

# Supplemental Items for Council

**Tuesday, 1st March, 2016 at 6.30 pm**  
in Council Chamber Council Offices  
Market Street Newbury

## Part I

Page No.

21. **Amendments, Corrections and Public Questions**

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Andy Day  
Head of Strategic Support

For further information about this/these item(s), or to inspect any background documents referred to in Part I reports, please contact Democratic Services Team on 01635 519045 e-mail: [executivecycle@westberks.gov.uk](mailto:executivecycle@westberks.gov.uk)

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**Amendments and Corrections**  
**Council**  
**01 March 2016**

**Agenda Item 21.**

## **Proposed Corrections:**

### **Item 3: Minutes**

Please note that the following amendment has been requested to the minutes of the 10 December 2015:

Councillor Pamela Bale was present at the meeting and the attendance needs to be amended to reflect this.

**Proposed by:** Peter Argyle

**Seconded by:** Roger Croft

### **Item 16: Revenue Budget Appendix Hiii Fees and Charges Environment**

The document has been amended to take account of revisions to car parking charges because of the new proposals that are being consulted on under phase 2 of the budget consultation. All changes in the re-published document have been highlighted in red so that they can easily be identified. Please see **pages 229 to 238** of your electronic agenda.

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## **Clarification**

### **Item 15: Capital Strategy and Programme 2016/17 to 2020/21 Appendix F: Highways Asset Management Plan 2014/15 to 2018/19**

On Page 95 in Table 3, paragraph 4.4 of the paperwork it states that the Gross Replacement Cost (GRC) of bridges is £75m but on page 128 item 18 the GRC is listed as £137m.

Officers have confirmed that both the £75m and £137m figure are correct. The £75m was calculated in April 2014 using an earlier approved method of calculation called the Unrefined Method. The £137m figure was calculated at the end of 2015 using the new CIPFA Structures Tool Kit which gives a more accurate (and higher) figure than the previous method. This difference is explained in paragraph 19 of Appendix C (page 128 of the papers).

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## **Item 6: Public Questions**

*(Question submitted after agenda published but in accordance with the requirements for Questions pertaining to agenda items)*

**a) Question submitted by Mr Gary Puffett to be answered by Councillor Alan Law**

How does the council think the cuts will impact upon the wider local economy?

- b) Question submitted by Mr Gary Puffett to be answered by Councillor Alan Law**  
Has the Council undertaken an Impact Needs Analysis to establish what specific ramifications will be for the local economy in the short, medium and long-term?
- c) Question submitted by Mr Gary Puffett to be answered by Councillor Roger Croft**  
What new revenue streams does the council propose to look into that could protect the local population from these draconian cuts?
- d) Question submitted by Mr Gary Puffett to be answered by Councillor Marcus Franks**  
Could the council go into public private partnership with a cafe in the libraries, or a broadband or energy provider in order to generate funds?
- e) Question submitted by Mr Gary Puffett to be answered by Councillor Hilary Cole**  
What does the council plan to do with the library buildings?
- f) Question submitted by Mr Gary Puffett to be answered by Councillor Dominic Boeck**  
What is going to happen to the books, DVDs, fittings and fixtures, audio-visual equipment and software from the libraries and children's centres?
- g) Question submitted by Mr Peter Norman and asked by David Marsh to be answered by Councillor Graham Jones**  
Given we are in the middle of a further consultation on cuts the Council would like to implement would the Council consider a motion where they set the revenue side of the budget tonight to enable them to raise the Council Tax in line with the proposals, but postpone approving the expenditure side of the budget until after the results of the second consultation are known so that the cuts can be looked at in the round rather than put together in a piecemeal way, and therefore approve the expenditure proposals at a second Council meeting?
- h) Question submitted by Mr Peter Norman and asked by David Marsh to be answered by Councillor Roger Croft**  
What, if any, additional lobbying is the Council making to Central Government to increase the settlement for West Berkshire Council, including getting our MP to better represent our interests, so that there is a smoother transition between now and the new financial arrangements for Councils in 2020?
- i) Question submitted by Mr Peter Norman and asked by David Marsh to be answered by Councillor Hilary Cole**  
Given the statutory obligation to provide a comprehensive library service, does the Council agree that the proposals to close rural libraries and cut rural bus services puts the Council at risk of not meeting its statutory obligations in this regard?
- j) Question submitted by Mr Peter Norman and asked by David Marsh to be answered by Councillor Roger Croft**  
Will the Council ensure that the paltry transition relief of £2.8m over two years is used to transformative effect in the way that the Council delivers its services with a holistic review of how services are delivered and by whom?

