

# Public Document Pack

COUNCIL - 21.02.23

## **AT A MEETING OF THE BOROUGH COUNCIL held in the Council Chamber - Town Hall - Maidenhead on Tuesday 21 February 2023**

**PRESENT:** The Mayor (Councillor Christine Bateson), The Deputy Mayor (Councillor Gary Muir)

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

**OFFICERS:** Tony Reeves and Emma Duncan, Adele Taylor, Andrew Durrant, Kevin McDaniel, Andrew Vallance, Nikki Craig, Louise Freeth and Jane Cryer

### 126. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors John Bowden, Stewart Carroll, Geoffrey Hill and Helen Price.

Councillors John Baldwin and Helen Taylor were in attendance remotely and took no part in the vote on any item.

### 127. COUNCIL MINUTES

Councillor Hunt proposed an amendment to be made at minute 125 relating to motion a) to insert the following sentence indicated in bold:

In response to a point of order raised by Councillor Hunt, the Mayor ruled that Councillor Werner had broken the rules relating to the conduct and standard of debate and requested Councillor Werner to desist from making similar comments. **The Mayor requested Councillor Werner apologise which he refused to do.** As Councillor Werner refused the Mayor excluded him from speaking further during the remainder of the debate.

Councillor Davey requested an amendment be made at minute 125 relating to motion a) to the following wording:

Councillor Davey thanked David Knowle Leeks for ensuring that the matter was progressed.

Councillor Del Campo requested an amendment be made at minute 125 relating to motion c) to the following wording:

Councillor Del Campo said she was mindful to support the motion and commented upon the need for the Council to pick up the pace.

Subject to the amendments made above it was **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:**

**That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 January 2023 be approved.**

In response to a question the Mayor confirmed that Councillors should stand when addressing her and agreed that Councillor Carole Da Costa would be exempt from that rule.

128. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none declared.

129. MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS

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

130. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

- a) **Ed Wilson of Clewer and Dedworth West ward asked the following question of Councillor Bhangra, Cabinet Member for Environmental Services, Parks and Countryside**

How much money has RBWM saved by switching to fortnightly black bin collections?

*Written response: The changes were not introduced specifically as a cost saving exercise, in fact the council launched its revised waste collection regime in October 2021 to drive an increase in recycling rates in the borough and decrease the volume of waste produced to help increase its recycling rate to at least 65%. This contributes to the council's Environment and Climate Strategy, which includes a commitment to achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050 at the latest.*

*The move to fortnightly waste collections came with additional waste collection costs, which were reported at the time and additional funds made available in the budget to cover these. The move to fortnightly waste collections has resulted in a decrease in waste disposal costs as waste moves from black bins into food waste, garden waste and recycling bins, or waste minimisation behaviour change takes place and less is thrown away which has mitigated some of the additional costs.*

Ed Wilson enquired as a supplementary whether there had been a decrease in waste disposal costs whilst the payment to the Waste contractor had gone up? He referred to a report which he stated indicated a saving of £175,000 and then a year later the Council was advised a further £500,000 was required to be spent. He asked for clarification.

Councillor Bhangra replied that he would ask officers to look into the specifics of his question.

- b) **Ed Wilson of Clewer and Dedworth West ward asked the following question of Councillor Rayner, Deputy Leader of the Council & Cabinet Member for Business, Corporate & Residents Services, Culture & Heritage, & Windsor**

What provision has been made in the budget for investment in Windsor's public toilets?

*Written response: The draft capital budget has identified £30k to invest in public conveniences in 23/24, there is also approximately £34k in the revenue budget which goes towards maintaining the public conveniences.*

Ed Wilson asked how much the Council has invested in Windsor's public conveniences in the last three years.

Councillor Rayner replied that she would ask officers to respond to him in due course.

- c) **Sunil Sharma of Cox Green ward asked the following question of Councillor Johnson, Leader of the Council & Cabinet Member for Growth & Opportunity**

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Does Councillor Johnson agree with me that it is important RBWM does not burden our children and grandchildren with unsustainable public debt that leads to higher taxes for them in the future?

Written response: *The Council has borrowed money to finance vital assets, but as you can see from the capital cashflow included within the budget papers (Appendix 4 Annex D p203), the Council is on course to pay off most of its debt over the next 12 years.*

Sunil Sharmer reiterated his published question and Councillor Johnson replied that like other public authorities they had borrowed money to invest in activities. The administration had inherited debt at the start, he stated he did not want to burden future generations and the upcoming budget set out a long term plan to reduce debt whilst continuing to invest in the Council's core priorities.

**d) Ian Haggart of Clewer and Dedworth East ward asked the following question of Councillor Cannon, Cabinet Member for Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime, and Public Protection**

Reduction of crime is important to many residents of the Royal Borough. Can the Cabinet Member expand or comment on the local priorities for the additional four Neighbourhood Police Officers that The Royal Borough is proposing to fund for the next three years?

Written response: *The four extra police officers will be dedicated to tackling crime and anti-social behaviour in the Royal Borough and are proposed to be recruited to support community safety and enhance local partnership working between the council and police. They will address key local crime issues and anti-social behaviour affecting communities and the environment.*

*The main objective will be to focus on the joint priorities outlined in the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) strategy 2022-25. The key purpose of the CSP is to ensure a partnership approach is taken to tackle crime and disorder and improve the quality of life of our residents. This extends beyond just policing and is about promoting stronger communities, in partnership with local stakeholders, to ensure all agencies prioritise safeguarding and put residents first.*

*CSP Priorities:*

- Working with our communities to reduce the likelihood of being exploited and protecting our most vulnerable from harm*
- Reducing the negative impact of violent on communities*
- Tackling violence against women and girls (VAWG)*
- Provide support for individuals who are vulnerable to radicalisation and extremism leading to terrorism through the Channel/Prevent process*
- Develop out partnership resilience and agility to respond to local crime and safety issues*

*We are holding a Community Safety, Crime & Anti-social behaviour summit on 17 March to help identify which local policing and community safety issues and areas should be the initial priorities for the extra police officers and our enhanced partnership working.*

Ian Haggart did not have a supplementary question.

**e) Ian Haggart of Clewer and Dedworth East ward asked the following question of Councillor Johnson, Leader of the Council & Cabinet Member for Growth & Opportunity**

Written response: *The public are encouraged by Government to reduce their energy-use footprint and move to a low carbon future. Can the Leader of the Council confirm that the Royal Borough will continue to offer a free permit to residents owning Electric Vehicles, to park in Council car parks, for the next year fiscal year?*

*The council has no plans to introduce charges for electric vehicle parking permits in 2023/24.*

Ian Haggart did not have a supplementary question.

- f) Adam Bermange of Boyn Hill ward asked the following question of Councillor Hilton, Cabinet Member for Asset Management & Commercialisation, Finance, & Ascot**

Saving PLA04S of £50k is to be achieved by charging out a portion of the Sustainability and Climate Change Team's staff time to grant and developer-funded projects but could the Lead Member please confirm the total budget for this team and it's organisational structure including the total number of Full-Time Equivalent?

*Written response: The Sustainability and Climate Team was established after the Council declared a Climate Emergency in 2019. It now has 10.6 FTE's. It is responsible for delivery of the Council's Environment & Climate Strategy and is made up of Officers with specialisms in the natural environment, energy, flooding and the circular economy. The staffing budget for the team is £335,870.*

Adam Bermange asked whether Councillor Hilton agreed with him that the plan to recharge a portion of the budget and that of the Climate Partnership against a finite level of capital funding inevitably creates an opportunity cost to direct investment in future sustainability projects.

Councillor Hilton reiterated that the Sustainability and Climate Team had come together over a short period time to create a significant force to move the programme forward. No project manages itself and the team are a fundamental cost to the project. He recognised that when running multiple projects it may be necessary to bring in external support and the associated costs would be specific to that project.

- g) Mohammed Ilyas of Belmont ward asked the following question of Councillor Carroll, Deputy Chairman of Cabinet & Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education, Health, Mental Health, & Transformation**

It is great to note the increase of £11m to the DSG for 2023-24. Please could you inform as to how much of this will be allocated to issues relating to the impact of the pandemic on areas such as pupil catch up on gaps in learning.

*Written response: Thank you for your question. The total Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for RBWM is £151m for 2023-24 which will help maintain the high standards of education in the Borough. In addition to this funding schools also receive direct funding from the Department for Education for Pupil Premium which is targeted at those on low income and eligible for Free School meals. This is estimated to be £3.7m for 3,200 young people who need the extra help. This funding is very welcome and will help our schools continue to focus on reducing the gaps in learning for our children. The Department for Education has previously also funded additional Covid-catchup grant directly to schools and that programme ceased in August 2022.*

Mohammed Ilyas asked a supplementary question whether the Council were putting in additional funding in particular for provision to address the wellbeing of pupils?

Councillor Johnson replied that the Council would be looking to secure additional investment and did believe the wellbeing of all young people in Windsor and Maidenhead was of paramount importance. He stated one of his administration's objectives was about achieving genuine social value from some of the Council's larger partner organisations and businesses to move this agenda forward.

- h) Julian Tisi of Clewer East ward asked the following question of Councillor Johnson, Leader of the Council & Cabinet Member for Growth & Opportunity**

The Major Capital Cash Flows schedule (Appendix 4, Annex D) identifies that, over 13 years, capital receipts of £295m are proposed to flow to the Council from residential and commercial projects. Could the Leader confirm, broadly, what proportion of those receipts are expected to relate to the development and disposal of the Maidenhead Golf Course?

Written response: *Approximately 75% of the receipts would arise from Maidenhead Golf Course. However, most of these are due after the period of the current Medium Term Financial Plan.*

Julian Tisi explained that a combination of the Liberal Democrats assessment of the current Market value of receipts from Maidenhead Golf Course would be a reduced amount of £120million and interest rates led to concerns about the repayment plan. He asked what confidence residents could have in the financial management of the administration and the credibility of its financial plan.

Councillor Johnson replied that he was confident in the financial management of the administration, the value of land fluctuated but was clear that the reasons to develop the land for new homes, new school, green public space and local people accessing homes. He stated that the capital programme was sustainable and they had long term plans to pay down existing debts.

**i) Nelly Semaille of St. Mary's ward asked the following question of Councillor Stimson, Cabinet Member for Climate Action & Sustainability**

What is the total value of revenue and capital grant funding from central government, included in the 2023/24 budget, for energy generation and efficiency projects in the Borough and, for comparison, please can she provide a quantitative list of any such grants received to date?

