Alysse Strachan, Adele Taylor and Andrew Durrant

Officers in attendance virtually: Chris Joyce and Adrien Waite

Draft Budget 2023/24 - Place Items

Andrew Durrant, Executive Director of Place Services, gave a presentation on highlighting the budget of 2023/24 relating to Place Overview and Scrutiny. He explained that the report presented pressures and mitigating savings to enable the Council to balance its budget in 2023/24. It was understood that there would be financial challenges, including the recovery from the Covid pandemic, high inflation, increasing interest rates and demographic growth all impacting on the Borough's residents. This also had an impact on both the Borough's revenue costs and capital costs (cost of borrowing).

Andrew Durrant also noted that RBWM had a low council tax rate which was more acute in comparison to other local councils, also low budget levels (although building these back).

Andrew Durrant also mentioned that there were in-year budget pressures (partially caused by Covid). In response, he stated that he was working with Heads of Service and teams to mitigate these pressures.

Andrew Durrant also pointed out that approximately over 80% of funding from Council Tax was spent on approximately over 80% on individual services.

Andrew Durrant then informed that there was a government funding announcement which included:

- Council Tax policy (3 +2) % (1% increase = approx. £830,000)
- New social care grants.
- One more year of New Homes Bonus (but no legacy payments)
- Consolidation of a number of grants
- Reductions in services grant to fund some of other commitments

This meant that RBWM was in an improved position with additional funding over and above what was included in current draft budget. Looking forward, Andrew Durrant stated that reserve levels would be reviewed as well as prepare for future challenges.

Andrew Durrant then discussed the Place Service Budget setting approach. In terms of approach to resource prioritisation, these included:

- Taking a strategic and collaborative view across Place Service in 3-5 years
- Maintaining essential and statutory services (underpinned by 'quality')
- Prioritise in setting the Corporate Plan goals
- Focus on Strategic Placemaking and Economic Growth
- Opportunities to promote Health and Wellbeing (e.g. Active Travel and enhancing facilities)
- Partnership delivery models key and area to explore
- Areas to maximise commercial activity and income generation opportunities
- Address system failure, improve process and unblock issues

Andrew Durrant then raised some financial risks and issues:

- Place Change Programme presented opportunities but also some challenges
- Historic contracts and renewals
- Post-pandemic behavioural change and recovery (e.g. Covid grant reduction)
- Economic outlook

Andrew Durrant then explained other opportunities which were being explored. These included the Berkshire Deal to open up new funding opportunities, better alignment of services and leadership with Corporate Plan Priorities, and strategic relationships with business and growth sector organisations.

Andrew Durrant then discussed the Place Service savings (accounting for £1.943 million) and growth (accounting for £1.731 million) from various sections.

In response to Councillor Singh wishing to have a copy of the slides, Andrew Durrant mentioned that he could circulate the slides to panel members after the meeting.

To conclude, Andrew Durrant then displayed the key dates:

- Online Engagement (launched on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2022) had closed on 24<sup>th</sup> January 2023.
- Cabinet to consider engagement feedback and propose budget on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2023.
- Full Council to discuss the budget on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2023

With agreement from the panel, the Chairman invited the public speaker to address the panel. They had three minutes to do so.

Mr Hinton stated that he was speaking on behalf of the RBWM Climate Emergency Coalition. While it was acknowledged that the Council was experiencing increasing costs and needed to budget accordingly, he argued that this was not the time to reduce the overall budget made available to deliver upon the commitments set out in the Council's own Environment and Climate Strategy, and the Corporate Plan's priority to tackle climate change and its consequences. He stated the Council is behind schedule with 3 of its 4 key Environment and Climate change objectives and with fully establishing the Climate Partnership. Therefore, he conveyed, there was a very strong argument for investment and acceleration.

Mr Hinton said that the Council were only considering the obvious climate related budget items, rather than the impact each budget item had on the climate and/or environment. For example, in recruitment, what provisions will be made to reduce emissions associated with the position through home working and/or use of public transport?

Regarding the draft budget, Mr Hinton stated that the proposed budget would reduce £180,000 in spending on delivering on its Environment and Climate Strategy, whereby funding would come from the carbon offsetting and biodiversity net gain fund (s106 payments). The s106 payments were meant to remedy damage caused by development, and were in addition to, not instead of, projects delivered through the Climate Partnership and/or the Council.

Mr Hinton concluded by asking the Panel what they had done to secure additional powers and resources from government to avoid a significant overall reduction in funds allocated to one of the Council's top three priorities.

