

# **COUNCIL**

## **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON**

### **TUESDAY, 2 MARCH 2021**

**Councillors Present:** Adrian Abbs, Steve Ardagh-Walter, Peter Argyle, Phil Barnett, Jeff Beck, Dennis Benneyworth, Dominic Boeck, Graham Bridgman, Jeff Brooks, Jeff Cant, Hilary Cole, James Cole, Jeremy Cottam, Carolyn Culver, Lee Dillon, Lynne Doherty, Billy Drummond, Clive Hooker (Vice-Chairman), Nassar Hunt, Gareth Hurley, Owen Jeffery, Rick Jones, Alan Law, Tony Linden, Royce Longton, Ross Mackinnon, Alan Macro, Thomas Marino, David Marsh, Steve Masters, Geoff Mayes, Andy Moore, Graham Pask (Chairman), Erik Pattenden, Claire Rowles, Garth Simpson, Richard Somner, Joanne Stewart, Martha Vickers, Tony Vickers, Andrew Williamson, Keith Woodhams and Howard Woollaston

**Also Present:** Nick Carter (Chief Executive), Sarah Clarke (Service Director (Strategy and Governance)), Tessa Ethelston (Group Executive (Cons)), Susan Halliwell (Executive Director - Place) and Joseph Holmes (Executive Director - Resources), Stephen Chard (Principal Policy Officer), Christine Elsasser (Democratic Services Officer) and Moira Fraser (Democratic and Electoral Services Manager)

**Apologies for inability to attend the meeting:** Andy Sharp

#### **PART I**

##### **52. Chairman's Remarks**

The Chairman announced that the number of events had been reduced this year due to the Covid pandemic but a few events had taken place via Zoom which included:

- Community Santa and Giving Tree – these events had been well supported.
- Annual Recognition Event – The Chairman said that was extremely proud of all the staff who had managed to keep services functioning during this difficult time. He specifically mentioned the Waste Services Team who had ensured that there was very little impact on waste collections during the year.
- Community Champion – The Chairman stated that this had been the best year for this award with over 90 people commended. All those people who had been nominated were winners in his view and he thanked all those who had helped out in their communities at this difficult time. The ceremony had been live streamed on YouTube so more people could see the event as it happened.

The Chairman also informed Members that the annual related party forms had been posted today. The forms would have written guidance attached to assist in completing the form which would relate to the period 1 April 2020 to the 31 March 2021 and need to be returned by the 12 April 2021.

##### **53. Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 3 December 2020 were approved as a true and correct record and the Chairman gave his authority for his electronic signature to be attached to these Minutes.

##### **54. Declarations of Interest**

The Monitoring Officer announced that in respect of items 17 and 18 (Capital Strategy and Programme 2021/22 to 2023/24 and Revenue Budget 2021/22): all Members had completed an Application for a Grant of a Dispensation in relation to “any beneficial

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interest in land within the Authority's area." The Monitoring Officer had previously granted the dispensation to allow all Members to speak and vote on this item.

There were also a number of personal interests declared in relation to agenda items and these were set out below and would be published on the Council's website.

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Councillor	Description	55.
Abbs, Adrian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Greenham Parish Councillor</li> <li>Trustee of Stroke Care Newbury &amp; West Berkshire (Stroke Care get a grant from the Council and Councillor Abbs was appointed in a personal capacity)</li> </ul>	
Ardagh-Walter, Steve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thatcham Town Councillor</li> <li>Member of the Kennet Leisure Centre Joint Advisory Committee (Council appointee)</li> <li>Member of Henwick Worthy Joint Management Committee (Council appointee)</li> </ul>	56
Argyle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Member of Willink Joint Advisory Committee (Council appointee)</li> </ul>	
Beck, Jeff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>WBC's Representative on the Board of Readibus</li> <li>WBC's Representative on the Board of Volunteer Centre West Berkshire</li> <li>Trustee of the Corn Exchange Newbury Ltd</li> <li>WBC appointed Member of the Henwick Worthy Joint Management Committee Board</li> <li>WBC appointed to the Kennet Leisure Centre Committee</li> </ul>	57.
Benneyworth, Dennis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Member of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority</li> </ul>	
Brooks, Jeff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Member of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority</li> </ul>	
Bridgman, Graham	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stratfield Mortimer Parish Councillor</li> <li>Investment in Abundance (Community Municipal Investment)</li> </ul>	
Culver, Carlyne	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investments in Abundance and had bought some of the WBC Community Municipal Investment bonds</li> </ul>	
Doherty, Lynne	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investment in Abundance (Community Municipal Investment)</li> </ul>	
Hurley, Gareth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pangbourne Parish Councillor</li> </ul>	
Jeffery, Owen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thatcham Town Councillor</li> <li>Substitute on Henwick Worthy Joint Management Committee (appointed by Thatcham Town Council)</li> <li>Member of Kennet Leisure Centre Joint Advisory Committee (Thatcham Town Council appointment)</li> <li>In receipt of a pension from the Royal Berks Pension fund</li> </ul>	58
Jones, Rick	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Purley on Thames Parish Councillor</li> </ul>	
Law, Alan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Berkshire Pension Fund Advisory Panel (Council appointee)</li> </ul>	
Linden, Tony	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Member of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority</li> </ul>	
Longton, Royce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Burghfield Parish Councillor</li> </ul>	
Mackinnon, Ross	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Member of Willink Joint Advisory Committee (Council appointee)</li> </ul>	
Marino, Tom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tilehurst Parish Councillor</li> </ul>	
Marsh, David	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investments in Abundance and had bought some of the WBC Community Municipal Investment bonds</li> </ul>	
Masters, Steve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trustee for the Donnington Hospital Trust (West Berkshire council Appointment)</li> <li>Trustee of Eight Bells</li> <li>Trustee Mobile Phone Museum</li> </ul>	
Rowles, Claire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trustee on the Board of the Citizens Advice Bureau (Council appointed)</li> </ul>	

### Petitions

There were no petitions presented to the meeting.

### Public Questions

There were no public questions received.

### Membership of Committees

There had been no changes to the membership of Committees since the previous Council meeting.

### Motions from Previous Meetings

Members were asked to note the responses to six Motions set out in

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the agenda which had been tabled at previous Council meetings.

As the motions had been discussed and responded to at either the Executive or via a Delegated Officer Decision it was not proposed to revisit the discussion on items (a) to (d) at this meeting.

Item (e) would be discussed as a separate agenda item and a response to item (f) had been included in the budget papers and could be discussed during that item.

Councillor Lee Dillon stated that in terms of the public being able to follow the documents it would have been useful to treat the Motions as had been the case with (e) which had been included on the agenda. He wanted to raise the issue that some of these Motion were lengthy and yet they had not been debated in the Chamber. Due to the referral process they had all been delegated to Part II meetings or meetings which were controlled by the Administration rather than the Council as a whole. He specifically referred to item (b) from Councillor Erik Pattenden in relation to the safer schools Motion. This had originally been tabled at the budget meeting in 2020 but it had taken until December 2020 for the Executive to respond to it and it was now being noted at Council. The Liberal Democrat group felt that the Council should be speedier in terms of a response and that debate should be had prior to Members making a decision.

Councillor Martha Vickers referred to her Motion (f) which it was proposed would be responded to as part of the budget papers where it could be seen that the Motion had been rejected. On the breaking news today it was stated that the Government had actually accepted the content of the Motion and that they would be making the £20 uplift in Universal Credit permanent. She felt that it was a shame that this Council had not been part of that lobbying process. She felt that it was disrespectful to the residents of West Berkshire, to herself as an elected Councillor and it was not democratic.