Written response: *In total, the Council has secured around £4 million of funding from Central Government to tackle energy efficiency and carbon emissions. These are for projects ranging from new low carbon heating systems in schools, feasibility work across the Council's estate as well as heat networks across the Borough and energy efficiency upgrades to residents homes.*

*In terms of the next financial year, the Council has a number of funding applications in with Salix as part of the latest round of Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme funding. We have already had confirmation that we have been successful in two of those applications, with funding of £1.02 million secured and we expect further good news over the coming weeks.*

On behalf of Nelly Semaille the Mayor read out the supplementary question concluding whether you can confirm the uptake of the Sustainable Warmth Scheme in the Borough i.e. what percentage and amount of the funds available would actually be spent and what impact this would have on emissions?

Councillor Stimson replied that of that funding £232,000 had come from the Low Carbon Skills Fund and this was spent on a feasibility study into all of the Council's areas to see what next steps could be taken for the next stage and the Council had applied for the next stage of funding. A public sector decarbonisation scheme of £1.765million and that had been spent already on state schools for both upgrading lighting and heating. More than 100 homes had signed up via the scheme Solar Together and this scheme was being expanded across Berkshire. She explained this was the reason for putting the Climate Partnership in place so the Council could extend its the sphere of influence. She concluded that she had been involved in a net zero Berkshire hub which would see a further increase the Council's influence.

**j) Tina Quadrino of Pinkneys Green ward asked the following question of Councillor Haseler, Cabinet Member for Planning, Parking, Highways & Transport**

In 2021, the budget for flowers in planters across the Borough was withdrawn; this provided an estimated saving of £86,000. It is understood from Cllr Rayner's remarks at Cabinet that flowers will return to Ascot, Windsor and Maidenhead. In which case, what will the additional cost be and which service area budget will be funding this?

Written response: *The three main towns of Maidenhead, Windsor & Ascot are critical to the Council's economic growth. Providing a high-quality experience to our residents and visitors is essential, it supports repeat visits and builds confidence in our local retailers and business who trade in these areas. It has been recognised that there is a need for investment to bring key aspects of the towns up to a high standard, which will also help remove street clutter, renewal old planters with sustainable planting, clear 'Grot Spots' and improve signage and wayfinding around the towns.*

Tina Quadrino asked why this funding could not have been redirected to delivering the Council's environmental climate strategy commitments and providing a better future for generations?

Councillor Haseler replied that the budget line related to a town centre face lift so he did not have specific figures about the funding on flowers.

**k) Paul Hinton, Old Windsor ward asked the following question of Councillor Johnson, Leader of the Council & Cabinet Member for Growth & Opportunity**

Despite receipt of an additional £3.5m in funding from central government, this budget relies on s106 payments to meet its commitments to the environment, climate change, and the Climate Partnership. Please explain why this is necessary, and what your response is to those who believe that you are putting this council's environment and climate change commitments up for sale?

Written response: *The Council has faced difficult decisions over the budget, with very difficult savings put forward in many areas of the Council's statutory responsibilities. I am therefore pleased to have been able to maintain funding to the Climate Partnership. A partnership we created with the purpose of leveraging in private funding to help us deliver upon our climate commitments. The use of s106 has been utilised to enable us to also invest in other key areas such as tackling crime through investing in more police officers, and in clamping down on environmental crime, plus removing a number of savings proposed across adult social care and children's services.*

Paul Hinton asked whether the Leader and the rest of the Council would reject the proposed budget in favour of one where savings currently achieved from Section 106 payments are instead come from additional £3.5million central government funding?

Councillor Johnson replied that this administration had invested in the Climate Change Partnership. He advised that the additional central government funding had been allocated. The Climate Change Partnership was fully funded, and its objective was to secure additional private funding to deliver its objectives.

**l) Mark Loader of Oldfield ward asked the following question of Councillor Johnson, Leader of the Council & Cabinet Member for Growth & Opportunity**

With higher interest rates on borrowing "an increasing share of the Council's budget is required to service debt before money can be spent on day-to-day services". Budgeted at around £7m for 23/24.

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Please can you explain how it has arisen that the debt on which this interest is paid, in excess of £200 million, is so high?

Written response: *The Council inherited historic debt from the old Berkshire County Council. In addition it has borrowed money to finance its capital programmes over the last 25 years, financing vital public facilities such as Braywick Leisure Centre. However, as you can see from the capital cashflow included within the budget papers (Appendix 4 Annex D p203), the Council is on course to pay off most of its debt over the next 12 years.*

Mark Loader surmised that the low level of Council tax across the borough resulted in a loss of revenue that could have been used to pay down debt and asked wasn't that the reason for the high level of debt?

Councillor Johnson replied that no this was not due to low levels of Council tax and although the Council had significant levels of borrowing it had invested in infrastructure funding to support the Council's growth.

**m) Mark Loader of Oldfield ward asked the following question of Councillor Stimson, Cabinet Member for Climate Action & Sustainability**

Please can you clarify what is the 23/24 budget for the Sustainability and Climate change team and the Climate partnership team. What are their deliverables (where documented) and are they constrained by the available budget. Who is responsible for ensuring residents get value for money ?

Written response: *The Sustainability & Climate Change Team are responsible for the delivery of the Environment & Climate Strategy. The strategy includes action plans across its key themes which detail the deliverables of the team.*

*The Climate Partnership was set up by the Council as an independent body to engage broadly across the Borough to enable the scale of change required to deliver the carbon reduction targets set out in the Environment and Climate Strategy.*

*As Lead Member, my responsibility is to ensure residents get best value. I meet with Officers at least bi-weekly to ensure I am happy with the work being undertaken and the value the team are delivering. I am absolutely satisfied the team are delivering against the objectives set out and have the resources they require.*

Mark Loader asked if the action plans and deliverables of the Sustainability & Climate Change Team and the Climate Partnership could be shared publicly.

Councillor Stimson replied that action plans and deliverables of the Sustainability & Climate Change Team were documented and as it comes to the anniversary of the first year of the Climate Partnership such information would be made available. She confirmed to report the request back to the Climate Partnership.

**n) Sian Martin of Belmont ward asked the following question of Councillor Carroll, Deputy Chairman of Cabinet & Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education, Health, Mental Health, & Transformation**

The Medium-Term Financial Plan (Appendix 1, Annex A) identifies budget gaps for the four years from 2024/25 to 2027/28 totalling £10.2m. Given this administration's earlier draft 2023/24 budget included cuts to the Early Help provision, can the Lead Member confirm that, if he were to continue in post, this service would be protected from cuts in those years?

Written response: *Thank you for your question. I am very pleased that the additional funding received from government has enabled us to protect the early help provision in the coming year. I remain committed to funding the services which protect the most vulnerable and provide prevention services as far as we are able within the resources available to us. Should*

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*the electorate continue to put their faith in us and I retain this post in future years I will maintain my focus on ensuring the children of the borough are supported by high quality, good value services, with protection for those most in need, within a financially stable budget for the overall council.*

Sian Martin asked for a guarantee that these services would be protected or was he ready to hand that pledge over to someone else?

Councillor Johnson confirmed the Council would continue to prioritise these services. He stated that the opposition had not yet indicated their budget and spending plans.

**o) Will Scawn of Belmont ward asked the following question of Councillor Cannon, Cabinet Member for Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime, and Public Protection**

I am delighted this Conservative-led Council is so committed to tackling crime and antisocial behaviour, and is funding four extra police officers to help keep local residents safe, and feeling safe.

Could policing the many, important footpaths in my home ward of Belmont be included in the remit of these extra police officers?

*Written response: The four extra police officers will be dedicated to tackling crime and anti-social behaviour in the Royal Borough and are proposed to be recruited to support community safety and enhance local partnership working between the council and police. They will address key local crime issues and anti-social behaviour affecting communities and the environment. The officers will enhance our partnership working at a local level and focus more strongly on tackling local crime and anti-social behaviour issues at a community level. If issues are reported and raised in Belmont Ward then these will be addressed along with other competing priorities.*

Will Scawn asked that local residents were involved in the partnership approach so that local knowledge can feed into decision making and they could be updated on next steps.

Councillor Cannon replied that local residents would be consulted in directing resources towards crime, environmental crime and antisocial behaviour. 17 March a Policing summit was being held to engage with residents, businesses and local communities to understand their priorities which would be the start of an ongoing consultation.

### 131. PETITIONS

There were no petitions submitted.

### 132. 2023/24 BUDGET

The Council considered the referral from Cabinet for the financial plans for the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead and its Net Budget Requirement and associated Council Tax level for 2023/24. Appended to the report were the various elements that form the basis of the budget.

Councillor Hilton presented the budget to the meeting and thanked officers across the council for the way they had worked collaboratively with their respective Cabinet Members and particularly thanked the Finance Team. He reflected that this was his fourth budget of which some had been set in some of the most challenging circumstances, from the impacts of the COVID pandemic, which left financial difficulties, to more recently high inflation and fuel costs. He highlighted that the Council was planning to add a minimum of £1 million to reserves and have the prospect of delivering an unprecedented fourth year of budget underspends.



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He stated that the budget invested in residents' priorities and delivered on the Corporate Plan continuing the transformation and modernisation programme which ensured the sustainability of crucial frontline services; exploited the power of technology and latest expert thinking as well as putting the needs of residents at the heart of everything the Council did to create a community-focussed and data-driven organisation.

He highlighted the Adult and Children's Social Care teams for their work with the borough's most vulnerable residents. As part of the Frimley ICS the Royal Borough had a productive partnership with the Clinical Commissioning Group and other health partners including GPs. Working with them all, the Adult Social Care team was creating a seamless service between health and social care. This would increase the capability of reablement support services to allow individuals to remain in their homes and in their community for longer. To secure longer independence the Council planned training partnerships with families, care providers, health partners and the wider community. He stated that the budget committed £41 million to the Adults & Housing Directorate.

He added that the proposed budget would invest £28 million to maintain support for the borough's children and young people. Family Hubs were retained and the Council would recruit additional foster carers with an enhanced benefits package to improve recruitment and retention. The Council would invest in an Intensive Support Team to transform the support provided to children and young people on the edge of care; whilst they were in care and supporting them to leave care. This initiative would reduce the number of children requiring longer term more costly interventions.

He explained the Council was investing in new systems that would improve the management and quality of the services,

- £1.1M in a children's social care system
- £1M in a new Adult Social Care system which would enable the Council to implement care charging reforms.

Tackling climate change was a key priority for the Council and this was being addressed at multiple levels. The borough's recycling rates were above 51.5% and rising, CO2 emissions from the Council's buildings were on track to meet net zero by 2050 but understanding the Council could only do so much it had promoted the Climate Partnership. The Partnership was establishing projects to meet their vision that everyone will benefit equitably from cleaner air and water; affordable, renewable energy; greater biodiversity; and efficient, resilient infrastructure.