Chris Joyce, Head of Infrastructure Sustainability and Economic Growth, stated that the Council was on track to meet its commitments relating to its own emissions, but also admitted that there were some challenges around meeting targets for the overall Borough emissions. He also stated that there were no reductions on the amount of money going into projects and teams in the budget proposals. Regarding external funding and money from government, there had been some success in acquiring £4-5 million to help the Council deliver on its climate commitments.

Chris Joyce then explained that, rather than being seen as a cut, he was making best use of the grant funding the Council had to grow the team and ensure that they had the right resources to deliver its objectives.

Andrew Durrant added that he and his team were working with its contract operators to look into carbon reduction as well as investigating and trialling methods in reducing environmental harm, such as road works. In addition, future contracts would have requirements on environmental friendliness.

*(Councillor Brar entered the meeting at 6:10pm)*

In terms of staff, Andrew Durrant explained that flexible and agile working would continue as well as looked into further. He also added that public transport would be further promoted.

Referring to the Climate Partnership funding (PLA17S in the report), where there was a proposed £100,000 saving and the finance was to be derived from the Carbon Offsetting, Biodiversity fund and S106 payments, Councillor Reynolds asked if these funds were already in place to replace funding directly. Andrew Durrant confirmed this.

Councillor Reynolds then asked if S106 payments would limit the amount of funds for other projects. Chris Joyce replied that the Carbon Offsetting fund was a s106 Payment fund, collected to reduce carbon emissions in the Borough. He also stated that the commitment to give £250,000 to climate partnership for three years would continue.

Councillor Reynolds then asked if this meant there were specific project limitations on that funding or would that funding be able to be used in anyway as per the original planned partnership funding. Chris Joyce replied that this was based on the business plan with the Climate Partnership Board. He stated that the funding was very much used for the intended purpose.

Regarding the Climate Partnership Fund and the money being used from s106 payments, Councillor Reynolds then asked if residents would not expect s106 payments to be spent on projects rather than running the Climate Partnership. Chris Joyce replied that he had worked with the Climate Partnership Board to identify their business plan for the next 3 years in terms of funding. The Carbon Offsetting fund (part of the s106 payments) would only fund projects rather than the general running of the Climate Partnership. There was nothing

preventing in investing in more projects which reduce carbon emissions across the Borough identified with the Climate Partnership.

The Panel then discussed the Draft Budget 2023/24 items that fall under the Place Directorate by going through the list of budget items in the report.

The Panel discussed Line-by-Line Review (PLA01S).

Councillor Walters asked if rising interest rates had been factored in. Adele Taylor, Executive Director of Resources, replied that had interest rates and inflations had been factored in the overall draft budget in the medium term.

Councillor Hunt asked why there was a high saving for a Line-by-Line Review. Andrew Durrant replied that this was made up of a variety of different aspects. Having had a look at some consultancy costs, some of these had been removed for the next financial year as consultancy costs were usually large but often one-off. The Place Directorate had looked into how this could be invested within the organisation, such as project management support. Adele Taylor explained that the Line-by-Line Review was annual exercise because there were usually changes for next year's budget. She added that the biggest change to Line-by-Line savings for the draft budget was the National Insurance (NI) changes, whereby employers and employees were to be charged additional Health and Social care NI, but this was no longer required. Thus, this was removed from every Directorate budget in 2023-24.

Councillor Davey commented that the Line-by-Line lacked detailed information in the report and stated that he was better informed during a meeting with officers in which he shadowed. He asked if there could be an informal meeting before the Place O&S meeting so that Panel members could be better informed on items in future. Adele Taylor replied that the Line-by-Line Review was hundreds of pages long due to having to go through every cost centre and account code.

Councillor Singh asked how much of £376,000 would go to staff public transport as there appeared to be a reduction. Adele Taylor replied that the sections (including staff public transport) under the £376,000 funding were areas where there had been a budget but there had been no spending over a number of years. She explained that there was a reduction in staff public transport was because of factors like changes such as more online meetings.

The Panel then moved onto discussing PLA02S (Infrastructure, Sustainability and Transport). Councillor Reynolds asked if there was a guarantee that in-house teams would be successfully recruited as well as why there was a struggle to recruit them. Chris Joyce replied that the recently recruited Highways Development Control Officer had recently started. He added that the reason that recruitment had not been done before was because the previous Transport and Infrastructure Team was originally an outsourced service and therefore it was being paid through a contract. By bringing the Team in-house, some money was able to be saved.