Councillor Jeff Brooks agreed with the comments already made. He himself had submitted a Motion which had been referred to the Executive but he now noted that it had been taken as a Delegated Officer Decision on 6 January 2021 with no debate. When a Motion had been submitted, and due to a political reason, was passed down to Officers to determine with no further debate, it was a disgrace.

Councillor Erik Pattenden confirmed that Motion (b) was the Safer Schools Motion and he was also disappointed that it had taken a whole year for the Council to hear the response to it. He felt that there were serious issues with the democratic processes of the Council.

Councillor Adrian Abbs referred to Motion (c) and stated that this Motion had been brought forward through cross party support via a Conservative Member. It had taken six months before it was then taken to debate and it did not feel right.

Councillor Steve Masters agreed with the comments made by the Liberal Democrats. There seemed to a deficit in the democratic process and this needed to be looked at as a Council to ensure that members of the public had confidence in the system.

The Monitoring Officer confirmed that the Motions had been dealt with on each occasion in accordance with the Council's Constitution which also reflected the legal framework and stipulated that certain decisions were by law reserved to the Executive. Therefore, if a Motion was submitted that was related to an Executive decision then it had to go to the Executive for determination. The Constitution also permitted those who had submitted Motions to attend the Executive meeting to have that debate. This meant that further debate would not take place at the Council meeting. The Monitoring Officer therefore felt that there was a framework in place but the Constitution Review Task Group was currently reviewing the Constitution and the concerns which had been raised were being looked at through that group.

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Councillor Martha Vickers highlighted her experience and the fact that no debate had taken place.

Councillor Steve Masters stated that it appeared to be very difficult to get a Motion discussed at full Council and it seemed that there was very little appetite for scrutiny and perhaps this was something that could be considered by the Constitution Review Task Group.

Councillor Jeff Brooks referred to his Motion which had been taken by a Delegated Officer Decision. He would like to know what the outcome of those discussions had been as he did not think that it had been published in the public domain. Sarah Clarke responded that the Delegated Officer Decision referred to the speed limit review and the CIL matter had not as yet been determined and would be going to the Executive.

### 59. **Licensing Committee**

The Council noted that, since the last meeting, the Licensing Committee had met on 8 February 2021.

### 60. **Personnel Committee**

The Council noted that, since the last meeting, the Personnel Committee had met on 9 December 2020 and 12 February 2021.

### 61. **Governance and Ethics Committee**

The Council noted that, since the last meeting, the Governance and Ethics Committee had met on 1 February 2021.

### 62. **District Planning Committee**

The Council noted that, since the last meeting, the District Planning Committee had met on 10 February 2021.

### 63. **Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission**

The Council noted that, since the last meeting, the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee had met on 26 January 2021 and 9 February 2021.

### 64. **Joint Public Protection Committee**

The Council noted that, since the last meeting, the Joint Public Protection Committee had met on 15 December 2020.

### 65. **Investment and Borrowing Strategy 2021/22 (C3980)**

The Council considered a report (Agenda Item 15) concerning the Treasury Risk Management at the Council which was conducted within the framework of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA) Treasury Management in the Public Services: Code of Practice 2017 Edition (the CIPFA Code) which required the Council to approve a treasury management strategy before the start of each financial year. This report fulfilled the Council's legal obligation under the Local Government Act 2003 to have regard to the CIPFA Code and set out the Council's proposed Investment and Borrowing Strategy for 2021/22.

**MOTION:** Proposed by Councillor Ross Mackinnon and seconded by Councillor Howard Woollaston:

That the Council:

“Agree and adopt the proposed Investment and Borrowing Strategy for 2021/22; and Agree and adopt the revised 2021 Property Investment Strategy”.

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Councillor Ross Mackinnon stated that this strategy came in two parts – it dealt with investments and it also dealt with borrowing. The report laid out the approved deposit institutions for the Council's treasury investments and also set prudential limits for those investments. It recommended borrowing limits for the next three years and together with a longer term forecast for the Council's borrowing requirements. The Council's external borrowing was kept under regular and close review to ensure that it was manageable and sustainable.

Councillor Mackinnon stated that one of the other organisations which had enabled local authority bond issues was Abundance Investments who facilitated enabling investors, both inside and outside of the district, to invest directly in the Council's Environment Strategy. He was proud to have played a small part in such an innovative scheme.

Councillor Jeff Brooks agreed that there were good reasons to borrow for infrastructure etc. but he felt that the Council was overdoing it.

Councillor Lee Dillon felt that members of the public would be disconcerted to see the annual rent for 4 The Sector. It had a purchase price of £8m and with no annual rent as yet. Councillor Steve Masters understood that 4 The Sector had been let to a capacity of about 30% and he understood from a question he had asked previously that the Council would be able to manage about a year to 18 months without the income before it became a major issue. Perhaps it would have been better to invest in social housing whereby the Council would have been getting rent from much needed social tenants.

Councillor Erik Pattenden referred to paragraph 5.2 which stated that the impact of Coronavirus and Brexit would have a major influence on the Council's Treasury Management Strategy but he asked what the impact of Brexit had been on businesses and residents in West Berkshire since 1 January 2021 as the national press had had a huge amount of coverage of how it had impacted on some sectors.

Councillor Adrian Abbs stated that he would like to see an asset value against all of the commercial investment as commercial properties had not been increasing in value recently. He also noted that capital was being spent on software, hardware etc. which were generally a declining asset and he would therefore like to see the value of the assets against the initial investments.

Councillor Howard Woollaston pointed out that the debt costs in many cases would be covered by the income such as was the case with the Property Investment Portfolio which was creating an income of £700k a year. In relation to interest rates and whether they would be likely to increase he advised that a lot of the Council's borrowing had come through PWLB which was a fixed rate for 40 years and therefore interest rates would not go up.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon felt that it was necessary to look at the total borrowing figure in tandem with the percentage of the revenue budget that went towards repaying the borrowing for capital financing. The long term forecast for the Council's borrowing was for it to decline. In relation to 4 The Sector he was bound by commercial confidentiality at this stage. However, the benefit of having a geographically diverse portfolio of assets was that in the case of having a vacancy or two it would wash its face and the Council was fortunate in that it was generating a positive return.

The Motion was put to the meeting and duly **RESOLVED**.

### **66. Medium Term Financial Strategy 2021/22 to 2024/25 (C3981)**

The Council considered a report (Agenda Item 16) which set out the financial planning assumptions for future years and aligned these with the Council Strategy to ensure that the Council Strategy was delivered. The MTFS highlighted the overarching key issues

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facing the Council's finances as well as how there were many different scenarios and uncertainties that concerned the future revenue streams for the Council in the future.

The Council was able to commence the next four years of the MTFS from a strong financial base and this position and future projections were highlighted in the report. The full MTFS was set out in Appendix A.

**MOTION:** Proposed by Councillor Ross Mackinnon and seconded by Councillor Lynne Doherty:

That the Council:

“approves and adopts the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2021/22 to 2024/25”.