He continued that providing a high-quality experience to the borough's residents and visitors in Maidenhead, Windsor and Ascot was essential to drive economic growth, support repeat visits and build confidence in local retailers and businesses, an investment of £150K would therefore be made to improve the borough's town centres.

He explained it was proposed that £500K of additional funding would be used to enhance the local environment by creating a new environmental crime enforcement unit, more funding to tackle fly-tipping, investing in additional street cleaning and tackling grot-spots.

He stated that the Council would continue to deliver a fairer deal for parking, free parking on Sundays would be retained in Maidenhead and resident parking discounts would be extended to include one-hour free parking in Victoria Street and Hines Meadow car parks and the cost of on-street parking permits would be frozen.

He stated that the Council would tackle crime and anti-social behaviour by funding four extra neighbourhood police constables dedicated to the borough. He added that this strengthened the Council's strategic partnership with the Thames Valley Police.

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He reflected that the budget that drove investments in the future of the borough and supported local economic recovery through its capital programme; the Vicus Way Car Park, delivered within budget, was now operational. Regrettably, redevelopment of the Nicholsons Centre which was key to the regeneration of Maidenhead and would transform an outdated shopping centre into a vibrant, mixed-use quarter, had been paused but the Council would challenge the Compulsory Purchase Order decision.

He advised that with Joint Venture partners, the Council was creating a ladder of housing opportunity. The first phase of the Watermark development was complete and construction at St Clouds Way was about to start and together these schemes would deliver 580 new homes with 156 affordable homes.

The adoption of the South West Maidenhead Development Framework SPD confirmed the provision of up to 2,600 homes including 30% affordable housing, supported by high quality infrastructure including primary and secondary schools, a local centre; new and enhanced green public open spaces, community and health facilities. He concluded the area a great place to live.

The Princes Foundation Trust was commissioned to develop a Windsor Vision to set out what the next 20 years might look like. Following Engagement with many stakeholders, the Trust will Publish an Engagement & Vision Report that details key actions that would support growth in the Windsor economy and revitalise Windsor Town Centre and its historic environment.

He continued that work to turn a review of Ascot High Street into a deliverable project with enhanced public realm continued alongside an essential placemaking SPD that would guide consideration of the first development proposals for the Ascot rejuvenation project.

He advised that the Council was seeking tenders for the management of its excellent leisure centres.

He stated the Council were committed to working with the Environment Agency to identify and progress affordable and deliverable flood alleviation schemes that would protect residents' homes from flooding in Datchet and Wraybury.

He explained that the Council were proposing a lower than inflation Council Tax increase of 2.99% together with a 2% Adult Social Care Precept, which at band D equates to £1.11 a week. He stated that the Council still had the lowest Council tax outside of London and at Band D would charge between £300 and £700 less than local authority neighbours which would be helpful to residents in difficult times.

He stated that the Council had taken the difficult decisions, consistently delivered underspends on the revenue budget, increased reserves which would be double what they were five years ago, close to the optimum level, and put the council's finances on a sustainable footing. He summarised the administration's significant achievements as having changed the corporate culture, created a Corporate Plan that sets out the vision for the Council, established the Climate Partnership, the Citizens portal improved transparency, strong strategic partnerships had been built with Health and the Police and the Council were leading on a Berkshire Wide Business improvement programme. He commended the budget to the meeting.

Councillor Johnson, Leader of the Council seconded the recommendations as set out in the report. He commented that over the past four years Councillor Hilton had griped the Council's finances with a strong and firm direction, given the Council clarity and four years of underspending, doubled reserves and key investments. He stated that the Council had a plan: to keep Council tax low during the cost of living crisis; introducing a ring fenced post to target support to protect the most vulnerable and cracking down on crime by directly funding four additional police officers. He responded to comments that the posts were not necessary that it

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was a big issue and residents wanted to see more 'Bobbies on the Beat'. He continued that the Council was also spending more on the borough's road to fix potholes, clean gullies and improve traffic flow and safety. Freezing car parking costs and extending the innovative residents discount scheme including free electric vehicle parking. Investments would be made in the additional air quality monitoring stations. Driving up standards across the private rental sector, supporting planning department to engage better with residents. He stated that the Council was committed to improving biodiversity and reducing carbon emissions. In advance of the election, he challenged the opposition to set out their budget proposals. He concluded by reiterating the Council's commitment to delivering a borough of opportunity – delivering core services but also driving investments, increasing productivity, tackling inequality and the borough playing their part to deliver sustainable economic growth, increasing education skills and health outcomes. He stated that the proceeds of growth locally would fund the service of the future, the mitigation against climate change, an increase in health provision, education provision and jobs for the future generation as well as deliver funding for affordable housing. He hoped consensus could be reached to support the proposed pay increase for Council staff.

Councillor L Jones delivered the opposition's response to the proposed budget and commenced by thanking the officers for producing the budget for 2023/24. She acknowledged that there were various options to provide a balanced budget but considered the policy decisions made by Cabinet during the last 12 years were still negatively impacting today. She noted that the proposed budget included savings off the annual council spend equating to a 10% reduction after accounting for increase in demand.

Councillor L Jones reflected that since 2012 she was not aware of the Conservative administration publicly acknowledging or responding within the budget papers, to any recommendation from the scrutiny panels or accepting any proposed amendments. She stated that this reflected the attitude of consecutive conservative administrations. Unless you take notice and work with scrutiny then it is just a 'tick box' exercise.

She reflected that when challenged in 2019 the lead member had stated that the Council would be 'debt free, including the pension deficit, in the medium term future' however the cashflow forecast explains that the debt would continue until 2034/35 with estimated borrowing costs for 2023/24 of over £9m which could not be spent on services. For 2024/25 this would increase to over £12m so over 11% of the total revenue budget of £108m. Councillor L Jones concluded that she was concerned that the Council was looking at continual non achievable savings plans.

Councillor L Jones summarised some of the conservative administrations promises for the four years following the 2019 budget: fund at least 25 community Wardens, noted the Council has six; build the Oaks Leisure Centre, noted whilst a priority was never included in the budget; support the development of the River Thames Scheme, this scheme went ahead without channel 1 because the Council was not being able to finance the required £50m contribution despite Cabinet stating they were 'committed to supporting the £640m Lower Thames Scheme that would protect residents homes' in the 2020 budget. Councillor L Jones continued that the promise to build hundreds of social rented homes in the four years to March 2023 had resulted in zero social rented homes built in 2019/20, 7 built in 2020/21, zero built in 2021/22 and then 15 built in 2022/23. She stated that the total of 22 social rented homes was far away from the amount promised in 2019.

Councillor L Jones considered that the Council was not doing enough to promote local use of the borough's town centres. She was encouraged to see the extension of discount parking to Victoria Street had been implemented and it was positive to see the promise to review residents discount parking charges but noted this had also been promised in 2020.

Councillor L Jones had observed reductions in the Council's experienced officers to enable cuts to council tax and felt this meant that service standards had slipped and it was costing residents more for less services.

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The decision to outsource services without retaining the officers to monitor the contract and ensure standards of service had led to a reduction in the standard of service received by residents. She stated that entering into contracts without measurable outcomes because of the lack of officers with procurement or contract management skills had meant these contracts were flawed, with glaring omissions and had cost the Council thousands.

Councillor L Jones highlighted a few of the budget savings to emphasise the extent of cuts that had been proposed:

- PLA07S – review of parking enforcement cut of 11k which was the removal of school crossing patrollers at two schools. The crossing patrollers were there due to special circumstances at the sites and she queried the price of children's safety.
- CHI20S – Family Hub services which was the removal of targeted group work from anyone other than those with access to a social worker, this was reducing access to help.
- CHI21S – Reduction in Family support workers was reducing the offer to vulnerable children and she reiterated this was reducing access to help.
- AHH23S – Reduce scale of services to carers.
- Councillor L Jones explained that they had seen a reduction in the funding from revenue to the Climate Partnership. She stated that they had been told that this would be replaced by developer funds. She found this concerning as developer funding should be addressing the issues identified from the development. It still appeared to be a reduction in funding for one of the Council's Corporate Plan priorities.

Councillor L Jones stated that there were 229 mention of 'reviews' in this budget but all of these reviews would 'apparently' result in less money being spent, less officers employed or a reduction in service.

She continued that there had been changes since the draft budget due to additional funding from Central Government, one of these is £240k for 4 warrant officers. She had not seen the evidence of need or the outcomes agreed, so could not comment on whether the proposal offered value for money. She reflected that only 9 out of the 357 responses to the budget consultation mentioned police visibility but this was enough for a £240k investment. In March 2018 Cabinet committed to increasing the wardens to 25, when imposing the reduction to 19 Wardens (in 2020) the Lead member stated 'Assurance should be provided in the core aims of the Warden team remaining unchanged, namely to build cohesion and to provide a visible deterrent to crime'. She wondered if the promised 25 community wardens had been in place whether the Council would be considering this 240k investment.

Councillor L Jones advised that the change had not seen any scrutiny and members were not allowed to ask questions of Cabinet when the budget was on the agenda. She commented there had been no challenge, no scrutiny, no transparency and that this was in addition to earlier reductions in Library hours, Bin Collection, Day Centre services, Arts funding, Community programmes, Youth Services, Community Wardens, no money to replace diseased trees, increased charges for Parking permits, Green Waste, services to schools and reported issues across departments did not receive a response.

Councillor L Jones stated that the administration had ignored previous warnings about the expected demand on Social Care and Waste, the consequences officer redundancies and the loss of expertise and knowledge, that excessive borrowing without a cohesive repayment plan was opening up the council to extensive borrowing costs but reflected the warnings had been ignored.

Councillor L Jones concluded that the budget was the legacy of the last 16 years of a Conservative administration which had not respected challenge, had not been transparent and

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was political decision making. She stated that she did not support the policies that had shaped the budget and therefore could not support the budget presented.

Councillor W Da Costa commented that the Council had not underspent but had chosen to put money in reserves to return them to the minimum levels. He noted that the Clinical Commissioning Group had been replaced by Integrated Care Service. He reflected on the approach to climate change commenting that responding with a partnership was not committing or aligning to meet the Council's obligations. He asked if the administration could commit to no developer getting out of delivering 30% affordable housing through the viability clause. He commented that the Vision for Windsor was all about development and not about revitalising the town. He said the plan was to keep Council tax low and use Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy funds to fund everything else. He asked whether this was taking capital funding into revenue. He thought there were lots of flaws in the budget, no collaboration but lots of cuts and promoting development.

The Mayor advised Councillor W Da Costa that he had one opportunity to speak and if he wanted to move an amendment to the budget that this was the opportunity.