Councillor Walters asked if recruitment for an in-house team would result in the curtailment of employing individuals outside of the Council. Andrew Durrant replied that it would not. He elaborated that the Place Directorate may have a different approach with contracts going forward, such as looking at different functions that were currently within contracted services transiting into in-house in the future, and therefore, providing some additional resource within the service teams directly rather than being within contracted teams.

On PLA03S (Public Transport Subsidies), Councillor Brar asked why the S106 contribution was a one-off. Adele Taylor replied that the sum of money was only received once and

therefore it could only be spent once. She explained that the sum of money would go in for one year and then get reversed back out in the following year because it was a one-off grant.

Councillor Davey asked if Public Transport Subsidies was a special project that was being funded out of S106 funding or a standard service which was being funded out of S106 funding. Chris Joyce replied that S106 funding was financing the services that RBWM were currently supporting but the alternative choice was to reduce the service and then refund the service using section 106. In effect, if this money was not put into the budget, then RBWM would then fund a lesser public transport service; but then the following day, RBWM would then put section 106 to restart up one of the bus services it supported.

Councillor Davey believed that S106 was for when there was an expansion and services were needed to support this. Therefore, he asked if there were issues with an existing service, would RBWM need to look into that service. Chris Joyce replied that the Transport Team were doing and that this was helping to maintain services for people whilst the Team undertake the more detailed review.

The Panel had no questions or comments for PLA4S (Sustainability team projects) and PLA5S (Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace income). The Panel then discussed PLA06S (Operational changes in parks).

Councillor Reynolds had some concerns over the closure of park gates and the suggestion of utilising volunteers. He asked if there had been considerations on the potential saving from this proposal being balanced against potential expenditure in the future resulting from and social behaviour vandalism, such as replanting trees which vandals had damaged. He also asked if the parks referred to in the report included cemeteries. Alysse Strachan, Head of Neighbourhood Services, confirmed that the balance of costs was considered. She added that it would not be all parks, and that there would be a place-by-place consideration whereby key parks which had a high volume of anti-social behaviour would be looked into. This would be done through a risk assessment with partners, such as Thames Valley Police. She also confirmed that this may also include the closing of cemetery gates.

Councillor Singh had some concerns on the provision of public conveniences (public toilet) and asked if an EQIA assessment had taken place as some public toilets had been removed. Alysse Strachan replied that a full-scale review of all public toilets in the Borough (rather than just in parks) would take place. She confirmed that an EQIA assessment had been completed but this would be updated as the project progressed in case there were any alternative options, such as parishes or other partners which may take on operational use of public conveniences. Therefore, this may not involve the removal of public toilets or charging for them.

The Panel then discussed the budget items relating to parking: PLA07S (Review of parking enforcement near schools), PLA08S (Parking Subsidies) and PLA09S (Charging opportunities for car parking). The Chairman declared some of these items would be discussed in Part II.

Councillor Reynolds requested to raise a point regarding PLA07S in Part II of the meeting. The Chairman accepted this.

On saving £67,000 for parking subsidies, Councillor Davey asked what these subsidies were or whether this was generic subsidies. Alysse Strachan replied this was made up of various subsidies that RBWM provided for parking across the Borough. A large chunk of parking subsidies was the free Christmas parking for residents, costing around £50,000 per year to deliver. The alternative arrangement introduced this year where public transport provision was made in conjunction with the resident's parking discount had proved successful. The

introduction of the resident discount scheme meant there was a negated need for this because residents could access free parking in the town centres. In addition, RBWM sometimes received requests from event organisers and therefore provide subsidised parking for events. The event organisers will be advised that they need to factor in parking costs into their plans.

On PLA09S, Councillor Singh asked if free parking on Sundays had been dropped. Adele Taylor replied this report was a draft budget and that Cabinet may make some changes before the final budget. At that stage, this was still in draft budget. In response, Councillor Singh then asked if there were any financial calculation in terms of budgetary arrangements on this direction. Adele Taylor replied that the draft budget to be sent to Cabinet would have full financial implications in it. She added that any changes Cabinet would potentially make would have to be fully costed and the draft budget would have to be fully balanced.

The Panel then moved onto PLA10S (Cashless Parking expansion). Parish Councillor Pat McDonald, Co-Optee, was reluctant about the use of cashless parking and asked if cash parking could continue in Maidenhead.

Councillor Reynolds asked if there was any additional cost with RingGo to the Council. Alysse Strachan replied that any costs were offset by the maintenance the Council had to pay for the maintenance of pay and display machines as well as facilitate cash collections.