Councillor Mackinnon in introducing the report stated that the MTFS four year programme had been built to ensure that the Council had the financial resources to deliver the Council Strategy. A key element of financial planning was that the forecast included a number of assumptions and uncertainties around both income and expenditure. The Local Government settlement for 2021/22 was broadly similar to the previous year but there were uncertainties around a number of income elements going forward such as the Fair Funding review, Adult Social Care and the New Homes Bonus. There were also unknowns in terms of expenditure particularly in relation to demand led services such as Adult Social Care and Children's Services. With so many uncertainties any four year forecast was going to be wrong but it was a key element of effective financial planning. Based on the assumptions that had been made it would be necessary for the Council to bridge a funding gap of £13.2m over the next three years. These savings would have to be met by transformation, digitisation and commercialisation. However, the Council had an excellent track record of delivering required savings in recent years without any cuts to frontline services. The key point was that the Council needed to have adequate reserves in place to smooth what would undoubtedly be an irregular pattern of savings. If the authority did not do this exercise and it just budgeted on a one year basis it would be in a precarious position if unexpected events were to occur or required savings proved to be temporarily unachievable.

Councillor Jeff Brooks stated that he could remember a time when there was not MTFS and it had muddled along. It was a useful planning exercise but only if it was accurate or as accurate as possible and within fairly tight parameters. In that way it would be possible to review what it was said would be done against what had actually happened. It would have been useful therefore to see a paragraph included in the report of outcomes against the MTFS over the last three years.

Councillor Tony Vickers noted that when reading the papers it had become apparent that half of the income received was not in the control of the Council but it was dependent on the Government's long term strategy for local government. He queried when local government was going to get a proper settlement as the Council had a business rate system which was not fit for purpose. It was difficult for the public to understand the finances but he asked if the MTFS included an indication that the Government would sort out the long term financial strategy.

Councillor Lee Dillon noted that Councillor Mackinnon had stated that the budget had been set without cutting any frontline services but he referred to proposals to cut Planning Enforcement Officers which he would class as a frontline service. The report also stated that the Council's general reserve was forecast to be above the minimum level required by the s151 Officer and he therefore queried why it was proposed to hold onto more of the residents' money than what the s151 Officer indicated was financially prudent.

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Councillor Graham Bridgman said that the MTFS was in a large part an accumulation of individual service or departmental budgets. He pointed out that there would always be fluctuations in individual budgets going forward over the years but that did not mean that there should be no financial planning. He was supportive of financial planning but agreed with Councillor Brooks to some extent that it was necessary to test what had happened against the plan and to learn lessons for the future.

Councillor Lynne Doherty stated that this time last year it would not have been possible to predict the horrendous year that lay ahead as Covid took hold. The Council had needed to respond to meet the needs of residents as a result of the pandemic. It had been a difficult year and it had highlighted why sound financial planning was so critical when it came to local government finance. The MTFS was a key document as it gave a clear message on the actions required to ensure the long term financial sustainability of the Council. It sat at the heart of good public financial management and that had never been more important than in the current year. She was sure that amendments would be put forward from the Opposition in relation to revenue and capital spend but these could not be considered in isolation and it would be necessary to consider the impact they would have on the future financial stability of the Council and on the MTFS. Any alteration to the budget would ultimately change the MTFS. Councillor Doherty echoed comments made by Councillor Tony Vickers in relation to the uncertainties still facing the Council as the impact of Covid-19 would be felt for a number of years and it would likely change how public services would be delivered in the long term. The Local Government Settlement announced in November 2020 was for one year only and there had been assurances from MCHLG that a longer term settlement was proposed in the forthcoming year. A report on the review of Business Rates would be published in the Autumn and there was currently an ongoing consultation with regards to a replacement for the New Homes Bonus. Whilst there was a desire to keep any Council Tax increase as low as possible there still remained uncertainty over the financial position of the Council for 2022/12. This risk had been taken into account and the Council Tax increase was considered to be at an acceptable level for the coming year.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon advised that the financial position that the Council was in at present was very different from that in the 1990's. The Conservative Administration supported good financial planning. He did not agree with the statement made by Councillor Vickers in relation to not being in control of the majority of the Council's finances. 75% of the Council's funding came from Council Tax and the Adult Social Care precept for which the Council was in control of the rates set. In terms of the level of reserves the report stated that this was the minimum recommended level of reserves - it was not the recommended level.

Councillor Lee Dillon referred to the point made in relation to the lack of an MTFS in the 1990's. This was a CIPFA guideline that required an MTFS and that had not been a requirement when the Lib Dems had been in power.

The Motion was put to the meeting and duly **RESOLVED**.

### 67. **Capital Strategy and Programme 2021/22 - 2023/24 (C3982)**

The purpose of the report was to outline the Capital Strategy covering financial years 2021/22 – 2023/24 and the supported funding framework, having provided a high-level overview of how capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury management activity contributed to the provision of local public services along with an overview of how associated risk is managed and the implications for future financial sustainability.

**MOTION:** Proposed by Councillor Ross Mackinnon and seconded by Councillor Dominic Boeck:



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That the Council:

- (a) approve the Capital Strategy and supporting Capital Programme for the period 2021/22-2023/24.
- (b) approve the supporting Minimum Revenue Provision Policy (appendix C) for the period 2021/22 – 2023/24.
- (c) approve the supporting Asset Management Strategy (appendix D).
- (d) approve the Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Policy (appendix E) for the period 2021/22.
- (e) approve the proposed CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) Bids for inclusion in the Capital programme 2021/22 (appendix F).

Councillor Ross Mackinnon introduced the Capital Strategy and Programme for the next three years. The administration was proposing an investment in infrastructure of £123m over the three year period which would ensure that West Berkshire remained a great place to live, work, learn and to be healthy. This was particularly important given the past year which had been challenging for all and it would enable the community to build back better from those unprecedented challenges.

The Capital Programme provided substantial investment across the Council's six priorities as set out in the Council Strategy and he specifically highlighted the fact that £40m would be invested in the People Directorate, £36m of which would sit within Education Services to provide new schools for children as well as new facilities, extensions and refurbishments to existing schools. £12m of funding would be set aside for highway improvement schemes in order to keep West Berkshire residents and businesses moving smoothly when people returned to work. Improvements were also proposed for railway stations, cycle and walking path upgrades. £12.5m would be invested in initiatives linked to the Environment Strategy of which £1.6m of carbon reduction initiatives and £10.4m which would be focused on solar photovoltaic energy generation. £900k of capital funding would be used to introduce separate food waste collections across the district and £500k would be allocated directly to community groups from a pilot scheme to tops slice and accelerate CIL payments to fund infrastructure improvements.

This Capital Programme would not just maintain existing services but it would invest in new schemes across all of the Council Strategy priorities. It was essential that the Capital Programme was sustainable and affordable and £53m of the three year programme was funded from external sources e.g. central government grants and s106/ CIL payments. Councillor Mackinnon stated that capital financing costs were only 9% of the revenue budget and that would remain so across the four year period of the MTFS.

**AMENDMENT:** Proposed by Councillor Jeff Brooks and seconded by Councillor Lee Dillon:

- Invest and open Faraday Road Football Ground so that it was available for Community Football until any re-provision came on stream - Cost £300,000;
- Funding to provide upgraded facilities at Thatcham Library – expanded reception and disabled toilet – Cost £30,000.

Councillor Brooks was supportive of the proposed Capital Programme but asked if the two items outlined above could be included.