Councillor W Da Costa thanked officers for their time in developing the proposals. He explained that based on the original budget, the Council had nearly £4m of windfall income plus £23m of developer contributions which could be used and more to come in the next financial year. He stated that residents had a need, and some had areas of acute need which should be addressed. He stated that many hundreds of residents on Wolf Lane, Poolmans Way, Priors Road, Keepers Farm Close, Washington Drive, on and off Foster Avenue, most of them elderly had become virtually housebound, unable to walk down a treacherous hillside pavement, unable to visit their local shops in Dedworth, struggling to visit friends, family or even access health services because of the change to the bus route.

The Mayor and the Monitoring Officer reminded Councillor W Da Costa that he had five minutes to speak in total including the movement of any proposed amendment to the budget.

Councillor W Da Costa continued that he proposed re-routing of the No.16 Bus to return to the route include Foster Avenue and Wolf Lane. He proposed that the frequency be improved and reliability be increased by including extra bus services. He wanted to introduce a night bus service from Windsor to bring back Dedworth residents after an evening out at the theatre, a club, pubs and restaurants. He explained that this was because Windsor Town Centre had been affected by a drop in footfall due to covid and many other issues. He wanted to boost local businesses. He stated that the Council were failing adults and vulnerable people in our care.

Councillor W Da Costa set out the proposed amendment that:

### *Appendix 1 Revenue Budget*

*That Council considers amending Annex H for Windsor Bus Services to increase the funding by £450k, Adult Social Care funding to be increased by £175k which would be balanced by reducing the contributions to reserves by £625k.*

### *Appendix 3 Capital Programme*

*That Council considers increasing the Capital programme, and if accepted then recalculating the detailed figures throughout appendix 3 and 4 to include the Dedworth pedestrian network, known as the Windsor Walkways at a cost of Year 1 £600,000, Year 2 £600,000 and Year 3 £692,000*

*This would be funded by additional borrowing and there would be an additional revenue cost of £37,050 per annum for 50 years or one year borrowing of £600k. This*

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*would rise to £117,304 per year by year three which would be balanced by reduced contributions to Reserves.*

Councillor W Da Costa raised a point of order that he had understood he would have five minutes to present his amendment in addition to his response to the main budget. The Monitoring Officer clarified what was set out within standing orders.

Councillor C Da Costa seconded the amendment and focused her comments on the adult services part of the proposal. Whilst she agreed with the reduction in agency social workers as this was a poor use of money, she thought it important that vacancies were filled so that social workers could manage the current and ever-growing caseloads. She commented that recruitment and retention was currently very challenging and the Council could learn from neighbouring authorities using incentives to keep staff. Councillor C Da Costa detailed an example case relating to resident she referred to as Mr X who had contacted the support hub she ran during covid. Following his stroke the hub team had raised safeguarding issues and she was concerned it was not an isolated incident. She reflected that when social worker levels were below establishment they would not have the capacity to undertake home visits to monitor the standard of domiciliary care being provided. She has raised concerns about the frequency of home visits for vulnerable residents and the implications. She explained that the proposal was for an increase in retention bonuses to ensure that the Council had sufficient social workers in post to provide these welfare checks, spot checks and to audit the contractors.

In response to Councillor Johnson's query about whether speaker's had requested to speak on the substantive motion or the amendment the list was cleared and councillors were invited to indicate if they wanted to speak to the amendment.

Councillor Werner queried how the proposed amendment was going to be funded and could not support additional borrowing as he had seen the level of debt increase from 50m to 220m in the previous four years. He reflected that every pound of interest came out of services to residents and he wanted to end the lack of restraint. He commented that in future when an evidence-based approach would be used to identify problems and financial solutions found to fund the proposal. This would then undergo a challenge session via scrutiny for inclusion in the budget. He wanted to change to a collegiate process and stop the additional borrowing of funds following the election.

Councillor Coppinger objected to the comments that had been made about officers not doing what they should, stated that no concerns had been raised with him as the relevant Cabinet Member and there was no evidence that this had occurred. He would therefore no support the amendment.

Councillor Clark was struggling to understand the issues and proposals being set out in the amendment. He noted that in relation to bus services the Council did not operate services but influenced providers and officers identified and proposed services based on need. He commented that there are complaints procedures in place for raising care provision concerns. He could not see where the revisions delivered services. He was keen to hear in relation to delivery of priorities which had a financial implication for residents where the funding would come from. He hoped the debate would clarify the amendment so that he could determine whether to support the amendment proposal.

Councillor C Da Costa provided a point of personal explanation in response to Councillor Coppinger that she had reported the whole case to the Head of People Services at the time it took place, was given the response regarding processes and would welcome a discussion on the issue outside of the meeting.

Councillor Johnson was unable to support the amendment but wanted to give the Councillors the credit for trying to put forward an amendment, the time and effort they had put into the

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proposal. He supported the principle of increasing connectivity for elderly residents but was not able to support the idea of reducing the amount of monies entering reserves. He did not support increasing the capital programme and noted that the use of Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy funding may not be feasible for the council's priorities and therefore may not be used for this purpose. He could not support an amendment that he had concerns about and he would not support something which generally channelled funding into one ward, the ward which the proposer represented. He appreciated the clarification from Liberal Democrat colleagues that they would reduce the Council's debt which he inferred supported the development plans for the golf course. He commented that assets would need to be reviewed to release funding to facilitate debt reduction.

Councillor Haseler commented that after covid that bus services had financial challenges and the Council provided a cash injection was provided to keep services going for local residents. He commented that waiting until the budget meeting to spring these proposals on Council was not the way to approach this. He suggested that Councillor W Da Costa should take his proposals to the Transport Team and together with himself, as portfolio holder, review the bus services as part of the review currently being undertaken. He added that Thames Valley Buses, as provider of services to that area, would also need to be consulted and part of the discussion to determine if it is a commercial or a subsidised route. He could not support the amendment for that reason.

Councillor L Jones agreed that due to processes Councillor W Da Costa had not been able to describe the full basis for his proposal. She added that it was not possible to fully articulate alternative proposals in five minutes and should be a cross-party process.

Councillor Walters advised the meeting that he had been discussing with Thames Valley Buses improvements to the bus routes 16 and 60A in the village of Hollyport where the older people were being affected by changes and the management were reviewing this for April.

Councillor Hilton replied to the amendment by saying that he although he respected the Councillor for preparing a proposal and he would have been available to discuss and provide advice to them. He reflected that in response to concerns about low reserves the administration had worked to increase them. He explained that in every Finance management report the Section 151 officer highlighted this as a risk and explained that this was why he was unable to support the revenue proposals. In relation to the Capital proposals he highlighted that the Capital Strategy showed that the Council was supporting fully funded schemes, revenue generating schemes and essential schemes. He commented that the proposal presented in the amendment did not fall within that criteria. He advised that the officer capital review board could consider the proposal to be prioritised for future consideration. He was unable to support the capital suggestions.

Councillor W Da Costa asked colleagues to support the amendment proposed as there was a need in Windsor following a decade of underfunding in Windsor in terms of pavements. Responding to comments made in the debate he acknowledged the concerns about additional borrowing and explained they had tried to fund the proposal from Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy funding but there was a high level of obscurity about how this could be allocated. They had therefore been forced to propose increased borrowing, but the intention was for this to be replaced by money from those sources. He added that they had been speaking to officers for six weeks and the Adult Social Care figures were from them. He wanted to boost the local economy as well as getting people out and about and improve accessibility for those affected by the change. He reflected that bus services were unreliable which had led to the proposal for increases to service frequency. He stated that officers were providing the figures required for retention of social care staff. He referred to the Walkways stating that improvements were required to open up the area for residents. He reiterated that there would still be funding to be added to reserves. He did not agree that the proposals were focused solely on his ward but the whole of Windsor. He concluded that they had been

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discussing proposals and detailed figures for six weeks with officers so it was not a last minute proposal.

A named vote was taken.

| <b>2023/24 Budget (Amendment)</b> |         |
|-----------------------------------|---------|
| Councillor John Story             | Against |
| Councillor Gary Muir              | Against |
| Councillor Clive Baskerville      | Abstain |
| Councillor Christine Bateson      | Against |
| Councillor Gurpreet Bhangra       | Against |
| Councillor Simon Bond             | Abstain |
| Councillor Mandy Brar             | Abstain |
| Councillor Catherine del Campo    | Abstain |
| Councillor David Cannon           | Against |
| Councillor Gerry Clark            | Against |
| Councillor David Coppinger        | Against |
| Councillor Carole Da Costa        | For     |
| Councillor Wisdom Da Costa        | For     |
| Councillor Jon Davey              | Abstain |
| Councillor Karen Davies           | Abstain |
| Councillor Phil Haseler           | Against |
| Councillor David Hilton           | Against |
| Councillor Maureen Hunt           | Against |
| Councillor Andrew Johnson         | Against |
| Councillor Greg Jones             | Against |
| Councillor Lynne Jones            | Abstain |
| Councillor Neil Knowles           | Abstain |
| Councillor Ewan Larcombe          | For     |
| Councillor Sayonara Luxton        | Against |
| Councillor Ross McWilliams        | Against |
| Councillor Samantha Rayner        | Against |
| Councillor Joshua Reynolds        | Abstain |
| Councillor Julian Sharpe          | Against |
| Councillor Shamsul Shelim         | Against |
| Councillor Gurch Singh            | Abstain |
| Councillor Donna Stimson          | Against |
| Councillor Chris Targowski        | Against |
| Councillor Amy Tisi               | Abstain |
| Councillor Leo Walters            | Against |
| Councillor Simon Werner           | Abstain |
| <b>Rejected</b>                   |         |

The motion therefore fell. The debate returned to the substantive motion.

Councillor Werner commented on the approach to budgeting over the previous four years and noted that Councillor Haseler agreed that submitting amendments during the meeting was not the right approach. He stated that the budget was based on flawed approach of cuts and borrowing indicating that his party would approach things differently. He reported that they would begin by insourcing services to save money and improve services, an invest to save policy to make assets revenue raising rather than selling them, charging Community Infrastructure Levy across the whole borough, commercialisation of services, reinstating a bid making team to apply for available funding and improving contract management. He concluded that avoiding mistakes such as building commuter car parking during the pandemic, selling off the Magnet Centre too cheaply, paying waste contractor for fewer collections were simple things that could have been avoided. He stated that residents had raised concerns



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about borrowing and he reiterated that the increase from the stable level of £50m of debt to £220m within the last four years. He was shocked by the response to the question from Julian Tisi as their research had shown that capital receipts were overestimated by as much as £100m. He was concerned that if this was not factual what else within the report was fictional. He reflected on naming the budget over the years and concluded it would be known as the last Tory budget.