Councillor Walters supported the idea of retaining cash parking due to an ageing population in the Borough and asked if this could be retained. Alysse Strachan responded that trends were showing that more people were taking up the cashless option which was why the Borough was moving in this direction. Though, with EQI element, cash parking still needed to be considered with different groups of people and the preference in payment method. She also stated that the cash parking option would not be fully removed and were looking at different options. Councillor Davey commented that EQI assessment did mentioned elderly people and therefore payment preferences for certain people had to be considered.

Councillor Reynolds asked if there was a proposal to remove parking machines from some of car parks and would that leave any of current car parks with no parking machines. Alysse Strachan said this could be a potential; but this would be a location-by-location basis whereby a couple of machines would be retained if there was no cash payment option nearby for residents. Though there was already a program of removing pay-and-display machines across the Borough.

Moving onto PLA11S (Income opportunities across Neighbourhood Services), Councillor Brar asked if the pavement licencing and cleansing and valeting services (as mentioned in the item) was going ahead. Alysse Strachan advised the project had not started yet because approval to go forward with this was pending; but any commercial opportunities with the assets that the Borough had were being looked at. Councillor Brar asked if residents were being consulted on this. Alysse Strachan said that there would a wide range of consultations.

Councillor Luxton asked how the Council received money from, for example, private car washers, such as would a fee be charged. Alysse Strachan replied that this was in development, but it may be in the form of a concession contract in which the Council would charge a management fee or received a percentage of the income.

Councillor Reynolds asked for reassurance that management enforcement would not involve enforcement such as management officers penalising children for a lemonade stand or a jumble sale. Alysse Strachan reassured this would not happen. Councillor Reynolds later followed up by asking what safeguards were put in place to ensure that young enterprising people were not being penalised as well as the grey area on what would be considered

acceptable and unacceptable. Andrew Durrant acknowledged that there could be pitfalls and that the approach to the program would need to be considered before being introduced.

Regarding licences for private trainers using parks, Councillor Singh asked if this encompassed organised exercises and events and thus the individuals arranging this would be charged. Andrew Durrant replied that this was one of several areas that was listed and identified to achieve the £50,000 worth of savings that the Place Service were committed to. An approach he suggested for the Council was to work more in partnership with the likes of personal trainers to see, for example, if there could be discounted concessions or to continue their free but commercial activity in exchange for some free to access community-led provision in which RBWM could then expand its activity program and health and wellbeing program. Andrew Durrant also stated that while the Council should consider the licensing arrangements for those individuals going forward, it should also equally and ideally engage and work with individuals which were providing activity in public spaces and to see how it could work with them to allow them to continue but to benefit the wider community.

Councillor Brar asked if the boat hire in Maidenhead through concession contract was related to the Maidenhead waterways or the River Thames. Alysse Strachan reiterated that she was looking at all the assets that the Borough possessed as well as the commercial opportunities that it could explore.

The Panel moved onto PLA12S (Waste operational changes). Councillor Shelim asked what was meant by waste transfer station opening times, such as whether this meant shorter opening times. Alysse Strachan confirmed this, explaining that there were different summer and winter opening hours. As such, RBWM had been looking at the option to have its winter opening hours reflected in the summer opening hours, in which they would be open for shorter. Despite this, as part of that work, RBWM would do investigations on the demand on when residents would want to use the tip.

Councillor Luxton asked what was meant by 're-use "shop"'. Alysse Strachan explained that sometime residents bring items to the tip which can be reused. Therefore, the staff on site would look to see what items were reusable, like bikes or chairs, they collect that equipment and then sell them to other residents who visited the site.

Councillor Singh asked if upcycling shops were considered which could be placed in the town centre as well as how the staffing and management would be organised. Alysse Strachan responded that some details were yet to be decided, but she was open to pop-up shops. If this had potential successful, then these suggestions could be explored.

Moving onto PLA13S (Place Service Transformation Programme), Councillor Walters asked what this meant. Andrew Durrant explained that it was intended in the long-term to achieve a better alignment of the services in recent times, functions and staffing resource across the Place Service. Some of these changes included the creation of Neighbourhood Services, with a realignment of some functions, and Chris Joyce's Infrastructure Sustainability and Economic Growth Service. Collectively, the directorate leadership team had identified aspects where the Place Service could be more effective in its contract management as well as where it could deliver higher quality of standard to RBWM residents. It was often about identifying areas of real expertise and specialism that could be better aligned and avoid any fragmentation. It was hoped that this would promote efficiency and reductions in costs.