Councillor Tony Vickers stated that he was not in favour of moving football out of the town centre although not necessarily on the existing site and the preferred option would be to keep it somewhere in central Newbury. In the interim it would be nice to see some football taking place in the town centre. The plans to relocate the facility to the Rugby Club, whilst it might provide a football facility, would not be a like for like replacement

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which the town deserved. He referred to the Hungerford Football Club ground which was a far better facility for a town that was only a fifth of the size of Newbury. The Liberal Democrats would like to see the London Road Industrial Estate redeveloped at zero carbon standards with a football facility somewhere in that area which would be a beacon for a multi-purpose mixed use area in the town centre. It should at least be no worse and perhaps be partially reinstated to what it was at the time that the lease on the Football Club ended.

Councillor Erik Pattenden referred to the amendment in relation to providing an upgraded reception area and disabled toilet for Thatcham Library. This would make a huge difference to library visitors as in normal times Thatcham Library would see more than 3,000 visitors a month. The Central Family Hub also ran weekly groups for the under-fives and adults. The building did have some disabled facilities but the nearest disabled toilet was in Thatcham Broadway.

Councillor David Marsh was also speaking in support of the Liberal Democrat amendments. The amount proposed for the refurbishment of Thatcham Library was modest and was clearly justifiable. The Green Party were also supportive of the proposal in relation to the football ground as it complemented their amendment to the Capital Programme. It had been two and a half years since the decision was taken to close the ground which had been premature. A lot of children had played football on this ground in the past and there was no demand for another recreation ground which would be adjacent to an existing park. He urged Conservative back benchers to support the amendments rather than block voting against them.

Councillor Lynne Doherty referred to the amendment in relation to the refurbishment of Thatcham Library. Whilst it might be a good suggestion she confirmed that there was a complete library review planned for the coming financial year. Therefore to make any assumptions around the findings of that review would be premature. It should certainly feed into the review. In regards to the £300k for the reopening of the football pitch she did not consider that that was a sensible use of funding for a limited period of time. She reiterated that the Council remained committed to regeneration and redevelopment of the London Road Industrial Estate and it would not be prepared to take any action that might jeopardise those plans. The Council needed to maintain control of that asset for as long as and when the land was required for redevelopment subject to obtaining the necessary planning consent. She questioned the fact that there was now, or had been, demand for children's football in that area. She was therefore recommending refusal of the two amendments as there was still further work to be done.

Councillor Jeremy Cottam raised concerns that West Berkshire Council were not supporting Thatcham Town Council in regards to upgrading Thatcham Library. The library review could take years whereas the work to upgrade facilities could be done quickly and would benefit the disabled in the community to make it a much more pleasant place to go.

Councillor Lee Dillon noted that a review of the library service was to be undertaken but he referred to the distance that a disabled person would have to travel to use the toilet facilities in Thatcham Broadway. This proposal also involved having an external access point as well which would benefit the wider community. If it was proposed to wait for the review would that mean that there was potential for Thatcham to not have a library at all. If the library was to be retained there would be an expectation that the facility should include a disabled toilet. In relation to the London Road Industrial Estate Football Ground it would still cost money to create an open space and car park and the Council had been premature in releasing the land which had therefore robbed the town of a football club.

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Councillor Jeff Brooks noted that it was likely that these two amendments would be voted down. The answer given was that a library review would be undertaken in the fullness of time but no immediate action would be taken. He stated that the Liberal Democrats would be abstaining on the vote for the substantive motion even though there would be some things within the Capital Programme which they would have been supportive of.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon agreed with the comments made by Councillor Doherty as she had given reasonable explanations for both amendments.

The Amendment was put to the meeting and duly **REFUSED**. It was noted that Councillor Rowles abstained from the vote due to technical difficulties.

**AMENDMENT:** Proposed by Councillor David Marsh and seconded by Councillor Carolyne Culver:

### **Page 90 Playing Pitch Action Plan**

Original text: "Provision to support the development of the PPS through additional facilities, including six 3G pitches as part of the PPS Delivery plan subject to business case development, including a suitable replacement for the Faraday Road Sports Ground."

*Amendment: Delete "including a suitable replacement for the Faraday Road Sports Ground."*

Councillor David Marsh stated that the Green Party were supportive of the Playing Pitch Strategy and the fact that the 3G pitches were long overdue across the whole district. The Green Party were not against the football pitches per se but were against relocating the football ground to Wash Common. There had been a flawed consultation exercise which did not seem to conform to the Government's consultation code at all. The facilities at the Rugby Club would not be a like for like replacement for the existing football ground and would not be popular with local residents. He had concerns about traffic and the impact of parking in the area. Councillor Marsh noted that a lot of the detail around the cost of the replacement football ground was in Part II and he felt that it would be a drain on Council taxpayers for years to come. The Council would have to pay rent for the Rugby Club when it did not need to as it already had an adequate site in Faraday Road which would cost less to run and had scope for expansion.

Councillor Steve Marsh concurred with the comments made by Councillor Marsh and added that this was an opportunity to put things right.

Councillor Tony Vickers stated that the Liberal Democrats were supportive of the amendment put forward by the Green Party. The proposals for a new sports ground appeared to be sketchy and badly thought out. There would be public debate on this at the Planning Committee and should it get planning permission he was sure that it would be called in by Sport England. This would mean that the decision would be taken out of the hands of West Berkshire. Any money that the Council had already spent on this or would do so in the future would be better spent on reinstating the current facilities in Faraday Road. The Liberal Democrats were supportive of further work being undertaken to do site investigations in the Faraday Road area but not necessarily on the current site.

Councillor Lynne Doherty disagreed that there was no suitable replacement site. The consultation was still ongoing and the Council was listening to the views of members of the public and key stakeholders. She therefore did not think it was right to support an amendment when the Council was in the middle of a consultation process. Again this was premature. She disagreed with the statement made by Councillor Masters in that there was no good reason to relocate the football ground. The reason that the London Road Industrial Estate regeneration should go ahead was to prioritise local jobs for local

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people and to support the local economy. This should come before the need for a football ground as the regeneration of this area would help the district to thrive into the future. The focus would be on the regeneration of that area and look for a suitable alternative site for the football ground on which consultation was currently taking place. She therefore stated that the Conservative Group would not be supporting the amendment.

Councillor Lee Dillon responded that the Liberal Democrat Group also supported jobs and businesses in the economy but it also supported sports, leisure and culture in a sustainable central location and therefore supported the amendment from the Green Party.

Councillor Carolyne Culver said that it was her understanding that the consultation on Monks Lane had now closed and she asked the Monitoring Officer to check whether that was the case. It sounded like a decision had already been made on this even though consultation had only recently taken place. The Council had not had a single debate on this issue and it was therefore an example of the democratic deficit and lack of unity. If there was to be unity there needed to be more respect for the opposition groups and having amendments accepted. There had been a lot of questions about Faraday Road at various Council meetings which demonstrated the level of feeling and need to seek clarity around this important issue. It did not seem sensible to look at renting another site when the Council had a site that it could use and on which there was no guarantee that planning permission would be granted due to the issue around flooding. Councillor Culver asked for a named vote to be taken on this item and this was agreed although Councillor Graham Bridgman made the point that the Leaders of each group had made a decision to take block votes in order to speed up the process. Councillor Culver agreed that she was happy to go with voting through the Group Leaders as long as the votes were recorded in the minutes.

Sarah Clarke clarified that the proposed amendment related to Faraday Road and the consultation related to the proposals at Monks Lane and the Newbury Rugby Club so there was a difference in terms of what was being proposed. The consultation had closed on 28 February 2021 and the Council was in the process of considering those responses. There was also a webinar scheduled for 15 March 2021 so there was ongoing dialogue with the community regarding the proposals for the sports ground at Newbury Rugby Club.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon concluded that the proposals from both the Liberal Democrat and Green Party were Newbury centric whereas the regeneration of the London Road Industrial Estate would be of benefit for the entire district.

