

## Responses to Public Questions for Extraordinary Council on 10 October 2023

- a) **John Baldwin of Boyn Hill will ask the following question of Councillor Werner, Leader of the Council and Lead member for Community Partnerships, Public Protection and Maidenhead**

You have described the 2023/24 Budget as “fake”.

Yet in the report presented to Council on the 21st of February 2023, the responsible officers told us in paragraph 2.2, that it was “realistic”, would secure “financial sustainability” and the “continuation of quality services”.

Do you consider these claims to have been fake?

*The last budget was based on a series of savings targets that were impossible to meet and inaccurate inflation figures, compounded by the low levels of reserves and the high level of debt.*

*Over the last 8 years the Conservatives build up council debts to high levels with no creditable plans on how to pay the debt off - only a series of inaccurate finger in the air predictions about how much money the Golf Course was worth.*

*Over the years, at budget meeting after budget meeting we warned the Conservatives councillors that they were voting for fake budgets. They chose to ignore us and now the residents have chosen us to fix the mess.*

- b) **Fiona Tattersall of Riverside ward will ask the following question of Councillor Jones, Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead member for Finance**

The residents of RBWM have been told there is a debt of £203 million. Over how many years has this been accumulated and why?

*The debt has been accumulated since 1998 when the new RBWM Unitary Council inherited a share of Berkshire County Council Debt and Outstanding loans relating to this particular debt amount to £3.2m.*

*Councils regularly use, and indeed are advised to use, available internal cash to fund capital projects in order to avoid incurring interest charges which means that borrowing dates do not neatly align with the purchase of assets making it more difficult to directly relate individual drawdowns to spend. Looking at cost lines over 4m there has been some high value items such as:*

<i>Braywick Leisure Centre</i>	<i>38.5m</i>
<i>Vicus Way Car Park</i>	<i>13.35m</i>
<i>Windsor Office Accommodation (York House)</i>	<i>10.2m</i>

<i>Broadway Car Park &amp; Central House Scheme</i>	<i>8m</i>
<i>Waste Vehicles</i>	<i>5m</i>
<i>St Clouds Way Ten Pin Bowl- Purchase Leasehold Int</i>	<i>4.6m</i>
<i>School Expansions and maintenance</i>	<i>53m</i>
<i>Roads Resurfacing-Transport Asset &amp; Safety</i>	<i>15.3m</i>

*Although there would be government funding for a proportion of school expansion projects. There are just under 900 lines of capital spend over the last 10 years.*

*In 2019 we were told the debt would be repaid by 2024. By 2020 published papers indicated that this debt would be paid back from £425m of capital receipts and grants by 2035. The rising value of debt over the last decade is shown in the table below:*

2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24 forecast
£59m	£59m	£60m	£68m	£93m	£148m	£222m	£192m	£206m	£233m	£204m

**c) Andrew Hill of Boyn Hill ward will ask the following question of Councillor Jones, Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead member for Finance**

Currently the council's debts stand at £203m. The impression I got from recent meetings was that Cabinet were unsure how all these debts were incurred. Does RBWM have best value reports underpinning all of these expenditures, and why are income generating assets like community centres left empty or demolished?

*The increase in debt can be seen from 2016 to 2020. Councils regularly use, and indeed are advised to use, available internal cash to fund capital projects in order to avoid incurring interest charges which means that borrowing dates do not neatly align with the purchase of assets making it more difficult to directly relate individual drawdowns to spend.*

*However, CIPFA, in their 2020 Report stated that their overall concern was "that the lack of financial transparency and Medium Term Financial Planning over a number of years has masked the financial problems that RBWM were facing and that, potentially, could have been avoided."*

*They also stated 'Overall we have concerns that:*

- *Members were able to circumvent RBWM's approved policy framework to include additional schemes in the capital programme without appropriate challenge from officers;' and*
- *Schemes appeared in the Capital Programme with no business case;*

*My understanding of the process is that where capital expenditure does not relate to service delivery and is proposed to fund an investment with financial return, the business case relating to that proposal would be published at the time as part of the Cabinet consideration of the investment.*

*The asset portfolio is under review, especially in light of the current financial situation and all options for income generation are being considered.*

**d) Andrew Hill of Boyn Hill ward will ask the following question of Councillor Jones, Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead member for Finance**

According to the South West Maidenhead SPD, the funding gap for the golf club site theoretically underpinning the medium term plan capital receipts is £47.4m. Given developers report problems with inflation, raw materials, and housing market, does RBWM now expect a much smaller return if developed, and has this loss been quantified for the MTFP?

*The £47.4m you reference is the estimated required infrastructure investment above the CIL receipts expected and is expected to be funded by S106 contributions from the developments. There isn't a direct relationship between the infrastructure funding and the council's potential financial return as a landowner which forms part of the MTFP. Discussions around all asset income are ongoing and while revisions of the MTFP will be updated with the latest estimates given to Finance, they will only be considered final as and when decisions are made.*