Councillor Davey asked if the contract work was being done by the Legal Team. Andrew Durrant replied that while the Legal Team was separate from the Place Service, they provide legal support in re-procurement of contracts alongside separate financial and HR support from other teams or services.

The Panel then discussed PLA14S (Contract efficiencies). Councillor Brar asked if there was an attempt to bring the services mentioned (Highways, Waste Disposal, Parking enforcement, grounds maintenance) in-house. Alysse Strachan replied that it was not an objective to bring all the services in-house, though potentially with some of them. For example, the re-procuring of highways contracts potentially had elements which may be better delivered in-house.

The Panel moved onto PLA15S (Parish council & Commercial Partnership). Councillor Luxton asked if the Borough Council controlled the flow of money to Parish Councils as well as what it was being spent on. Adele Taylor replied that the parish precepts were for Parish Councils and the Borough collected and delivered this to the Councils on their behalf as part of the Council tax collection. As Parish Councils were their own separate and sovereign bodies, the Borough Council had no control over where this money was spent. Unlike RBWM, which had a referendum limit of 4.99% on Council tax, Parish Councils were not limited by this. Another difference was that there was an un-parish element, which was limited to by the referendum limit, which covered costs in areas which were not under the jurisdiction of a Parish Council.

Councillor Brar asked if PLA15S was asking Parish Councils to take in services from the Borough. Andrew Durrant replied that this budget line was part of the Council looking into how to better work with parishes in the future. Through discussions with parishes, Andrew Durrant stated that there were potential opportunities and that some parishes were keen to have further discussion to ensure cooperation. In addition, commercial opportunities were also considered, such as supporting community service. Community wardens were also discussed with parishes.

Councillor Brar then asked if Borough funding would be provided for the services in which Parish Councils may take on. Andrew Durrant replied that this was still under consideration and discussion. In addition, there needed to be an analysis of the assets as well as the divisions of responsibility in the parishes to understand where the opportunities exist. One objective for the future was to ensure that officers were identified so they could do that type of work.

*(Councillor Clark left the meeting at 7:59pm)*

The Chairman asked if the Council knew Parish Councils individual reserves and a cumulative figure of their reserves. Adele Taylor reiterated that Parish Councils were their own separate sovereign bodies, and therefore it was up to them to determine what their reserves were.

The Panel then moved onto PLA16S (Economic Growth Team). Councillor Reynolds asked if town centre events (such as Christmas light switch on) were at risk with this budget line. Chris Joyce replied that most of those big events were financed through sponsorship and organised by partners, while the budget was for minor events which may be organised. Therefore, the events were not at risk. Coming back, Councillor Reynolds then asked what smaller events were at risk in not being arranged. Chris Joyce said he would need to come back to the question, but he reassured that major events like Christmas lights were not under threat.

Councillor Shelim asked for explanation regarding Guildhall and business rates in the budget line. Chris Joyce explained that the tourist information centre was previously based in the shopping centre and was paying rent and business rates. As part of the process to bring the tourist information centre into the Guildhall and share the space with the museum, the rent was taken out of the budget, and this had identified that there was also a business rate cost

that had previously not appeared in the budget and now could because it was now within an RBWM building.

The Panel then discussed PLA17S (Climate Partnership funding). Councillor Reynolds asked if the budget would keep RBWM on its annual carbon budget and successfully achieve its annual carbon budget production. Chris Joyce replied that forecasts for the Council carbon emissions showed that it was on track to meet its target and there was nothing in the budget proposals which would make achieving these carbon targets harder. Though some other potential risks may exist, such as securing government funding.

In reference to a Table 3 (under 4.17: Development Contributions) in the report, Councillor Davey commented that there were no S106 and CIL contributions for biodiversity, despite biodiversity being discussed. Chris Joyce stated this did not mean there would not be any spending on biodiversity. The table was referring to the fact that there was no S106 contributions to biodiversity at the moment, though S106 contributions may be collected to support biodiversity in future.

The Panel then moved onto PLA18S (Planning Performance Agreements). Councillor Reynolds asked for an elaboration on the budget line. Adrien Waite, Head of Planning, explained that a planning performance agreement was when RBWM entered into an agreement with a developer to process a free application advice or a planning application to try and meet particular time scales. These were often associated with funding agreements which RBWM negotiate on a on a bespoke basis. They could provide extra resource such as specialist external consultants or contract planners. As part of the budget, the Planning Team was looking to change some of its pre-application charging structure but there were also a lot of larger developments in the pipeline due to the adoption of the Borough Local Plan. Overall, this budget line was highlighting that there was the opportunity for more discussions with developers particularly on larger sites and to try and increase revenue to fund those activities.