### **FOR the Amendment:**

Councillors: Carolyne Culver, David Marsh, Steve Masters (3)

### **AGAINST the Amendment:**

Councillors: Steve Ardagh-Walter, Peter Argyle, Jeff Beck, Dennis Benneyworth, Dominic Boeck, Graham Bridgman, Jeff Cant, Hilary Cole, James Cole, Lynne Doherty, Clive Hooker, Gareth Hurley, Rick Jones, Alan Law, Tony Linden, Ross Mackinnon, Tom Marino, Graham Pask, Claire Rowles, Garth Simpson, Richard Somner, Jo Stewart, Andy Williamson, Howard Woollaston (24)

### **ABSTAINED from voting on the Amendment:**

Adrian Abbs, Phil Barnett, Jeff Brooks, Jeremy Cottam, Lee Dillon, Billy Drummond, Nassar Hunt, Owen Jeffery, Royce Longton, Alan Macro, Geoff Mayes, Andy Moore, Erik Pattenden, Martha Vickers, Tony Vickers, Keith Woodhams (16)

The Amendment was put to the meeting and duly **REFUSED**.

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**MOTION:** Proposed by Councillor Ross Mackinnon and seconded by Councillor Dominic Boeck:

Councillor Adrian Abbs raised concerns that he could not see the justification for a lot of the IT spend within the Capital budget, particularly the £2m set aside for the Enterprise Resource Planning System.

A number of Members raised queries or highlighted specific schemes/projects which would have an impact in their area.

Councillor Alan Law stated that this was a good news report which was all about investing in the future - £123m over the next three years. Over the last 15 years or so the Council had invested an average of £40m every year on things like schools, Children's Services and infrastructure which included Superfast Broadband. West Berkshire had recently been ranked number two for happiness in the whole of the country and number four overall for health and wellbeing.

Councillor Lynne Doherty agreed that there would be so many projects within the Capital Strategy and Programme which would be beneficial to the residents of West Berkshire. Investment into three primary schools was most welcome and in particular the commitment for a new school in Shaw-cum-Donnington as the parish expanded to accommodate the new housing development in that area.

Councillor Lee Dillon confirmed that his group would be abstaining on the Capital Strategy and Programme. However, there were some good projects and investment contained within the programme. By abstaining it did not mean that the Liberal Democrats did not want to see the vast majority of these projects to go ahead it was due to the fact that their amendments had not been accepted.

Councillor Dominic Boeck supported this strategy and programme as it demonstrated the commitment to the Council's overall Council Strategy which included a priority to support everyone to reach their full potential. Over the next three years it was planned to spend a further £35.7m on the district's schools. This money would be spent on providing the basic need places for children as the population expanded and enhancing and ensuring that existing provision continued in the quality expected for children and young people.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon thanked the opposition as from the comments made it was good that many of the projects within the Capital Programme were supported. Councillor Mackinnon specifically mentioned the £2m for the Enterprise Resource Planning System raised by Councillor Abbs. It might not be necessary to spend that amount as the Council would go through the procurement process and would aim to achieve value for money. He pointed out that some projects in the programme would not have a revenue stream as it was not the intention of the Capital Programme was to make money.

### **FOR the Motion:**

Councillors: Steve Ardagh-Walter, Peter Argyle, Jeff Beck, Dennis Benneyworth, Dominic Boeck, Graham Bridgman, Jeff Cant, Hilary Cole, James Cole, Lynne Doherty, Clive Hooker, Gareth Hurley, Rick Jones, Alan Law, Tony Linden, Ross Mackinnon, Tom Marino, Graham Pask, Claire Rowles, Garth Simpson, Richard Somner, Jo Stewart, Andy Williamson, Howard Woollaston (24)

### **ABSTAINED from voting on the Motion:**

Adrian Abbs, Phil Barnett, Jeff Brooks, Jeremy Cottam, Carlyne Culver, Lee Dillon, Billy Drummond, Nassar Hunt, Owen Jeffery, Royce Longton, Alan Macro, David Marsh, Steve Masters, Geoff Mayes, Andy Moore, Erik Pattenden, Martha Vickers, Tony Vickers, Keith Woodhams (19)

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The Motion was put to the meeting and duly **RESOLVED**.

### 68. Revenue Budget 2021/22 (C3983)

*(All Members had been granted a dispensation by the Monitoring Officer to speak and vote on this item).*

*(Councillor Claire Rowles declared a disclosable pecuniary interest or an other registrable interest in agenda item 18 by virtue of the fact that she had been appointed as a trustee Member on the Citizen's Advice Bureau. She would therefore be made an attendee for the duration of the item and would not vote or take part in the debate on the item).*

The Council considered a report (Agenda Item 18) concerning the 2021/22 Revenue Budget, which proposed a Council Tax requirement of £104.32m, requiring a Council Tax increase of 1.99%. The Council Tax increase would raise £2.04m. The Council was not proposing any use of the Adult Social Care precept and there would therefore not be any increase in the precept. The overall Council Tax increase was intended to balance the financial impact of the pandemic on residents, mitigating the financial pressures they faced, as well as the cost pressures that the Council faced.

The budget detailed the investment for the year ahead to deliver the Council Strategy and support core Council Services. This included investment in Adult Social Care, economic development and prevention work. The budget also allocated revenue funding to deliver the Capital Strategy (separate paper) that had a substantial amount of investment in infrastructure for the year ahead, including savings proposals, other income sources and £3.2m of support from Government for Covid-19 costs. The Council was proposing to support the budget with a £2.2m contribution from reserves; it was rare that the Council would use such a sizeable level of one-off support for the budget but the impact of the pandemic on the current year budget, allied to Government financial support, had led to an expected underspend in the current year that was being partially used to support the 2021/22 budget.

The report also proposed the Fees and Charges for 2020/21 as set out in Appendix F, the Parish Expenses as set out in Appendix G and recommended the level of General Reserves as set out in Appendix E.

Councillor Mackinnon introduced a minor alteration to the proposal for the revenue budget (recommendations at pages 123-125 of the agenda), and clarified that the recommendation at paragraph (10) was that Council: "Consider and reject the motion presented at the Council meeting of 3rd December 2020 regarding the Citizen's Advice Bureau."

