

Place Overview & Scrutiny Panel – Comments on the Budget

On Parking fees and charges:

Disappointing that the council is putting up cost of parking. This could send a negative message to residents about visiting town centres in the borough and they could choose not to visit due to the increased cost. It is also disappointing that the council will be charging more for residential parking permits. Have many people signed up to the 1 hour free parking for residents?

The number of residents taking up the free one hour of parking offer is low but changing this to 2 hours could change the habits of residents. While this could encourage more residents to use the scheme, this is at a risk of a greater loss of income and parking revenue. In last year's budget, there should have been further costs included in adults and children's services so these areas have significant growth bids this year. These bids needed to be funded and it was decided that parking fees should be increased. The Parking team will be monitoring usage and if there are significant changes noted to the parking habits of residents as a result then further changes could be made.

Considering other options which are open to the council could be looked at. What about things like zoned parking, a tourist tax or charges to coach parking? Free parking can be excluded on certain days or when events are taking place. There is concern for residents who will bear the brunt of the increased charges.

The increase in parking charges has sparked a conversation on what other methods are available or should be reviewed. The proposal was looked at from all angles and was not purely a financial decision, it was subject to extensive discussion with officers and Councillors before a decision was made.

The council needs to find a way to Vicus Way car park more popular and ensure that revenue is being generated.

The recent Communication campaign in newsletters and social media has seen an uplift in usage for this car park.

Other comments:

- Removal of free parking for residents on selected events in the borough would not encourage people to attend and get involved.
- Encourage residents and businesses to submit their views to the council on the bus routes consultation.
- There are many incidents reported of illegal parking and a lack of enforcement by the council.
- Broadway car park scheme needs to be completed to help alleviate parking issues in Maidenhead Town Centre.
- Charging for EV vehicles was a good idea.

Suggested recommendation from the Panel:

- That the 1 hour free parking offer is reviewed and whether this can be extended to 2 hours, to ensure that residents will continue to use the borough's town centres.
- While it is appreciated that this might not be practical for all car parks, this could be explored for under-utilised car parks like Vicus Way.

On Events in Parks fees and charges:

Good to see that fees have been introduced to charge for organisations using parks owned by the council, this is a good way to raise income. Is this an annual license? Is it something that is maintained and monitored by the council? How is this policed?

That is correct these are new charges for 24/25 as detailed in the fees and charges report and these are 'per day' rates. The Parks Team will monitor and manage applications for events that organisations and groups would like to run within our parks spaces.

On advertising opportunities in efficiencies and growth:

This is a good way to raise revenue and should be explored, companies will want to pay for good advertising space. However, there has been a lot of advertising on council street furniture spotted which had been placed illegally. Is the council ensuring that enforcement action is taken and that these are removed, to ensure that companies are coming to the council through the correct route? There is a possibility of lost income if enforcement is not effective.

One income route is the permitted banner locations within the borough. There is an application fee of £285, and on the website, there are set locations where we allow banners to be in place, there are 5 locations in Maidenhead, and 2 in Windsor. If banners are noted in any locations that are not approved, then we have to write to the company who has erected the sign and allow them a 'reasonable period' to remove the sign. If they do not remove them then we remove them and issue a fine, which covers the cost of the officer attending site. These fines can often be low.

Regarding Advertising Boards, which the council currently does not allow, there is a charge per Board of £150 for removal plus a storage charge fee. At the beginning of this year, we undertook an enforcement process. Again, it is slightly long winded. We have to write to each individual business reminding them again that A Boards are not allowed on the adopted highway, and that if noted they will be removed and a fine will be issued as well as removal of the board. Town Centre Managers hand deliver these letters to the relevant businesses (we have to pre warn them that we may be removing their property before we remove it). Then we have put the arrangement in place with our street cleansing contractor, and the financial set up with the website/accounts team behind the scenes. Then officers and contractors do the 'sweep' through the area to remove the signs. When we did the sweep earlier this year, we removed approximately 10 A Boards.

We are considering that rather than banning, we look at licencing and managing A Boards, it would work in practise like the Street Cafe (table and chairs licences), where an application has to be made, we approve the location, the look and feel (the proposal is that they all are the same height, width etc) so have some form of uniform to them. We can as then add to the fees and charges. To date no further progress has been made due to a lack of resources but could be picked up again by the team later this year.

On Braywick Leisure Centre defects:

It is surprising that there are defects to Braywick Leisure Centre given that it is relatively new. What are these defects and how can this be rectified to ensure that this is not an issue for next year's budget?