Councillor C Da Costa commented that she was pleased to see a change of heart following the People Overview and Scrutiny Panel for the removal of the cut to Family Hub work. Many families would benefit from this change. She supported the need for an officer to make grant bids because she noted that the Council had missed out on funding that was made available. She requested an explanation of the rationale for paying for four additional Thames Valley Police officers. She stated she was supportive of law enforcement, her son was a newly recruited officer and she was very proud of him and what the force did across the borough. Thames Valley Police had increased its recruitment from 200 to 1,000 officers within the year so queried why these roles were necessary and wondered if this funding would be better spent on community wardens to bring the funding back into the borough as enforcement was a borough issue.

Councillor Rayner explained to the meeting that the Council did have officers in post that continually bid for grant funding and the money brought into the Council supported services. She stated that comments made about the Princes Foundation were inaccurate as the £50k cost had come from Community Infrastructure Levy funding. She was proud to be Deputy Leader bringing forward the strong budget including: a 4% increase of staff salaries with 3% next year as officers deserved to be rewarded for their hard work; the investment in four extra police constables would improve residents safety and have a significant impact on Windsor and Eton as they are the busiest towns for tourism and the evening economy; investing in improving air quality with £1.5m towards cycling and walking would make a significant contribution; improving street cleaning, tackling grot spots and funding improvements such as flower displays to create a more welcoming environment; continuing to support culture and heritage within the borough; investing £1.8m in the Council's ICT and how the Council does its business. She continued that the borough had a fantastic library service which was constantly praised both locally and nationally so was pleased the Council was continuing to support their work. She noted that the budget was guided and informed by the Council Plan which provided a governance structure and giving transparent direction to decision making. She thanked everyone who participated in the budget consultation and noted that 6,000 questions were raised and answered by the finance team. She gave thanks to Councillor Hilton for his work bringing the Council into the position where they were able to strengthen their reserves and for his years of service and dedication. She also thanked Adele Taylor, Section 151 Officer for delivering her final budget for the authority and had led the finance team into this position.

Councillor Story advised that meeting that on behalf of Councillor Carroll, who was unable to attend, he spoke strongly in favour of the budget. He stated that despite the pandemic, the energy crisis, the war in Ukraine and other events that had caused instability the administration had steered the Council through global fiscal turbulence. He considered that comments that the Council would not be able to produce a balanced budget were misplaced or misjudged. He was grateful to residents including the Youth Council for their contribution to the consultation. He acknowledged that the timing of government funding decisions made budget planning difficult. He considered that the final outcome was a significant improvement for residents. In Councillor Carroll's service area the budget contained significant investment to support the vulnerable such as Early Help Hub to improve outcomes for children, joint working for better integrated care and early intervention. He asked the Council to join him in thanking Kevin McDaniel, Executive Director – People for delivering services in the most challenging area, noting his professionalism, leadership, commitment and dedication.

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Councillor Coppinger reflected that when he previously held the portfolio the decision had been taken to move adult social care services into a company called Optalis which is jointly owned with Wokingham Borough Council. He commented that the Council spent more on adult social care services than any other service, now he had the portfolio again he could see it continued to provide an excellent service. The Council had a clear costed plan for delivery to respond to the pressures. The Council was working on a joint programme with the NHS called Home First with input from professionals from both teams to assess the best approach, with residents coming first and real benefits were already being seen for residents.

Councillor Cannon was very supportive of the budget and the work done by officers and colleagues to produce a balanced budget investing limited resources to address residents' concerns. The Council continued to provide £10m to the Environment Agency for their responsibilities maintaining the flood waters of the River Thames, managing and improving local waterways and infrastructure to protect the borough's communities until an affordable and deliverable scheme was developed. Investment in air quality monitoring across the borough. Investing in four additional police officers and will increase the neighbourhood team by 50%. He stated that the four full-time officers were over and above those the Thames Valley Police could normally provide due to fixed establishment. The new officers would be ring-fenced to work within the borough to address key issues, alongside the new borough environmental crime team proposed within the budget, addressing priorities within the Community Safety Partnership Strategy 2022-25. A borough Community Safety, Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour Summit was being held on 17 March to help identify which local policing issues would be their initial priorities. He explained the issues that warranted police officers could deal with.

Councillor Larcombe commented that Datchet, Horton and Wraysbury was a forgotten outpost of the borough. There were a couple of hundred houses within the M25 with the M25 and A30 cutting off a large section of Wraysbury. The area had the aeroplane noise, three working gravel pits, waste handling plant with lorry movements and a further temporary site had been given permanent status. He added that the area also floods. He commented that he had heard at the Cabinet meeting that the proposed Sunday parking charges had been removed for Maidenhead and asked whether this had also been removed for Datchet, Horton and Wraysbury residents? He considered this would be an election issue. He reported that more than 50 people had attended a meeting in Wraysbury about flooding with the Environment Agency attending and the borough officer was there. He believed the budget would be approved but noted that at Appendix 3 the report referred to the River Thames Infrastructure Project which was initiated in 2003 emerging from the Environment Agency strategy. He queried the reference to the cost of the scheme being £10m in 2015 reflecting he had been present when Surrey County Council had committed to funding the elements within Surrey. It had then been reported that all elements of the scheme was fully funded but something went wrong. He could not get any answers until August 2020 it was stated at a Parish Council meeting that the scheme was unaffordable and Channel One had been removed. Wraysbury had not had any flood improvements since 2003. This Council did not put a penny into the scheme and he hoped to see a change in Datchet, Horton and Wraysbury.

The Mayor highlighted that the time had past 9.30pm and asked members to agree to conclude the business on the agenda.

Councillor C Da Costa requested that this could be reviewed again at 11pm.

The meeting agreed to a comfort break and was adjourned. The meeting recommenced at 21:46.

Councillor Bond commented on two of the budget lines. His experience of Community Wardens and neighbourhood policeman started in 2010 and he remembered that he was impressed of their knowledge of the area and the people in it which was helpful in dealing with antisocial behaviour. He had seen the effect of austerity reducing the number of wardens from

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the original Conservative promise of 36 to just 6 and police officer numbers had fallen nationally with still fewer now than there had been in 2010 and down by 9% as a proportion of the population. He considered himself as an advocate for improving security for everyone. He was disappointed by the proposed cuts to the revenue budget for supporting the Climate Partnership made up with money already committed for climate change and biodiversity. He commented that people were starting to make connections and making changes themselves as individuals but the Council needed to do more. The additional government funding was a missed opportunity to put this right.

Councillor Davies reflected on the budget that the proposal that £100k of the £250k budgeted for supporting the Climate Partnership would be taken from Community Infrastructure Levy funds earmarked for carbon offsetting and biodiversity net gain caused by development. She stated that this was a £100k reduction in the budget. In relation to air quality monitoring she was very pleased to see that monitoring of particulates was finally being extended across the borough but was bemused to see this announced a year after the original proposals were voted down. She was disappointed the proposal was for three rather than four additional monitoring stations so one of the identified areas would continue to be unmonitored. As a part of the overview and scrutiny process she reflected they had the opportunity to comment on the impact of services but had not been able to comment on the proposals impact on the Council's journey towards net zero. An annual sustainability budget panel was proposed to be held once a year to do that.

Councillor Del Campo commented that it was her fourth budget meeting and reflected on previous discussions. In 2020 she talked about the value of the borough's Children Centres as cuts for all but the neediest families were proposed under the guise of transformation. Wider benefits for not just the most vulnerable but for those families who were hovering above that category. In 2021 transformation threatened the borough's libraries and talked about how they offered so much more than books, how important it was to protect community spaces and noted the hard work to save and improve them. In 2022 she had pointed out the number of community initiatives that had been closed due to them not turning profit. Now in 2023 the settlement had allowed the Cabinet to reverse some of the hardest proposed cuts. She commented that the Overview and Scrutiny process had allowed her and her colleagues the opportunity to ask, on the record, the impact of those savings on services and people's lives. She appreciated the support from the People Overview and Scrutiny Panel for the recommendations to Cabinet for Children's Services and maintaining the free Meals on Wheels service. She stated that a Liberal Democrat administration would continue to protect this funding. She could not understand why the Place Overview and Scrutiny Panel had been prevented for making similar recommendations to prevent a budget cut reducing the safety of the route to school for children in the borough. She stated that this was counter to previous promises. This cut would be reversed by a Liberal Democrat administration. She was concerned about the care in the community proposals stating there was a danger that without the right care and support people in their homes could be isolated. She had pushed for a Domestic Violence Task and Finish Group to ensure that residents' lived experience matched the theory and rhetoric, she was not sure this was the case despite the sterling work of officers. She concluded that it was time for change after 16 years of Conservative administration.

Councillor Brar commented that at paragraph 2.4.5 on page 131 it stated that the Environment Agency Scheme would receive £805K in funding in 2023/24 and 2024/25 with works to begin in 2027 with money to be drawn from £10m set aside in April 2015. She asked what had taken so long, the affected residents had been crying out for action only now was this announcement made just before an election. She commented that Community Infrastructure Levy receipts were meant to be shared with the parish Council and used for Neighbourhood Plans etc and would be shocked to learn if any money had been shared. As a Bisham Parish Councillor she was aware of how needed these funds are for projects for local residents.

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Councillor Tisi advised that in preparation for the meeting she had looked back at previous Conservative pledges on Children's services and my shadow lead budget speeches for inspiration and was struck at the patterns that formed. She stated that in 2019 the Tory manifesto promised to 'Protect vulnerable residents' and in the 2020 budget the administration closed the borough's Children's centres but claimed they were transforming the service for the better rather than to just save money. By 2021 she was raising concerns that the burden of 90% of the cuts in that budget were unfairly shouldered by older residents, disabled residents and children with special educational needs. In 2022 she had argued that instead of the money wasted on 'bingate', they could have invested a fraction of that on family support worker to bring back universal services. At the start of this budget process she noted the Council was faced with hundreds of thousands of pounds of cuts to services that support young children and young people. Early help services wiped out, cuts to special educational needs support, measures to retain social workers, the youth offending team, the total decimation of the family hubs. All of this risks harmful cumulative effects on children and families though short term cuts. She stated that it was 'shameful' that the administration's first reflex when faced with difficult choices was to slash these recently 'transformed' services. She commented that the administration had quickly changed from what was set out in the corporate plan to focus on prevention in children services. She strongly believed in the value of early help services to keep families together and had advocated for them during the budget process and would continue to do so.