**MOTION:** Proposed by Councillor Ross Mackinnon and seconded by Councillor Lynne Doherty:

"That the Council:

- (1) approves the 2021-22 Council Tax requirement of £104.32 million, requiring a Council Tax increase of 1.99% with a 0% increase in the Council Tax Precept ring-fenced for adult social care;
- (2) the Fees and Charges are approved as set out in Appendix F and the appropriate statutory notices be placed where required;
- (3) the Parish Expenses of £6,410 are approved as set out in Appendix G;
- (4) provide a £150 reduction to Council Tax for claimants receiving Council Tax Reduction falling within a working age category during the 2021-22 financial year. Where the balance to pay for a working age claimant is less than £150, we will

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credit all the remaining liability through this hardship scheme. The remaining funding from the allocation of £838k will be utilised to support the Collection Fund and consideration of the further impact on the Council Tax Reduction Scheme as well as the overall Collection Fund;

- (5) it be noted that the following amounts for the year 2021-22 in accordance with regulations made under Section 31B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, as amended (by the Localism Act 2011):
  - (a) £65,343.65 being the amount calculated by the Council, (Item T) in accordance with regulation 31B of the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 1992 (as amended by the Localism Act 2011), as its council tax base for the year (the number of properties paying council tax);
  - (b) part of the Council's area as per Appendix K being the amounts calculated by the Council, in accordance with regulation 6 of the Regulations, as the amounts of its council tax base for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which a Parish precept relates;
- (6) calculate that the Council Tax requirement for the Council's own purposes for 2021-22 (excluding Parish precepts) is £104,315,255;
- (7) the following amounts be now calculated by the Council for the year 2021-22 in accordance with Sections 32 to 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, amended by the Localism Act 2011:
  - (a) £345,178,680 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(2), (a) to (f) of the Act taking into account all precepts issued to it by Parish councils;
  - (b) £236,356,619 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(3), (a) to (d) of the Act;
  - (c) £108,822,061 being the amount by which the aggregate at 7(a) above, exceeds the aggregate at 7(b) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with the Section 31A(4) of the Act, as its Council Tax requirement for the year (Item R);
  - (d) £1,665.38 being the amount at 7(c) above (Item R), all divided by 5(a) above (Item T), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31B of the Act, as the 'basic amount of its Council Tax for the year (including Parish precepts)';
  - (e) £4,506,806 being the aggregate amount of all special items (Parish precepts) referred to in Section 34(1) of the Act (as per Appendix K);
  - (f) £1,596.41 being the amount at 7(d) above less the result given by dividing the amount at 7(e) above by the amount at 5(a) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34(2) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which no special items relates;
- (8) it be noted that for the year 2021-22, Police and Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley and The Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service have issued precepts to the Council in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 for each category of dwellings in the Councils area as indicated in Appendix K;

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- (9) the Council in accordance with Sections 30 and 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, hereby sets the aggregate amounts shown in the tables in Appendix K as the amounts of Council Tax for 2021-22 for each part of its area and for each of the categories of dwellings;
- (10) consider and reject the motion presented at the Council meeting of 3rd December 2020 regarding the Citizen's Advice Bureau.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon moved the Motion and set out three minor amendments which included updated figures in paragraph (7) of the recommendations, recommendation (10) to be altered to state that the Motion in relation to the Citizen's Advice Board be considered and rejected, and that the fees and charges for taxi and hackney carriage licences as set out in Appendix F be frozen as recommended by the Licensing Committee. All Group Leaders indicated that they were in agreement with the proposed amendments and it was confirmed that they had therefore been accepted.

Councillor Mackinnon noted that Covid had resulted in a significant divergence from the budget in some services particularly within the People Directorate. He thanked Councillor Jeff Brooks for taking a constructive approach in recognising the unprecedented challenges facing the Council during the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission meetings where revenue spend was reviewed against the budget which had been set. The Council had received support from Central Government during the pandemic but there would be longer term impacts on future budgets. He expressed his thanks to the Revenues and Benefits Team who had done an excellent job in distributing business grants across the district. They had provided over £17m of support to businesses to sustain them through the pandemic.

Councillor Mackinnon referred to the Motion in respect of the Citizen's Advice Bureau which had budgetary implications as it was calling on funds to be invested and was also asking for MPs to lobby Central Government to campaign to meet various changes to the benefit system and financial support. The Prime Minister had that evening made an announcement that matters were currently under review in relation to Universal Credit and therefore it was not proposed to lobby MPs any further on that issue. In the current financial year the Council had provided £104k to the CAB and the Council had a service level agreement in place with them until March 2022 and for those reasons it was proposed that the Motion should be rejected.

In terms of the Council Tax level although he would like to keep it at the same level it cost the Council more to provide the same level of services to residents and as mentioned previously 75% of the Council's income came from Council Tax. This year the Council had decided not to take the 3% Adult Social Care precept unlike some other Councils and it was therefore proposing a Council Tax increase of 1.99%. Demand for Adult Social Care services had been lower this year due to the pandemic and it would likely remain at a lower level than originally forecast for a number of years before resuming an upwards trend. It was also the main driver of the £3.2m predicted underspend in the current year. It would therefore be wrong to impose an additional precept for Adult Social Care given the current situation. However, the Council was only in a position to do that because of the extensive financial support it had received from Central Government over the past year.

Councillor Mackinnon highlighted a number of areas where investment would be made over the coming year. The level of reserves would increase from £8m in the previous year to £9.35m in April 2021. This was a prudent level with all the continuing uncertainty of the impact from Covid. He felt that this budget struck the right balance between investing in services and infrastructure whilst keeping Council Tax rises to a minimum.



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**AMENDMENT:** Proposed by Councillor Jeff Brooks and seconded by Councillor Lee Dillon:

### 1) People Directorate

- A) Funding to allow Council Tax Relief for care leavers (on-going)

Cost £10,000

This will help eighteen to twenty one year old care leavers in West Berkshire to start to make their own way in the world by giving them relief from Council Tax.

- B) Funding for instrument loan for Maestros to supply instruments to all Y3 pupils in West Berks (on-going)

Cost £30,000

Playing a musical instrument brings many benefits to young children, and for some, leads to a life-long passion for amateur or even professional performing arts. To nurture this we want every primary school child in West Berkshire to have the opportunity of learning to play a musical instrument.

- C) Freeze ASC personal fee increases for 2021/22 (on-going)

Cost £4,000

Many families have to contribute to the costs of relatives' care. The finances of many of those families are, or are likely to be, stretched by reduced incomes due to furlough, redundancies, reduced hours or less overtime. This amendment is to ease the financial pressure on these families.

- D) Funding for Corn Exchange Learning Centre education program to support their children's and adults learning program (one off)

Cost £20,000

This will help people across West Berkshire overcome the isolation of the COVID lockdowns of the last year and to reduce the barrier of cost, this will help support the people of West Berkshire to participate in art learning programs provided by the Corn Exchange Learning Centre.

- E) Community Support Fund – Arts and Culture (one off)

Cost £20,000

This will create a support fund for arts and culture sector within West Berkshire.

- F) Funding to provide relief for town and parish councils to cover contributions for library services (on-going)

Cost £100,000

This will reduce the requirement for parish councils to pay to maintain a service which is the statutory function of West Berkshire to maintain.

- G) Funding to provide Active Travel support for schools (on-going)

Cost £50,000 (officer)

To restore the School Travel Plans Officer post in the light of the increasing priority of Active Travel, linked to the public health, climate emergency and sustainable travel agendas.

- H) Funding for Berkshire Youth to allow the detached youth work in schools work to continue after funding from the PCC ends in March 2021 (on-going)

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Cost £50,000

This will allow Berkshire Youth to continue to provide detached youth work in all schools in West Berkshire, by providing £50,000 to replace the funding they are losing from the TV PCC. Without this funding being replaced, school children in West Berkshire will no longer benefit from this youth work.

### 2) Place Directorate

- A) West Berkshire becoming its own Power company (invest to save)

Cost £100,000

By becoming a supplier, we are able to take advantage of the higher revenue and so more environmental projects become affordable whilst also contributing to the council's revenue stream and gives us options to encourage businesses with West Berkshire. This funding would provide for Feasibility studies to establish the business plan for major investment and return on that investment in future years.

- B) Develop larger Solar Power generation facilities to provide energy for Council use and to sell to consumers/industry (one off)

Cost £100,000

The current plan is only 3-4% of what is needed in West Berkshire and we are therefore proposing to enlarge current activity to have a chance of meeting the Council's carbon reduction targets on time.