**k) Question submitted by Mr Peter Norman and asked by David Marsh to be answered by Councillor Roger Croft**

Councillors will be aware of their obligation to represent the whole of their constituencies and not just those that elected them. In fulfilling 4] above will they undertake to use the next few months to go out and engage with their constituents to get a community wide response to what services the Council should be providing and how services are delivered going forward, including constituency based public meetings? Such a review should in tandem encompass a wide ranging benchmarking of other local authorities as to best practice and innovation.

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## **Proposed Amendments**

### **Item 15 - Capital Strategy and Programme 2016/17 to 2020/21**

**Proposed by:** Councillor Lee Dillon

**Seconded by:** Councillor Roger Croft

That the recommendation set out in the report be approved and adopted subject to a separate line being added to Paragraph 2.1 (page 44) as follows:

“To actively use the Capital budgets to help generate income that can support the revenue budget of the Council through longer term investments.”

### **Item 16 – Revenue Budget 2016/17**

**Proposed by:** Councillor Roger Croft

**Seconded by:** Councillor Alan Macro

“That recommendation (9) be approved and adopted subject to the deletion of the words “be given delegated authority to adjust the Council’s budget plans” and the inclusion of the words “make appropriate recommendations to a Special meeting of Council on 24 March 2016”.

The amendment would therefore read as follows:

“That the Executive, on 24 March 2016, make appropriate recommendations to a special meeting of Council on 24 March 2016, to adjust the Council’s budget plans should the responses to Phase 2 of the public consultation require it to do so”.

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### **Item 16 – Revenue Budget 2015/16**

**Proposed by:** Roger Croft

**Seconded by:** Graham Jones

*“That recommendation (2) be approved and adopted subject to Council agreeing to allocate transition funding, as set out below, to the following Phase 1 public consultation areas of service:*

*Short Breaks for Children - £170,000*

*Two Saints floating support service and Step by Step Lodgings service - £100,000*

*Empowering West Berkshire - £25,000*

**Section 151 Officer comments:**

The amendment proposes to use £395,000 from the Transition Grant of £1.39m next year and does not present any further financial risk for the Council.

Andy Walker  
Head of Finance  
25-2-16

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**Item 16 – Revenue Budget 2015/16**

**Proposed by:** Alan Macro

**Seconded by:** Lee Dillon

*“That recommendation (2) be approved and adopted subject to Council agreeing to allocate transition funding, as set out below, to the following Phase 1 public consultation areas of service*

*£132,500 to be used to delay the implementation of the cuts to home-to-school transport until the start of the new school year. This is to allow the following:*

- The works required to improve the walking routes to be completed*
- Give parents time to change their family arrangements to allow them to accompany or drive their children to school*
- Allow parents time to budget for the increase in farepayer fares*

*£80,000 to delay implementation of the cuts to public transport for 3 months. This is to allow parish councils and communities time to either fund the required subsidies or to implement alternatives. It will also give time for regular users of the bus services to make alternative travel arrangements.*

*£21,000 to delay implementation of the cut of the school crossing patrol service for one year to allow schools and communities to find other ways to fund this valued service.”*

**Section 151 Officer comments:**

The amendment proposes to use £233,500 from the Transition Grant of £1.39m next year and does not present any further financial risk for the Council.

Andy Walker  
Head of Finance  
25-2-16

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**Additional Documents:**

**Item 16 – Revenue Budget 2015/16**

Please see the attached documents which were marked as to be tabled on the agenda:

Appendix K – Unison Comments





**WEST BERKSHIRE COUNCIL  
2016/17 REVENUE BUDGET PROPOSALS FEEDBACK  
February 2016**

West Berkshire Local Government UNISON is extremely concerned by, and strongly opposed to, the proposed West Berkshire Council Revenue Budget for 2016/17. The reasons are set out below.

**1. Financial context**

Whilst UNISON recognises the Council's financial position and the continuing assault on the proper funding of essential public services by central government, the Council has not historically taken the opportunity to make full use of Council Tax.

Had it done so (by increasing Council Tax by 2% in 2013/14 and 2014/15, rather than accepting the government's 'freeze' grant of only 1%) it would now be £1.6m per annum better off. The base for any future increases would also be commensurately higher.

This budget therefore contains cuts that are deeper than they needed to have been and is repayment for the political decision not to make modest increases in Council Tax to support the delivery of essential public services in past years.

**2. Impact on the vulnerable in our communities**

A disproportionate number of the cuts outlined in Appendix E will fall on the most vulnerable in our communities – children and families in need of support, people with disabilities and the elderly. Those whose quality of life is to a large extent dependent – and in some cases wholly reliant – upon support from the Council will see it being eroded. Inequalities between the less fortunate and wider society will widen as a result.