She reflected that she was relieved that the administration had finally listened to pressure from the public consultation, the interventions of People Overview and Scrutiny Panel and other representations to use some of the windfall government settlement to reverse the worst of the family hub cuts. She asked whether the administration had considered the enormous levels of stress caused to the affected staff by having redundancy threatened over Christmas and thanked the staff in children's services who continued delivering for the borough's families despite this additional pressure.

She wondered whether this would be revisited when further cuts were needed and commented that the administration could not be trusted. She stated that following the election as lead member for Children's Services she would prioritise early intervention, not just for the most vulnerable but also for those families who are 'just about managing'.

Councillor Davey asked the meeting whether the Council needed to call in Thames Valley Police's CID to determine best value. The Government suggests that local authorities follow best value approach to managing and delivering services. He stated that reviewing the Council Plan and Residents' Surveys would be a good starting point. He wanted to focus on two points that appeared in the final budget: £200K environment enforcement and £240k for Police Officers. He assumed that Cabinet included these lines based on data but thought they were a political invention and PR spin. Within the Corporate Plan the main strength was Communities and there was not much in there about crime but rather references to an increase in the proportion of women and girls feeling safe in the borough. Within the 2022 Residents' Survey references to crime and safety were positive. He stated that there were apparently 9 references in the budget consultation responses, found them hard to find and he quoted a few examples. Community Safety Survey 2022 had 26 comments that people did not feel safe and police were not visible. This small number of comments had been used to justify this expenditure in addition to the monies provided via precept. He thought that Thames Valley Police did a great job but did not feel this was how residents' money should be allocated. He could see no references to the rationale behind the need for the environment enforcement officers. He did not consider that these budget lines felt right. He asked the meeting to consider the funding being focused instead on Community Wardens instead. Providing community support and their role was to help reduce crime and disorder or the fear of crime working with all parts of the community. He reflected back on the CIFPA review of Council finances and whilst he was pleased to hear that there were additional checks through the audit process ensuring the Council had enough officers to ensure effective contract management. He reiterated that introducing these budget lines

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without a sound basis was the work of political invention and PR spin. He concluded that with a new administration this would be a thing of the past.

Councillor Bhangra thanked the Leader, Councillor Hilton, Adele Taylor Section 151 Officer, Andrew Vallance Head of Finance, Chief Executive Tony Reeves and his Cabinet colleagues and officers for their hard work in preparing the budget in unprecedented times. He observed that the budget was presented during the cost-of-living crisis after a recent pandemic. He was pleased that each year during their term the administration had delivered a balanced budget with no overspending and appropriate levels of borrowing to deliver the commitments made to residents. He commented that there was no credible or costed alternative budget to be considered despite the lengthy consultation period and opportunities to consider the proposals. He stated that it was a residents' budget that keeps money in their pocket by balancing their priorities. He was pleased to see the creation of an environmental crime enforcement unit to tackle poor behaviour and fly tipping; invest in street clearing and tackle grot spots. Continuing weekly collection for food and waste recycling and increasing recycling levels. Continuing to invest in the borough's parks. He thanked the officers within his team. He was pleased to see continued funding and support for Norden Farm which was based in his ward, Boyn Hill and Old Court in Windsor.

Councillor Haseler thanked Councillor Hilton for bringing forward the balanced budget and was pleased that within his portfolio they were investing more in roads and pavements to fix potholes, clear blocked drains and improve traffic flow, street lighting and road safety. He advised that an application had been submitted to the Department for Transport to enforce a selection of moving traffic offenses. He stated that they were extending the residents parking scheme to Victoria Street and Hines Meadow car parks so 8 car parks were now included. Free parking would be offered in all Council car parks as long as a free Council EV permit was displayed. He supported the aforementioned environmental enforcement officers and the Thames Valley Police Officers. He reiterated the improvements being made to the town centres including improving signage and wayfinding. He highlighted the significant £454k investment in the tree team to cover proactive tree inspections and maintenance. He reported that the fully funded capital investments were: £250k for pavement maintenance including accessible crossing points; £1.2m pothole action fund that had been secured from the Department for Transport that could be used for potholes and resurfacing; £300k for highway drainage improvement schemes; £200k for road safety schemes and traffic calming schemes; £1.261m for highways resurfacing schemes; £200k for ongoing structural testing of streetlights; £600k for the refurbishment of the historic Cookham Bridge; £200k for the improvement to borough car parks; £100k for the review, replacement or upgrade of road markings on major roads, junctions or crossings; £130k to upgrade traffic signals; £150k for work on Drift Road; £500k for street lighting to complete the LED upgrade, light column replacements for damaged, misaligned or stumped assets; £200k towards Electric charge point rollout; £150k for improvements to Maidenhead Town Centre environment; £1.5m for walking and cycling schemes. He concluded by recommending the balanced budget and thanking all officers across all services for their professionalism and hard work over the previous year.

Councillor Singh stated that he had serious concerns for the budget and the process followed as its delivery would have serious implications for our residents, their families and friends. In a recent scrutiny session, he still had not received an answer to a query relating to a single budget line as it was stated this could include 100s of elements but specific detail was provided. He stated that vagaries of the budget question its credibility. He was concerned about the repayment of the debt due to the penalty clauses. He could not see any budget or contingency in place to the Broadway car park back into use which was a particular issue for his ward. He stated that this was not just an issue for St. Mary's but across the borough residents were having to go to other boroughs to do their shopping. The car park was partially closed since August and fully closed since November which was costing thousands of pounds on a daily basis. He had asked for a report and how this was being offset and this had not been provided. This was negatively impacting residents and businesses which he considered

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should be supported. He considered that if not opened soon it would force other businesses to close and leave the town. Options that he had provided had been ignored for the last few years e.g bringing Clyde House car park into public use; Waldeck House had been run down and left to rot with no plans to develop, Kidwells Park café had been closed for nearly 5 years and that community asset could have been brought back into use and the loss of the sensory park which were important to his residents. He was worried about how the debt mountain would be resolved and asked again whether the Town Hall would be sold and stated he had not seen a report which he had requested in January 2022. The Community Asset Review was on hold until after the elections. He asked if the developments seen in Maidenhead would be repeated in Windsor.

Councillor Clark commented that he agreed that there should not be spin but considered he had been listening to it. He recalled his comments from the previous year was that 'we were all doomed' but the budget had been delivered on budget. Within the Residents' Survey not only the majority thought the Council offered value for money but it was 7% above the Local Government Association benchmark, 70% of residents saying they trusted in the Council; 66% of residents saying they were very or fairly satisfied much LGA below that and 89% were satisfied with RBWM as a place to live. He stated it was not the doom and gloom borough but we should be proud of achievements achieved delivered against pandemic and financial issues. He said that balancing the books, getting right level of borrowing so that progress was not thwarted was sensible fiscal management. He did not think that the Cabinet had an easy job, the money had to be found from somewhere and there was no credible answer of where the opposition would fund any of the expenses they'd outlined. There were 158 written answers shared before the budget came out which were used to help them object rather than to work with officers to make proposals. He concluded that if you don't support the budget then need to come forward with costed proposals to be credible. He concluded by commending the budget.

Councillor L Jones made a point of clarification that members questions to officers on the budget were confidential and therefore what Councillor Clark referred to could not have happened. He clarified in response that he was referring to questions and responses that were in the public domain.

Councillor Singh made a point of explanation that he was trying to explain that Council revenue was down, service levels were down and debt was rising.

Councillor Stimson commented that she was aware that the climate and sustainability budget had been under scrutiny for some time. She was extremely proud of the team that she worked with, the budget may be a small percentage of the overall figure, but she highlighted that it reached into many, if not all areas of the council and with the Climate Partnership with large multi nationals. She added that with officers trained in carbon literacy, there would be no limit to how this could grow. She reflected that it had expanded exponentially over the last 3.5 years. The team had grown from zero individuals to 10.6 at present. She wanted to correct an earlier speaker advising that only one of the individuals within the 10.6 was still doing the same job. There were six new officers, currently there were two vacancies being recruited to and they also had two ecologists who work closely with the team. The team were working with an individual in schools, and Recycling, parks and countryside. She thought the officers had done an extremely good job.

She reflected that the Section 106 which was actually a Carbon Tax had been created with the Head of Planning and was not just funding for the council but actually teaches developers to be more climate efficient, more carbon efficient and increase biodiversity with a carbon offset if the list was not met.

As a ward councillor for St Mary's she considered that many of her residents would welcome the extra funding coming forward to be spent on extra police, an environment crime enforcement that tackles poor behaviour towards the environment, and increased funding to

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deal with flytipping and more street cleaning. She stated that these were key issues that are raised when talking to residents as building a safer community was also important in the context of serving that community.

She concluded that with a superb group of officers she had been using care, ingenuity and hard work to cultivate a solid climate portfolio and climate team but there was still more to be done.

Councillor Reynolds wanted to focus on parking as the advantage card was a fantastic addition to the borough and a fantastic Liberal Democrat success. He recalled it used to allow people to go into town to use the local shops, cafes and places to eat at a leisurely pace to enjoy the town. He compared that to the current hour of free parking which was not long enough time for residents to meet in places, to eat or spend their time. He added that residents in Windsor were being forced to pay a tourist tax to park in their own town. He commented that Vicus Way was empty despite low fees as no one wants to park there. He asked how much money had been spent on a car park that was not used or wanted by the residents. He observed that Nicholsons Car Park had been let to deteriorate to the point where concrete was falling off of it. He supported the proposal for four additional Police Officers if they were fully dedicated to Windsor and Maidenhead and spending all of their time in our towns. He commented that the administration had just woken up to this key issue, reflected on the history of them cutting Community Wardens which was a failure to live by their manifesto pledges. Looking forward to a Liberal Democrat administration would mean fighting climate change, clear plan to sort out dirty streets, sort finances and put the Council back into the heart of the community. He concluded that it was the last Conservative budget.

Councillor Walters asked what was there to dislike about the proposed budget with the lowest council tax level outside of Westminster which would mean more money in people's pockets. He added that to have four constables around that were dedicated to the borough would be excellent. Tackling fly tipping was important in the rural areas. Improving air quality was something he had led on in Bray as people were suffering from the congestion which was difficult to stop. The budget had been balanced and he wanted everyone to thank the officers and the Leader for achieving a balanced budget in the circumstances. 75 or 80% of the monies received from residents was spent on Adults and Children's Services and they were the most vulnerable residents. He commended the budget.