Councillor Reynolds responded that this sounded like a “planning application fast lane” in which developers could grant RBWM extra cash to get applications through quicker. Adrien Waite responded that this was not the case, explaining that this did not change how planning applications were handled. Rather, this changed how it would be dealt with and the way it would be funded as well as bring in additional resources. He also explained that these planning performance agreements would mostly be used for larger developments.

Councillor Reynold was still sceptical with the idea. Adele Taylor stated that planning performance agreements were used in multiple local authorities. She stated that these agreements were to ensure the right skills and resources were acquired in a timely manner when doing planning applications. She stated that this was supporting the efficient use of RBWM resources for individual applications and minor applications by utilising funding like this to support major ones. This was about individuals who would pay for the increase in use of resources.

The Panel had no comments or questions on PLA19S (Planning Application fee), PLA01G (Leisure Centre rent concession income) and PLA02G Public transport subsidies

On PLA03G (Tree Maintenance and Inspections), Councillor Davey asked if the full year impact of £454,000 in the budget line encompassed tree planting by the Tree Team or whether it included tree maintenance. Andrew Durrant replied that this encompassed tree inspection and maintenance and not the re-planting of trees, though tree planting schemes had been investigated. He added that there had been increased pressures relating to trees, such fallen trees caused by extreme weather.

The Panel had no comments on PLA04G (Section 81 works extra resource) and PLA05G (Highways and Streetworks software).

On PLA06G (Parking Income season tickets), in reference to Table 6: Fees and Charges Income in the report, Councillor Davey asked for an explanation for the income growth from £10.3 million to £11.5 million. Adele Taylor explained that the table illustrated the totality of the income and that the overall income budget for parking services would be £11.5 million (an 11.6% average increase). She also added that the table reflected the changing demand and behaviour in certain areas.

The Panel had no comments regarding PLA07G (Car Parks).

On PLA08G (Fly Tipping), Councillor Davey asked if there was an organisation who would be providing most of the funding. Alysse Strachan replied that the existing contract which RBWM had underestimated the volume of fly tipping in the Borough, therefore the Borough had to pay for anything above the threshold.

The Panel had no comments regarding PLA09G (Tivoli Contract) and PLA10G (Burials income reversal).

Councillor Davey requested to look at different approach on discussing the budget items, arguing that discussing the items in a less formal chat would give Panel members a chance to discuss and ask questions. Adele Taylor replied that the budget process was made extremely difficult due to a tight timescale from central government; namely late notification of information and policy decisions from central government which therefore caused work around balancing budget to be done right up until the draft budget was to be presented to Cabinet. She added that if it were not for the restrictions from central government, then RBWM officers could have looked at different ways to brief councillors.

Adele Taylor also stated that a review would be arranged on how things could be done differently. She also explained that it was the remit of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel to consider the budget because the budget should not have been separated into single elements because it was about the totality of the funding, elaborating that if the budget was viewed separately, the budget as a whole would not be reviewed. They could however involve other panels but it was their remit to consider the whole budget.

The Panel had no recommendations to Cabinet. Therefore, the Panel moved the meeting into Part II.

**RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the motion to exclude the public for the remainder of the meeting be approved.**

After some discussion on the nature of the proposals in Part II, two motions were proposed.

Councillor Luxton proposed the motion that Cabinet explore all the schools in the Borough which require funding for school crossing patrols (SCPs). This was seconded by Councillor Shelim.

A named vote was taken.

<b>That Cabinet explore all the schools in the Borough which require funding for school crossing patrols (SCPs). (Motion)</b>	
Councillor John Bowden	For
Councillor Gerry Clark	No vote recorded
Councillor Maureen Hunt	For
Councillor Sayonara Luxton	For
Councillor Shamsul Shelim	For
Councillor Leo Walters	For
Councillor Joshua Reynolds	Against
Councillor Mandy Brar	Abstain
Councillor Gurch Singh	Against
Councillor Jon Davey	Abstain
<b>Carried</b>	

The result was 5 in favour, 2 against and 2 abstain, so the motion passed.

**AGREED: That Cabinet explore all the schools in the Borough which require funding for school crossing patrols (SCPs).**

Councillor Reynolds proposed the motion that Cabinet review budget line PLA07S (Review of parking enforcement near schools). This was seconded by Councillor Singh.