- C) Introduce energy standard for all suppliers (carbon footprint) (taking into account their ability to do the work) - 2nd officer to help here (on-going)

Cost £50,000 (officer)

This will introduce a standard that can be built into tenders and RFPs that go to suppliers. Responses should then include details about critical elements that allow the Council to evaluate suppliers for their green credentials. This ensures suppliers have environmental concerns front and centre when responding to such opportunities.

- D) Power from water (rivers and canals) (Kennet, Dunn and Lambourn) Initial Projects run in conjunction with NTC as locations previously established plus (one off)

Cost £150,000

To undertake a Feasibility study and develop a Business Plan for future years with all costings; looking at micro hydro schemes across the Council that take only 6% of space compared to equivalent sized energy schemes using solar.

- E) Green hubs adjunct to community hub (consumer & business focus) 2nd additional officer to also help here plus some KPI's from other Officers.

Cost £50,000 (officer)

As expertise grows within the council this aims to embed the sharing of that expertise with consumers and business.

- F) Viable villages (investigation of what needs to change to make West Berks villages viable long term) 2nd additional officer to also help here.

Cost £40,000 (officer)

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To work with every village within West Berkshire to understand what was needed to make their village viable in the longer term - in areas such as community mix, energy supplies, and housing.

- G) Remove the green bin charge for those in receipt of Council Tax benefits.

Cost £100,000

Roughly 5,500 homes. We assume an uptake of around one third of these households at a cost of £50 each, meaning a total cost of £92,000 but we allow more than this within this cost allocation (on-going).

- H) Create taxi recovery fund – so no license fee. (One off – one year)

Cost £40,000

To provide support to Taxi drivers so that we maintain an active rank.

- I) Do not delete Enforcement Officer as planned by Administration (Place D&P E4)

Cost £30,000

Public perception that planning enforcement is extremely ineffective, risks undermining support for whole planning system. Instead of cutting a post, this would urgently review processes, work more closely with parish councils and boost resources.

- J) Reintroduce Planning letters to neighbours – 0.8 FTE plus postage costs (on-going)

Cost £40,000

This would form part of the effort to boost public confidence in the planning system. The Council should investigate use of case officer or parish councils for hand delivery of letters to save postage costs.

- K) Allow for more community speed reviews by increasing officers to carry out assessments 0.5 FTE (on-going)

Cost £25,000

Boost public confidence in highway safety and help encourage increases in Active Travel.

- L) Town Centre Refurbishment Plans – Thatcham, Theale, Hungerford

Cost £150,000 (additional to budget papers)

This will give our towns the opportunity to create a sense of 'place' within their centres, helping them to remain viable as shopping habits change.

### 3) Resource Directorate

- A) Green Bins – reduce charge to provide a £2 discount (becomes £48) for the lack of collection in January 2021 (one off)

Cost £46,000

This would reduce the green bin charge to £48 per year for next year.

### Summary

The financial demand was modest and would lead to only a small revenue demand in servicing the increased borrowing requirement and which could be contained within existing budgets/reserves.

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Councillor Jeff Brooks confirmed that he was speaking mainly to the package of amendments to the budget proposals that the Liberal Democrats had put forward. It proposed some additional spend which would improve Council services and the quality of those services to local residents. The level of money required was modest and affordable and comprised 21 additional lines of spend amounting to just under £600k of recurring revenue investment. He acknowledged that the current financial year had not been easy to manage and the forecast going forward would need to be prudent as the country came out of the pandemic. That was the reason why some of the amendments put forward in the previous year had not been brought forward again. The focus was on helping two groups who had been going through difficult times.

Councillor Brooks had had discussions around whether the amendments would be taken separately or in small blocks but this had not been accepted by the Leader who had stated that the amendments would be taken en bloc. So even if there was one proposal that might be acceptable it would fail as it would not be debated separately. Therefore the same budget process would be followed as in previous years which was disappointing. Councillor Brooks mentioned the proposal to adjust the green bin charge by reducing it to £48 for next year due to the cancellation of one collection of the green bin. It had been stated that it would not be cost effective to give a refund of just under £2 at the time. However, the Council had taken money from people without providing the service. Councillor Steve Ardagh-Walter responded that due to unprecedented circumstances it had not been possible to collect the green bins for a short period. However, the Council had offered to collect extra bags of green waste for a short period after the suspension of the service.

Councillor Brooks noted that there was a sum of £150k for Town Centre Plans proposed in the budget but the Liberal Democrats would like to extend that to Theale, Hungerford and Lambourn and had therefore included a further £150k to support those rural areas rather than focusing on urban areas.

Councillor Brooks concluded that the Liberal Democrat amendment had put forward a range of budget proposals which were affordable and which would assist people who had been hardest hit by the pandemic. Some of the proposals would not be difficult to take on board but he felt that the current process was flawed.

Councillor Lynne Doherty responded that she was concerned that 21 individual amendments had been presented to the meeting that evening and although Councillor Brooks had stated that they were modest they did equate to £1.2m of additional revenue expenditure. The paper suggested that this could be taken from Reserves or from existing budgets but there was no mention of what could be cut out of the existing budget to make this possible. Councillor Doherty had mentioned earlier the importance of producing a fair and balanced budget within the MTFs that took into account future risks and none of that had been taken into account in the amendments. She agreed that there might be some potentially good ideas within the amendments but they were just ideas and would need to be considered alongside their feasibility and the fit within existing strategies. In respect of the proposal to retain the Enforcement Officer this had already been picked up and she confirmed that there would be no reduction in the number of Planning Enforcement Officers. However, in relation to the process it would be unreasonable to expect a decision to be made on what little information had been provided as they would need to be checked for feasibility. She had asked in the discussion on the substantial revenue proposal that the relevant Portfolio Holders highlight individual items that they felt might be worthy of further investigation. However, it would have been helpful if these budget proposals could have been worked on earlier in the year and submitted to the relevant areas to be considered. In respect of the voting arrangements it was not in her gift to make constitutional changes to the process and this

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would need to be decided by Council. She would be happy for the Constitution Review Task Group to look at that and bring forward alternative proposals.

The Chairman of the Council reminded Members that time was moving on and it would therefore be necessary to vote on the Motion to continue the meeting past 10.00pm. Therefore, in accordance with paragraph 4.9.12 of the Constitution Councillor Graham Bridgman proposed that the meeting should continue past 10.00pm provided that all business could be conducted by 10.30pm. This was agreed.

Councillor David Marsh confirmed that he broadly supported the amendments put forward by Councillor Jeff Brooks apart from the unnecessary refund of the green bin charge. People had been allowed to put out additional waste on the following collection day and he had not received any complaints from local residents about this issue. He shared the concerns raised by Councillor Brooks about the process around the voting arrangements for the budget amendments and a compromise was offered but not accepted. However, it would be explored through the Constitution Review Task Group and hopefully a better process could be agreed for the following year. However, he did want to make the point that had the Council discussed and voted separately on each of the Liberal Democrat and Green Party amendments for both the Capital and Revenue

Councillor Tony Vickers stated that amendments I and J were designed to boost public confidence in the Planning system as it was not the right time to cut a post in Planning Enforcement. Although it was not a statutory function it was a factor in the low opinion many residents had in the planning system. The Chairman of the Council pointed out that this issue had already been addressed by the Leader in her earlier comments when she confirmed that the Planning Enforcement Officer post would not be deleted. Councillor Vickers apologised but asked if he could raise the point that there was a need to involve Parish Councils much more in the Planning system.