Councillor Knowles asked colleagues to note that though in opposition not all independent councillors were a different group of people and not all the same. In relation to Capital spending he could see that there was a lot of instances where things were refined down to what was possible for what funding was there. He was disappointed in the focus. He commented that the state of pavements and roads were not due to the Council's contractors but due to other utility companies but without someone monitoring what was going on that clause of 'make good' becomes 'patch up and walk away' which then requires remedial attention. He would have hoped that there would have been a push for emergency funding to undertake a survey of the other car parks that had been open for some time for example Victoria Street car park which was an embarrassment with horrendous conditions in the stairwell. He was aware that contractors were trying to clean it but the site needed major attention. He thought structural inspections would be implemented across the older car parks. An allocation of money to improve public toilets needed a boost as they were in a poor state. He was disappointed there was no mention of Oaks Leisure Centre, which some Councillors were strongly in favour of, there had been assurances that the money would be found or borrowed to finance the project and nothing was included. He observed the planning permission would start to expire again. Within the capital cashflow there had been a lot of slippage which was accounted for, however the Council had a lump in the next few years between a lag in the income and the expenditure required. He commented that the officers had done an brilliant job pulling the budget together and he knew that they would have modelled the bottom, middle and most optimist outcomes and it would be useful to have sight

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of that along with detailed assumptions and detailed risk assessments. He concluded that he wanted to ensure that they made borrowing work.

Councillor McWilliams commented that over the past four years the administration had protected vital public services, invested in crucial infrastructure projects, implemented robust financial management to ensure the best value for taxpayers money and secured long term financial stability of the Council. He observed that whilst other Councils were dipping into reserves to avoid difficult decisions the Council was adding to its reserves and had a clear plan to pay down public debt crucially lowering debt. He stated that RBWM did not duck difficult decision making, not because it was popular or easy, but because it was the right thing to do. He stated that there was no such thing as public money but taxpayers money. He recalled that the last time the Liberal Democrats had run the council they increased council tax by over 24% in four year which meant residents paid more. This and the previous administration had cut that which meant that residents had £30m of their own money to spend on their own priorities. In response to growing demand and reduction in government grant this had been steadily increasing but at a lower rate. He compared the approach to examples of Liberal Democrat run Councils and the approach in Slough Borough Council. He stated that this Council's approach had enabled them to invest in four more police officers, expand the residents parking scheme, to open a state-of-the-art leisure centre and establishing an innovative Climate Partnership. He stated that the Liberal Democrats had funded a failed Judicial Review which was a failed attempt to stop the Local Plan from happening which sought specifically to increase the value of the Council's assets by delivering social housing and 1922 socially rented homes.

Councillor McWilliams stated that the Housing team, through rigorous service reform, effective delivery and achieving grant funding, had supported 93 residents through the rough sleeper pathway. 40 residents sleeping rough in 2019 and only 6 at the last count but the number fluctuates.

On the Leisure sites they were hoping to see the Windsor site expand soon, in relation to the Oaks Leisure Centre the Leisure Contract was currently undergoing the tender process so he didn't want to speculate but following the global pandemic the leisure industry had been affected. He concluded that he commended the budget.

Councillor Shelim said he was speaking in full support of the budget which would make the lives of his residents in Eton and Castle better. He commented that despite inflation keeping they were keeping the parking permit to £50 for the third year, they were not increasing visitor parking costs and electric vehicles continued to be able to park for free endorsing the commitment of tackling climate change. To help residents and many shops and businesses they were 'first hour free'. He added that £200k to improve the car parks was something he had been lobbying for which would be welcomed by residents and visitors. He advised that residents had been asking for more electric charging points to help them switch. In Windsor there was more limited off-street parking so investment of £200k was supporting the roll out of electric charging points. He concluded that they were doing things for our residents and make the borough a cleaner, safer and more attractive place to live and helping residents with the cost of living.

Councillor Sharpe began by thanking the officers for the work they had done over the last few years and in particular he thanked Adele Taylor and Andrew Vallance for their work on the budget. He considered this was the most closely scrutinised budget than ever produced. He was delighted by what had been achieved with the sustainability agenda and also what they were doing with the additional policing in place for residents' safety. He reflected that for the fourth year in a row the administration had produced a balanced budget and had a plan. He said unfortunately the opposition had an opportunity to prepare an alternative budget but had not done so. He stated that there was an amazing misunderstanding of the budget process and what it is all about and he was very disappointed. He continued that from what he had heard there was nothing there. He heard about insourcing and sharing resources with other



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councils, which was nothing new there but he stated it was great that they were onboard with our plans. He stated that would have loved an alternative plan and he had found the opposition to be uncoordinated and confusing.

Councillor L Jones noted a point of explanation that it was a misrepresentation of the budget setting process.

Councillor Hilton summed up the debate saying that the budget had been damned earlier because of the proposed £10.1m savings but no mention was made of the £10.5m growth funding being introduced. He stated that the budget was actually about reprioritising resources so that the Council can deliver to our residents' priorities. Savings were at risk of change due to a change in circumstances and this year £165k saving in home to school transport was blown away by the influx of asylum-seeking children and turned into an overspend. The good news was that they were prudent and had contingency to cover such eventualities. He understood the comments on Family Hubs and the desire to spend more but he wasn't sure if colleagues realised that, over the past four years, the proportion of budget spend on adults and children's care has risen from 69% to 75% and that clearly is unsustainable so small reduction in Family Hubs alongside an intensive support team to transform support for people on the edge of care which was specifically designed to prevent them going into a care setting. He thought there had been a number of interesting speculations on land values and the dislike of borrowing but he wondered how many people present at the meeting were debt free. He noted that most people have mortgages and if people wanted to borrow money to buy a car then they do and the Council borrowed money in the same way. The Council had borrowed money to refurbish York House, this was now let and was delivering a really good commercial return. The Council was obligated to produce places at school and had borrowed money to increase school capacity. He directed the members present to page 203 in the agenda pack to the section that explained how debt would be paid down. He said He had listened to the members opposite, he'd like to deliver those things but commented that it was easier to look at finance from the outside. He concluded that this was his last budget, and he left a legacy of transparent and open finance reports, consistent underspends, sustained reserves and finances. The excellent team would continue to work with Directors to improve further the Council's financial position. This could not be achieved without incredible support from the conservative administration. He stated that this was not just his legacy but that Adele Taylor, Section 151 Officer who was leaving to work in Slough. He urged everyone to support the budget as proposed.

A named vote was taken.

| <b>2023/24 Budget (Motion)</b> |         |
|--------------------------------|---------|
| Councillor John Story          | For     |
| Councillor Gary Muir           | For     |
| Councillor Clive Baskerville   | Against |
| Councillor Christine Bateson   | For     |
| Councillor Gurpreet Bhangra    | For     |
| Councillor Simon Bond          | Against |
| Councillor Mandy Brar          | Against |
| Councillor Catherine del Campo | Against |
| Councillor David Cannon        | For     |
| Councillor Gerry Clark         | For     |
| Councillor David Coppinger     | For     |
| Councillor Carole Da Costa     | Against |
| Councillor Wisdom Da Costa     | Against |
| Councillor Jon Davey           | Against |
| Councillor Karen Davies        | Against |
| Councillor Phil Haseler        | For     |
| Councillor David Hilton        | For     |

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|                            |         |
|----------------------------|---------|
| Councillor Maureen Hunt    | For     |
| Councillor Andrew Johnson  | For     |
| Councillor Greg Jones      | For     |
| Councillor Lynne Jones     | Against |
| Councillor Neil Knowles    | Against |
| Councillor Ewan Larcombe   | Against |
| Councillor Sayonara Luxton | For     |
| Councillor Ross McWilliams | For     |
| Councillor Samantha Rayner | For     |
| Councillor Joshua Reynolds | Against |
| Councillor Julian Sharpe   | For     |
| Councillor Shamsul Shelim  | For     |
| Councillor Gurch Singh     | Against |
| Councillor Donna Stimson   | For     |
| Councillor Chris Targowski | For     |
| Councillor Amy Tisi        | Against |
| Councillor Leo Walters     | For     |
| Councillor Simon Werner    | Against |
| <b>Carried</b>             |         |

**RESOLVED that:**

**Appendix 1 – Revenue Budget**

**That Council considers and:**

**i) Approves the 2023/24 Net Budget of £108.075m, consisting of:**

**a. The proposed new growth in service budgets of £10.558m as set out in Annex C to Appendix 1;**

**b. The proposed new opportunities and savings of £10.923m as set out in Annex D to Appendix 1;**

**c. The associated contribution from Earmarked Reserves of £0.165m, and the level of contingency as £2.380m as set out in paragraph 5.29**

**ii) Approves the calculations for determining the Council Tax Requirement for 2023/24 as set out in Annex I1 to Appendix 1, consisting of:**

**a. A Council Tax Requirement of £87.222m.**

**b. A Band D charge of £1,223.11 for the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead in 2023/24, reflecting an overall increase of 4.99%, based on:**

**i. A 2.99% increase in base Council Tax taking the charge to £1,060.73 for 2023/24;**

**ii. An additional 2% to reflect an increase in the Adult Social Care Precept which is proposed as £162.38;**

**c. The Special Expenses Precept increases by £1.03 (2.98%) to £35.60 for 2023/24 for the unparished areas of Windsor and Maidenhead in accordance with Section 35 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, as set out in Annex E to Appendix 1;**

**iii) Notes the following Precepts by partner organisations:**

**i. The Police and Crime Commissioner for the Thames Valley - £256.28 (para 5.19), as set out in Annex I3 to Appendix 1;**

**ii. Royal Berkshire Fire Authority - £78.95 (para 5.19), as set out in Annex I3 to Appendix 1;**

**iii. Parish Precepts as set out in Annex I3 to Appendix 1, as notified by the individual parishes.**

iv) Approves the allocation of the £152.201m Dedicated Schools Grant as set out in Annex F to Appendix 1, and delegated authority be given to the Executive Director of People and the S151 officer in consultation with the Cabinet Members for Finance and for Children's Services, Education, Health, Mental Health and Transformation to amend the total schools' budget to reflect the actual Dedicated Schools Grant levels once received;

v) Approves delegated authority to the Grants Panel to award community grants (capital and Kidwells Trust) for the 2023/24 annual round and publish the decisions following the Grants Panel.

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

That Council considers and approves:

- i) The Fees and Charges for 2023/24 as set out in Annex A to Appendix 2.
- ii) Delegated authority is extended to the Executive Director for People, in liaison with the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Maidenhead, to set the Direct Payments Standard Rate.

#### **Appendix 3 – Capital**

That Council considers and approves:

- i) The Capital Strategy 2023/24 – 2025/26 as set out in Annex A to Appendix 3 of this report. A draft was considered by Audit and Governance Committee on 20th October 2022.
- ii) The consolidated Capital Programme for 2022/23 – 2025/26 in Annex B1-3 to Appendix 3 of this report, including previously approved schemes and proposed new schemes as set out in Annexes B4 & B5 to Appendix 3 of this report.
- iii) Capital programme slippage to date from 2022/23 to 2023/24 as detailed in Annex B6 to Appendix 3.