Whilst Braywick Leisure Centre is a relatively new facility it is extremely well used and now reporting greater usage than at pre-pandemic levels. It is correct that some defects to the centre have been discovered and officers are working in partnership with Leisure Focus Trust to fully assess faults to air handling between the swimming pool and gym, which is causing damage to equipment and the fabric of the building. Therefore, these defects are presenting a potential cost liability to the council to rectify unless officers are able to reach an agreement with the contractors and architects that built the centre.

Comments:

- It would be useful to have more information on the Braywick Leisure Centre lease contract to understand where responsibility lies for the repair works.

People Overview & Scrutiny Panel – Comments on the Budget

Appendix A

Adult services case management system is over a 5 year period? What do we normally pay? Cost of case management system appears to be expensive. Biggest overhead is case management system but very necessary for work to be done.

This is the ongoing 5 year costs for the system, there is significant spend over the next few years as a result of transformation. We have paid a similar amount for this system in the past as it is an essential tool needed for social workers. The team have been through a competitive tender process. In children's services, we still use system called Paris and the council is one of the only local authorities in the country to still use it. The system is not fit for purpose and this is the capital earmarked to change the system.

Will the children's services case management system be able to integrate with other existing systems?

Not necessarily going to be able to do that but other AfC authorities Kingston and Richmond operate a similar system and this would be compatible with them so would make things easier for AfC.

Is borrowing from the capital? Which projects are new?

This is capital slippage, so existing projects which haven't finished or are being carried over into next year. They can be funded from various places but are capital projects funded by borrowing. None are new, these are current projects but not finished yet and are going to roll over into next year. Final capital programme will be new things for next year and things which have slipped.

On the budget lines that are slipping – has the borrowing already taken place? Or will we need to borrow more?

We are not borrowing ahead of time, it is driven by cash flow. As long as we have sufficient funds we don't borrow in advance as we would then have to pay interest at an earlier stage.

Are we looking at the foundations of what we need to deliver – or is there any extra? Have we done an analysis on what we need to do as a council and we could do, considering things which would be 'nice to have'?

We are looking at the essentials, we could cut further but S114 notice would cut everything that isn't statutory and this therefore keep control within the council. We have removed projects/discounted some of them, a lot of projects were already in progress or funded by grants. We are making decisions on whether to continue projects on grants or prioritise other projects, but many are ringfenced. We have issues in adult services with billing, we are working hard to get to the bottom of

it. We will get financial benefit from controlling billing. Statutory duties are clear – but we are not told how to do it. What does a good service look like? For example, we are not required to have a day centre but it would be very difficult to meet certain needs without one. By staying out of S114 we can choose what the service looks like. Resource provisions and services for children with special educational needs are expensive. Out of borough provisions are expensive and can have impact on different budgets.

Traveller local plan – what is it?

Plan for providing accommodation for those that identify as travellers and is respect of their approach.

Preserving early help intervention is important – if we invest now, we save later. Can you give us assurance that this will be protected?

We are not reducing children's services; no family hubs will be closed.

Are we doing more to support children in good placements through the shared lives programme?

There is overlap between adult and children's services, we have a transition pathway in place to go from childhood to adulthood. A project officer is also now in place to help support this process which was not available in previous years.

Are we cutting adult social care services?

There is £6 million of additional funding planned for adult social care. There have been pressures in-year which was due to savings made last year which were too ambitious. There is transformation work planned to help residents live more independent lives. Adult social care places huge pressure on the budget, particularly with an increase in all costs.

How much of the budget is spent on adult social care and children's services?

For every £100 of expenditure, approximately £42 is spent on adult social care and £28 on children's services.

Affordable key worker housing riverside line – what is this?

Answer to be given after the meeting.

Proposal to build nursing home – how is that funded, when will it happen and what is the saving?

Weekly costs of nursing care can be as high as £1,800 a week. If we could save this we could have a working revenue fund to run the proposed home. It would give us price certainty but would need to

consider if we buy an existing home or build one. Optalis currently run a care home in Wokingham and they have also worked to improve a poorly run care home. There are plans but it is not cheap, Optalis are prepared for either approach.

High cost of using third parties for foster care. Is this something that we could invest in-house resources, could that be offset by not using third parties?

We could buy or build our own residential provision, this would be a better offering but can't say if it would be significantly cheaper. Main difficulty is finding a property in the borough. It is a transformation project and would probably be looking at 2027 as approximate timescale on this.

Braywick leisure centre defects – worrying that it's only been open for a few years.