<b>That Cabinet review budget line PLA07S (Review of parking enforcement near schools) (Motion)</b>	
Councillor John Bowden	Against
Councillor Gerry Clark	No vote recorded
Councillor Maureen Hunt	Against
Councillor Sayonara Luxton	Against
Councillor Shamsul Shelim	Against
Councillor Leo Walters	Against
Councillor Joshua Reynolds	For
Councillor Mandy Brar	For
Councillor Gurch Singh	For
Councillor Jon Davey	For
<b>Rejected</b>	

The result was 5 against and 4 in favour, so the motion fell.

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Monday 30 January 2023

Present: Councillors Gerry Clark (Chairman), John Story (Vice-Chairman), Simon Bond, Greg Jones, Lynne Jones, Helen Price, Julian Sharpe, Shamsul Shelim, Leo Walters and Simon Werner

Also in attendance virtually: Councillors David Hilton, Mandy Brar, Ewan Larcombe, Donna Stimson and Gurpreet Bhangra

Officers: Mark Beeley, Adele Taylor and Nikki Craig

Officers in attendance virtually: Andrew Vallance, Emma Duncan and Alysse Strachan

Budget 2023/24 - Fees and Charges

Adele Taylor said that the full fees and charges report was part of the agenda pack, the Panel were asked to provide any comments on the proposals. This included the financial implications which were included as part of the draft budget. Lines that were statutory had been indicated and service areas were asked to consider the fees impact on the budget, for example an increase in volume should be fed into the service area income budget.

Councillor Price commented that there was no point in the Panel discussing non-discretionary items as these were fixed. This was confirmed by the Executive Director of Resources.

Councillor Price asked if there was a rationale for some areas which had increased and other areas which had not.

Adele Taylor explained that some increases could be higher due to the scale of some of the fees, cost recovery could be a factor if costs had also increased. Average increases could be skewed if one specific fee had increased which had affected the overall average.

Councillor Price asked why the parking fees had gone out to public consultation but no other fees in the budget had done so.

Adele Taylor said the parking fees formed the majority of the council's income which was why officers had focused on this area.

Councillor L Jones said that inflation was forecast to drop rapidly over the next couple of months, she asked why the finance team were not using the forecast on inflation.

Adele Taylor said that the rate of inflation was taken at the current point in time, the same had been done for expenditure. Some of the fees and charges were driven by costs in year. All fees and charges were done on an individual service basis, these service areas could justify any rises if needed.

Councillor L Jones did not understand what other costs had been incurred on parking over the past year, other than a loss in income. She did not believe that parking charges needed to be raised to match coinage as parking charges were now done digitally. Councillor L

## Appendix 7, Annex A

Jones suggested that particularly in Windsor, residents needed more than a one hour discount on parking, residents needed to be encouraged to use their local high street. She requested to Cabinet that the parking charge was not increased, that the inflation rate used needed to be revaluated and that residents were given a greater discount on parking.

The Chairman recalled that the parking team had benchmarked parking charges against other local authorities and RBWM had low parking charges, in comparison.

Alysse Strachan, Head of Neighbourhood Services, confirmed that benchmarking had been done with neighbouring authorities and also with other authorities in different areas of the country. RBWM was largely similar in the level of charge for parking.

Councillor Sharpe wanted to ensure that comparisons had been made locally, residents of RBWM were only likely to visit other local town centres for shopping.

Councillor Werner felt that the cost of parking in Windsor was shocking, he said it was cheaper to travel and park in Bracknell. Councillor Werner said that residents should have a greater discount at car parks in RBWM, they should not be charged the same level as tourists.

The Chairman highlighted that an increase in discounted parking would have to be offset by revenue in another area, to ensure that the budget remained balanced.

Councillor Werner suggested that there should be a proper residents discount scheme, where residents paid a fairer rate which was less than what tourists were charged. The more parking charges were raised, the less residents would use RBWM car parks. The council was losing customers to Bracknell and Wokingham due to the cost of parking.

Councillor Shelim understood that some of the car parks in Windsor were near tourist areas and it made sense why the charges in these car parks were higher. Other car parks were used by residents and the charges should be kept as low as possible.

Councillor Bond noted that there was a proposal to charge for parking in Maidenhead on a Sunday but this was now going to be withdrawn and he welcomed this change. He also understood that the one hour free parking for residents would be extended to a third car park in Maidenhead. Councillor Bond felt the Panel should be informed of the estimated cost, so that this could be factored into the overall budget proposals.

Adele Taylor said that any amendments to the budget would be part of the Cabinet agenda which was due to be published on 1<sup>st</sup> February. She was unable to comment further until the agenda had been published, which would contain the final confirmed information.

Councillor Price was concerned that a price increase on parking would affect businesses in Windsor as well as residents.