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

That Council considers and approves:

- i) The Council's Treasury Management Strategy for 2023/24 as set out in Appendix 4 of this report, including
  - a. The proposed Lending Counterparty Criteria;
  - b. the continuation of the current Minimum Revenue Provision Policy for 2023/24. A draft was considered by Audit and Governance Committee on 20th October 2022.
- ii) The Council's Treasury Management Policies as set out in Annex B to Appendix 4 of this report;
- iii) The Council's Prudential Indicators as set out in Annex C to Appendix 4 of this report

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

That Council considers and approves:

- i) The Council's updated Pay Policy Statement Strategy for 2023/24 as set out in Appendix 5 of this report.

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

That Council considers and approves:

- i) Pay awards of 4% from 1 April 2023, and 3% from 1 April 2024, for all staff paid on RBWM local pay scales.
- ii) An increase in Members' Allowances of 4% from 1 April 2023, and 3% from 1 April 2024, in line with the employee pay award, as required by Section 17 of the Members' Allowances Scheme.

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

**That Council considers and has due regard to the contents of Appendix 7.**

**Appendix 8 – Equalities Impact Assessments**

**That Council considers and has due regard to the contents of Appendix 8.**

The Mayor noted that the time had passed 11pm and asked members to agree to conclude the business on the agenda.

133. COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME

Members considered the referral from Cabinet regarding the outcome of the consultation into the proposed amendments to the Council Tax Reduction scheme for 2023/24.

Councillor Hilton proposed the recommendations and explained that the Council was obligated in law to review its Council Tax reduction scheme annually. He advised that the review left the council tax reduction rate unchanged at 80% but proposed a number of changes designed to make life easier for CTR recipients and to reduce the Council's administrative burden.

Councillor Hilton explained that five proposed changes were proposed and that three of the five changes only affected working age applicants who were in receipt of both Council Tax Reduction (CTR) and Universal Credit (UC).

He briefly ran through the changes:

Currently anyone in receipt of both Council Tax Reduction (CTR) and Universal Credit (UC) who was working had their CTR altered every time their UC changed as a result of fluctuating changes in earnings. This could result in up to 13 changes per year which was confusing for customers. The proposal was to only re-assess these claims three times per year, unless a customer had a significant change such as starting or stopping work. When re-assessed, all changes would be processed so the overall net financial effect would be the same. This would make things a lot easier for all parties.

The Universal Credit Customers – automatic re-awards proposal would mean that any UC customer who lost entitlement as a consequence of a slightly higher level of income for one UC assessment period of four weeks, would not need to submit a new claim for CTR if they subsequently re-qualified. He stated this would neither increase nor decrease the level of CTR for customers but would make life easier for customers.

Currently, if a UC customer has a deduction from their UC income as a consequence of repaying a loan to the Department of Work and Pensions, the net UC income was taken into account when assessing entitlement to CTR. This was at variance with other Benefit Income where regulations require the gross income to be used. The proposal was to amend the scheme to equalise the treatment of UC customers by taking their gross award. He stated that this would not be beneficial to these UC customers who are repaying a loan as they would get less CTR but would be fair.

Councillor Hilton explained that the current system limited the time that working age customers may be able to have their new claim backdated to one month but they need to have proven good cause for failing to have applied earlier. It was proposed to extend that current one-month period to three months where the customer has proven good cause for failing to apply at an earlier date. This brought working age customers in line with pensioners who receive CTR. He stated that this would be beneficial to customers.

The final proposal was to ensure the scheme aligned to changes introduced to the national Housing Benefit scheme, where the rules were set by the Department of Work and Pensions

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or the Pension Age Council Tax Regulations which were amended by the Department of Levelling Up Housing and Communities. He stated that this would be largely beneficial to all customers and was what the Council had done since the scheme was introduced.

Councillor Hilton emphasised that the Council was not proposing to change the level of reduction which remained at 8%.

Councillor Hilton reported that the agenda report explained the extensive public consultation exercise which had been undertaken from 2 September to 2 December 2022. He stated that in total 499 responses had been received. There was strong support for the changes which varied between 77% and 86% of respondents. He concluded that he hoped that the Council could support the recommendations.

Councillor Johnson seconded the proposals supporting Councillor Hilton's comments.

Councillor C Da Costa welcomed the changes and commented they would make life much easier for those families in receipt of these benefits.

On the proposition of Councillor Hilton, Cabinet Member for Asset Management & Commercialisation, Finance, & Ascot and seconded by Councillor Johnson the recommendations were put to a named vote as required by the legislation.

| <b>Council Tax Reduction Scheme (Resolution)</b> |     |
|--|-----|
| Councillor John Story                            | For |
| Councillor Gary Muir                             | For |
| Councillor Clive Baskerville                     | For |
| Councillor Christine Bateson                     | For |
| Councillor Gurpreet Bhangra                      | For |
| Councillor Simon Bond                            | For |
| Councillor Mandy Brar                            | For |
| Councillor Catherine del Campo                   | For |
| Councillor David Cannon                          | For |
| Councillor Gerry Clark                           | For |
| Councillor David Coppinger                       | For |
| Councillor Carole Da Costa                       | For |
| Councillor Wisdom Da Costa                       | For |
| Councillor Jon Davey                             | For |
| Councillor Karen Davies                          | For |
| Councillor Phil Haseler                          | For |
| Councillor David Hilton                          | For |
| Councillor Maureen Hunt                          | For |
| Councillor Andrew Johnson                        | For |
| Councillor Greg Jones                            | For |
| Councillor Lynne Jones                           | For |
| Councillor Neil Knowles                          | For |
| Councillor Ewan Larcombe                         | For |
| Councillor Sayonara Luxton                       | For |
| Councillor Ross McWilliams                       | For |
| Councillor Samantha Rayner                       | For |
| Councillor Joshua Reynolds                       | For |
| Councillor Julian Sharpe                         | For |
| Councillor Shamsul Shelim                        | For |
| Councillor Gurch Singh                           | For |
| Councillor Donna Stimson                         | For |
| Councillor Chris Targowski                       | For |
| Councillor Amy Tisi                              | For |

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|                         |     |
|-------------------------|-----|
| Councillor Leo Walters  | For |
| Councillor Simon Werner | For |
| <b>Carried</b>          |     |

**RESOLVED that:**

- i) the report and, in particular the feedback from the consultation, be noted and**
- ii) the proposed amendments to the Council Tax Reduction scheme for the financial year 2023/24 be approved.**

134. STATUTORY OFFICER APPOINTMENTS

Members considered proposals to approve the statutory appointments of Section 151 Officer and Monitoring Officer on an interim basis.

It was noted that the officers being considered as part of the report left the meeting for the duration of the discussion.

Councillor Johnson proposed the recommendations within the report by thanking both of the departing officers for their contributions to the borough. Adele Taylor, Section 151 Officer for her strong stewardship of the Council's finances. Emma Duncan, Monitoring Officer for her work creating the Corporate Plan, changing communications, and steering the Council through the LGA Peer Review. He supported their ambition to progress their careers. In relation to the interim appointees he stated that Andrew Vallance had proven himself as effective in his role as Deputy 151 Officer and Head of Finance, the fact that the Council now had a balanced budget was proof of that. He noted that Elaine Browne had steered the Council through significant legal challenges and issues with great success, determination and a measured approach.

Councillor Raynor seconded the proposals but had nothing to add to the debate.

Councillor Werner commented that he had been looking forward to working with Adele Taylor and wished her well in her new role in Slough. He was really pleased that Andrew Vallance was being given the interim post as he was looking forward to working with him from his reputation at the Fire Authority as well. He stated that it had been interesting working with Emma Duncan and wished her well in Cambridgeshire and said it would be good to get to work with Elaine Browne.

On the proposition of Councillor Johnson, Leader of the Council and seconded by Councillor Rayner it was

**RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY that:**

- i) The report be noted;**
- ii) Andrew Vallance, Head of Finance and Deputy Section 151 Officer, be appointed as the Council's Section 151 Officer effective 20 March 2023 on an interim basis until such time as permanent arrangements have been determined; and**
- iii) Elaine Browne, Head of Law and Governance and Deputy Monitoring Officer, be appointed as the Council's Monitoring Officer effective 27 March 2023 on an interim basis until such time as permanent arrangements have been determined.**

135. RETURNING OFFICER AND ELECTORAL REGISTRATION OFFICER APPOINTMENTS AND APPROVAL OF ELECTIONS PAYMENT SCHEME

Members considered a number of proposals to support the delivery of elections including appointments to the role of Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer, appointments to Deputy Electoral Registration Officer with duties limited to completing the Temporary Voter Authentication Certificate process as required by the Elections Act 2022 and an increase in the hourly rate paid to staff working in key roles to deliver the elections in May and future elections as set out in Appendix B of the agenda report.

It was noted that the officers being considered as part of the report left the meeting for the duration of the discussion.

Councillor Rayner proposed the recommendations as set out in the report noting that as per the previous agenda item Emma Duncan was leaving the Council and therefore the Council needed to appoint an alternative Returning Officer in preparation for the upcoming elections. Due to the change in law in the Elections Act 2022 and the introduction of Voter ID the process for issuing temporary Voter Authority Certificates needs to be robust. The deadline to apply for a Voter Authority Certificate (VAC) for the local elections in England on 4 May 2023 was Tuesday 25 April 2023 at 5pm. If officers were not confident that the VAC would be delivered in time a temporary certificate could be put in place, this needed to be signed by the Electoral Registration Officer or their deputy and be collected in person. It was prudent to appoint Deputy Electoral Registration Officers to support this and ensure the process. During a review of the current election payments in comparison to other Berkshire authorities it was proposed that the payment structure be increased for election roles.

On the proposition of Councillor Rayner, Cabinet Member for Business, Corporate & Residents Services, Culture & Heritage, & Windsor and seconded by Councillor Johnson it was

**RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY that:**

- i) the report be noted;**
- ii) Stephen Evans, Chief Executive Designate be appointed as Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer for the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead with effect from 17 April 2023 until further notice;**
- iii) Tony Reeves, Interim Chief Executive be appointed as Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer for the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead with effect from 27 March 2023 until 16 April 2023;**
- iv) Kirsty Hunt, Service Lead Electoral and Democratic Services and Wendy Allum, Electoral Services Team Leader be appointed as Deputy Electoral Registration Officers with limited powers in relation to authorising Temporary Voter Authority Certificates and**
- v) increased staff pay rates for future election roles as detailed in Appendix B of the report be agreed.**

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