This has been highlighted by the Place Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

SEND children – is there any plans to extend our own centres rather than adding extra stress onto schools? Would it be easier to provide a new school?

Resource provisions have been agreed with schools. Not necessarily going to mean any big building works. Schools that are involved are up for it, important for local schools that we have provision attached. There had been a bid explored to open a school specifically for children with SEND, this could be opened in the next few years and is planned to be in Windsor.

22 units being built in Imperial Road, Windsor. Could integrate younger/older people to help prevent elderly going into care.

Supported accommodation is planned for Imperial Road, the plan is to build two blocks of 11 units. Residents can live independently but in a supported environment. That idea has not been looked at but can discuss with the team to explore this. The CQC would be monitoring the accommodation and they can be quite descriptive.

Appendix B

Budget surplus/gap is increasing – are we accruing debt?

Not necessarily accruing more debt. Costs are inevitably rising and therefore services will cost more to provide.

Council tax - is it expensive to chase up residents who are not paying? Some other councils are introducing long term empty premiums – do we do this as a borough? Could we increase it?

If a property is empty, there is a 100% premium at the moment, which is the original council tax and 100%. If the property had been empty for two years, it's an additional 200%. The maximum we can

charge is 300% which is if it gets to 10 years. Legislation now allows us to reduce the 200% threshold from two years to one year. This is in the draft budget to bring this threshold down. We need to give notice for a full financial year before new premium can be levelled from April 2025 – this is around second home premium/properties that are periodically occupied. New premium is for furnished properties that are only occasionally occupied and this can be up to 100% from April.

Other councils where landlords are renting out properties, some licensing of landlords has been introduced to maintain standards – is that something we could introduce?

We are not doing this but did come up in discussions. This is being considered by housing but not in the budget proposals for this year, there are questions around whether it would suit the demographics of the borough.

Council tax at Band B – 500 is quoted for each year. Is that an assumption on the number of planning applications coming through, where has this figure come from?

500 is an estimate and a realistic figure with some caution. We have reduced our estimates for growth as this had been overestimated in previous years. We start by considering all properties at a point in time, but then have to estimate how many new properties will come into existence.

At what point does a house become 'live' and start paying council tax?

Property inspectors keep a database of new properties, they will regularly visit to check if they can be charged. Complete means that the property is structurally sound and has things like floors, plumbing and electricity. Doesn't have to be internally decorated. Can be argued against by the developer but a completion date can be agreed.

Empty homes currently get a 6 month warning before council tax is required to be paid. Will we make provision for probate?

Every opportunity we give makes it harder for the council to get money back which is owed.

Adult social precept – are we not getting any?

Don't think we will be offered any.

Appendix C & D

Are we building council homes to improve our levels of housing stock to reduce level of temporary accommodation? How will this take place?

We have an obligation around temporary accommodation. There is an £600,000 overspend in current year on temporary accommodation so this is a big focus for next year. We can buy and convert stock and these are some of the options being explored.

Residents not using funds which have been allocated to them – what does this mean?

Direct payments are where we give families money to organise care and support that they need. Sometimes that money is not utilised, we need to recoup that if its not being used. We have someone in place to recoup this, it is only money that is not being spent.

Income generation for unused car parks. In the US they have some quite interesting ideas – are we looking at ideas like this for car parks?

Yes and no – there have been discussions about how to maximise usage. We have a drive on commercialisation generally. We are using space in car parks, for example we have given dedicated floors to businesses. We are always open to listening to new ideas.

Out of hours service for noise complaints – how are we going to help residents? Putting more things online, can we talk to Parish Councils to allow them to spread news through their own publications – elderly could be cut off if we are not producing 'Around the Royal Borough' anymore.

We are looking at all different areas. We took a decision to not make 'Around the Royal Borough' magazine, optional services had to be considered. We are conscious of the balance that needs to be made.

Cutting refreshments for the Mayor – is that a big saving?

Not a huge saving but it was decided that this was not essential.

General Comments/Recommendations:

- Disabled residents need to be considered, it is difficult particularly with a proposed increase in fees and charges for parking. Blue badge holders still have to pay for a permit. This is an issue that should be looked at – is there anything that we can do? A permit is a lot of money for residents who are on a limited income.
- Nursing home which is proposed to be run by Optalis – this idea was strongly supported by the Panel. It was appreciated that this would have a cost but would produce a saving over a longer period of time.
- Residential housing for young people in care, this should be brought in-house.
- School provisions – we've discussed provisions and understand that it is to consolidate services but it is also best for families to bring resources back in borough. Could gain revenue if we were able to make provisions from out of borough.