The effect of many of the cuts – which in a number of instances are for preventative work or early intervention – will be that costs are shunted to other organisations and, in some cases, to other parts of the Council. This is a false economy – prevention is better than cure – and the additional work will be loaded on to already overburdened staff. The potential impact on staff in the Children and Families Service – which still has well-documented recruitment and retention problems – is particularly concerning.

**3. Impact on the Council's staff**

Year-on-year real terms cuts to wages are causing staff to feel unappreciated and undervalued.

Staff in many service areas are already struggling to keep up with current workloads and the performance expectations of the public and their

Councillors. Cuts to the workforce will further increase the burden on those staff that are fortunate enough to keep their jobs.

At the same time that work pressures are increasing, the Council is eroding the support mechanisms available to staff. Particularly concerning are the removal of training budgets (essential for the replacement of skills lost through redundancies), the introduction of restriction on counselling for staff when demand is likely to increase and reductions in HR staffing levels

The removal of funding for the UNISON branch secretary will restrict the union's ability to support staff effectively, especially as capacity in the HR service is also being reduced. Further, it flies in the face of evidence from the TUC that for every £1 invested in union 'facility' time, taxpayers get at least £2.31 back in savings. See <https://www.tuc.org.uk/node/124546> .

#### 4. **Local democracy**

As the public – particularly the vulnerable – lose or have eroded their essential public services and staff are continuing to face pay restraint or the prospect of losing their jobs, the inappropriateness and insensitivity of councillors awarding themselves a 16.5% increase in their allowances (which was almost their first act after the 2015 elections) is brought sharply back into focus.

Councillors now cost local taxpayers in excess of £500k per annum and the stated intention to conduct a boundary review (and thereby reduce the number of councillors and their associated costs) shows no sign of yet beginning, much less concluding. The Council remains disproportionately over-represented, creating a drain on funding that could and should be redirected to services for the public.

The removal of the £7k per annum cost of catering for councillors (this is for central catering, which is provided in addition to the £7,324 basic allowance paid to all councillors, and was also overspent for the municipal year 2015/16) is welcome if grossly overdue.

There is however questionable value to the public in the expenditure of c£32k (plus on-costs) for the Council-funded post that provides administration and other support to the ruling Conservative group. This post supports the 48 Conservative councillors only.

By simultaneously removing support to both the elected opposition and trades unions, the administration is dismantling the mechanisms that provide the checks and balances that are necessary for the functioning of a healthy local democracy.

5. **Strategic coherence.** The authority's own stated aims and priorities for improvement for the period 2015 – 2019 are set out in its Council Strategy (see <http://info.westberks.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=34790&p=0> ). Of the proposed cuts, almost all can be matched against an aim, a priority or both. This is strategically incoherent.

## Minutes of a Meeting of: Business Panel information meeting on the 2016-17 budget

held on: 22nd February 2016 – 6pm

**Present:** Jon Thompson, WBTC  
Russell Downing, Newbury BID  
Andy Walker, Head of Finance  
Bill Blackett, Revenues & Benefits Manager

Apologies from:  
Elizabeth Anfield, EMA Accountants  
Plus over 40 other organisations invited to attend.

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### Action

### **Proposed Budget 2016-17**

Andy Walker summarised the Council's budget proposals for 2016/17 including the processes followed to arrive at the budget and covered the following areas:

- Revenue Support Grant cut
- Retained Business Rates
- Other Grants cut
- Care Act funding
- Cost pressures
- Savings requirement
- Council Tax increase
- Transitional Grant
- Reserves

It was generally accepted by those present that the Council's budget position mainly as a result of the unexpectedly poor finance settlement, significant business rates back dated appeals and Care Act eligibility funding shortfalls had left the Council with little room for manoeuvre but to propose a number of significant cuts to valued services across the Council which have been and are in the process of public consultation. Those present were also of the view that closer working with business partners and other service partners was now even more important to find effective and economic ways to respond to these budget challenges in the future.

Jon Thompson - Organisations like WBTC can access funds not available to the Council and some services may potentially be free if better organised as partners.

Need for WBC to make decisions about using the infrastructure e.g. where we bring in external organisations rather than invest in the local area services, there is a need to be a re-model of past arrangements brokered by

WBC. The message about forgetting convention and doing things differently is not getting back.

Russell Downing - Needs to be recognised that WBC doing a good job having regard to the financial challenge faced. However we need to work together with the business community which can unlock funding we are unable to get to.

There needs to be confidence and trust leading to joint ventures and work with the wider community.

Recognise that demand does not always = need.

## **Business Rates update**

Bill Blakett provided an update on the latest announcements and covered changes to NNDR legislation, specifically the continued extension of small business relief and the ending of retail relief – the latter being something which will impact on smaller retail businesses who will face a bill for the first time in two years.

The meeting closed at 7.00pm

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