Councillor L Jones said that Windsor did not benefit from free parking on Sundays, the price was the same regardless of the day. She felt that this showed the inequality between Maidenhead and Windsor. Councillor L Jones commented that there was a high chance that residents would not choose to park in Windsor for shopping or leisure activities due to the cost.

Councillor Sharpe pointed out how poor he felt the parking was in Ascot during race days. Local residents should be considered to ensure that they were not forgotten.

The Chairman suggested that the Panel could ask the Cabinet Member for Finance to check the distribution of increased car parking charges across the borough and to ensure that the potential impacts on Windsor and Ascot had been considered.

Councillor L Jones suggested that the inflation rate should be reviewed, parking charge increases were not tied to coinage and therefore should be reconsidered and that the resident discount scheme should be expanded, especially in Windsor.

Adele Taylor reminded the Panel that if any recommendations had an impact on the income total, alternative sources of funding would need to be considered.

Councillor Walters felt that the impact on businesses in Windsor from a rise in parking charges would have been taken into account by officers when the decision was made.

Alysse Strachan said that the reference made to York being a comparison was because Windsor was also a tourist destination. The daily parking budget was up to around 96% of pre-Covid levels, however season ticket income was much lower and was around 55% of pre-Covid levels.

The Chairman felt that it was appropriate to ask the Cabinet Member for Finance to note the comments which the Panel had made and to consider whether there were any elements in the points which had been made that should be addressed before the budget was proposed to Full Council for adoption. This recommendation was seconded by Councillor Werner.

**RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the comments from the Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Panel on parking were considered by the Cabinet Member for Finance.**

Councillor Sharpe said it was important to not let things get out of control and that the council had the funds to cover all services in the budget. In other areas, charges had not been increased at all. One example was charges on anti-social behaviour, he asked if this was something that the council could change.

He was informed that this was a non-discretionary charge, therefore the council had no power to amend this amount.

Councillor Price felt that the charges for film units were low, she suggested that this market could bear higher prices.

Adele Taylor said most of the income would come from the price on application, so this could vary.

Councillor Price was surprised that the charge for hiring the Guildhall in Windsor had not increased, she felt like this was a missed opportunity.

Adele Taylor said that the Guildhall was charging fairly significant rates compared to other venues, uptake on its usage was plateauing.

Councillor Price was concerned that the charge on the collection of special waste had increased, residents could be more likely to fly tip which would cost the council more money in the long term.

Alysse Strachan understood the concerns, there had been a lot of research done on this. The organisation Keep Britain Tidy had confirmed that there was little to no increase in fly tipping as a result of charges being increased. She was aware of some authorities which had

no charge on waste collection but still had high levels of fly tipping, therefore no definitive correlation could be made.

Councillor Price asked if the charge for rooms at the library applied to all organisations. The police had recently given a presentation to residents using this space, she asked if they would have been charged by the council.

Adele Taylor confirmed that all organisations were charged for their use of the library space.

Councillor Bond was disappointed to see the charges for sports pitches were increasing more than inflation when it was good for people to participate in exercise. He noticed that sexual entertainment venue licenses and sex shop licenses were charged at the same amount, particularly when other things like the Windsor Horse Show and the triathlon paid significant amounts to the council. Councillor Bond suggested that he would like to see the cost of these licenses be increased so that they were in line with inflation. One of the budget proposals was to review public conveniences in parks, it did not seem appropriate or convenient to implement this.

Councillor L Jones asked if there was a discount or benefit on special waste collection for those who were disabled or the elderly. Allotments were increasing by 15%, this was a £50 increase a year which was significant. The council were meant to be encouraging people to exercise and maintain wellbeing, increasing the cost of sport pitches and allotments went against this principle.

Alysse Strachan confirmed that there was a 50% discount on waste collection available to those on housing benefits. On sport pitches, the tariff in RBWM was particularly low when compared with neighbouring local authorities, it was important that the council was able to cover the cost of the maintenance of these areas. Allotments were very popular, in some places there was a ten year waiting list in place. These prices were also comparable to other authorities.

Councillor Shelim asked why on the annual fee for premises licenses, the report said 'see website'. He asked if it was therefore a different amount for each premise.

Adele Taylor said that the amount had not been set which was why the website had been referenced in the report, she would confirm this after the meeting.

**ACTION – Adele Taylor to confirm the reason why 'see website' had been referenced in the report.**

**RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel provided comments on the proposed fees and charges for 2023/24, these would be published as part of the budget report for consideration by Cabinet on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2023.**