Councillor Alan Law raised a point of order. The comments made by Councillor Vickers were in respect of the Planning system and was nothing to do with the amendments to the budget. Councillor Vickers responded that he was referring to the amendment around the restoration of the neighbourhood letters which had been withdrawn. He also referred to public safety in respect of speed limit reviews and active travel support for schools as this was something that needed to be prioritised amongst young people.

Councillor Lee Dillon raised a point of order and asked what would happen if the Council did not get through the debate. Unless speaking rights were limited to one minute then it would not be possible to get through the agenda. Members had been advised of their speaking time limits but hardly anyone had breached the limit and yet time was rapidly running out. It did not seem fair that Members were being rushed through their careful deliberation because of an arbitrary time limit.

Councillor Alan Law also raised a point of order. He proposed that the question be put. This was seconded by Councillor Dominic Boeck. The Chairman of the Council noted that time was running out and it was necessary to set the budget that evening. Sarah Clarke outlined the process which would need to be followed in relation to the Closure Motion and asked the Leaders of each group how they wished to vote.

Councillor Lynne Doherty reluctantly agreed as it was necessary to agree a budget.

Councillor Lee Dillon did not agree as he felt that it was a travesty of debate and justice.

Councillor Carlyne Culver agreed with the comment made by Councillor Dillon.

The Monitoring Officer confirmed that the Closure Motion had been carried and the meeting would now move to the close of debate provisions.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon confirmed that he had nothing further to add.

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The Amendments were put to the vote and declared LOST.

Councillor Lee Dillon stated that he was not willing to take any further part in the meeting and was going to leave the Chamber. He urged his Party to leave with him as despite being democratically elected representatives of West Berkshire residents their voices were not being heard. Councillor Carolyn Culver confirmed that her Party would also be leaving the Chamber.

### **Green Party Amendment:**

#### **Investment**

##### **Page 145 D&P13 LRIE site investment**

*Amendment: Delete from budget*

Reason: Further consultants' fees on the LRIE cannot be justified, especially as D&P13 earmarks a similar sum for Council Officers to support the project.

#### **Savings and Income Generation**

##### **Page 150 E20 Cashless Parking**

*Amendment: Delete from budget*

Reason: The claimed savings simply do not add up. CEOs more than pay for themselves. Moreover, cashless parking machines do not “mean we need less CEOs” as they face ever increasing demands – for example, Safer Schools, pavement parking, cycle lanes, and other active travel schemes.

### **Green Party Investment Proposals**

#### 1) Berkshire Youth

*Proposal: £37,000 grant*

Reason: To provide a full-time youth worker to support young people, particularly those who have experienced loss, isolation, changes in parental employment or income and uncertainty about their future as a result of living through Covid-19, and to give them a voice in the community to engage in future youth opportunities.

#### 2) Community United

*Proposal: £35,000 grant*

Reason: To cover staffing costs and enable this non-partisan organisation to concentrate on its key aims of bringing West Berkshire communities together, raising awareness and working to eliminate discrimination, promoting positive relationships between our diverse communities, advocating for equal opportunities for all in West Berkshire.

#### 3) West Berkshire Foodbank

*Proposal: £35,000 grant*

Reason: To cover staffing costs and enable the Foodbank to concentrate on its role of helping to feed families in crisis, particularly those affected by Covid-19.

budgets it would have taken a very long time and it was hoped that a more productive way forward could be found for the future.

The Chairman of the Council noted that the amendment from the Green Party had not been debated and the Monitoring Officer confirmed that unless anyone else moved or seconded the amendment it would not be voted on.

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Councillor Richard Somner confirmed that he was going to offer Members of the Opposition the opportunity to discuss those matters that related to transport and countryside through the Transport Advisory Group.

Councillor Rick Jones commended the strong financial management of the Council and the production of such a positive budget in the current extreme circumstances. The proposed budget was positive for his ward particularly around investment in the Council Strategy for community support engagement which helped his community's resilience and in particular the partnership with the voluntary sector.

Councillor Steve Ardagh-Walter welcomed the chance to build on progressing work on the Environment Strategy over the coming years.

Councillor Dominic Boeck confirmed that he would be happy to discuss youth worker services with the Opposition but there was a big shift in the way that abuse services had been funded and he was keen to undertake a review of how the Council could maintain strong links and support young people after the age of 18 where they became liable for Council Tax yet were unable to afford it. The Service would also be announcing exciting news in relation to the Holiday Activities Programme for children. The Government had provided funding but it was proposed to deliver the summer programme in partnership with schools and local organisations and he would ensure that the Corn Exchange had the opportunity to participate in the programme if they wished.

Councillor Graham Bridgman stated that it was disappointing that the Opposition parties had left the Chamber but he stressed the point that the Council was governed by the Constitution which limited the length of meetings to 10.30pm. At times it was necessary to cut debate in order to meet that deadline and the Council had an absolute legal obligation to set a budget. He stressed the point that the only way that the Council had been able to set a balanced budget with only a 1.99% Council Tax increase was because of the regrettable deaths of some residents which had had an impact on the Adult Social Care budget. It was not a position that he would have liked to be in. Councillor Lynne Doherty concurred with the comments made by Councillor Bridgman and she commended the budget which was about the recovery process from Covid and supporting residents through it.

The Motion was put to the meeting and duly **RESOLVED**.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 4.15.2 it was requisitioned that the voting on the Amendment be recorded. The names of those Members voting for, against and abstaining were read to the Council as follows:

### **FOR the Motion:**

Councillors: Steve Ardagh-Walter, Peter Argyle, Jeff Beck, Dennis Benneyworth, Dominic Boeck, Graham Bridgman, Jeff Cant, Hilary Cole, James Cole, Lynne Doherty, Clive Hooker, Gareth Hurley, Rick Jones, Alan Law, Tony Linden, Ross Mackinnon, Tom Marino, Graham Pask, Garth Simpson, Richard Somner, Jo Stewart, Andy Williamson, Howard Woollaston (23)

### **ABSTAINED:**

Councillor Geoff Mayes (1).

## **69. Statutory Pay Policy 2021 (C3984)**

The Council considered a report (Agenda Item 19) concerning the approval of the Statutory Pay Policy Statement for publication from 1 April 2021.

**MOTION:** Proposed by Councillor Jo Stewart and seconded by Councillor Garth Simpson:

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That the Council:

“approve the Statutory Pay Policy Statement for publication from 1 April 2021”.

Councillor Jo Stewart referred to the amendment to this item in respect of paragraph 3.1.23 and 3.1.24 of the policy. Exit Pay Cap Regulations 2020 had been revoked with effect from 12 February 2021 and paragraph 3.1.23 would therefore be deleted and paragraph 3.1.24 would be amended to state sums up to £99,999 as per the Statutory Pay Policy for 2020.

It was noted that this report had been reviewed through Corporate Board, Operations Board and Personnel Committee which was a cross party committee. This item had been debated and amendments had been made to the policy as a result of that discussion. One of the amendments related to the tightening up of the process around additional payments.

The Motion was put to the meeting and duly **RESOLVED**.

### 70. **Member Development Programme 2021/2022 (C3991)**

The Council considered a report (Agenda Item 20) concerning the proposed Member Development Programme for 2021/22. The programme was considered and endorsed previously, by the Member Development Group on 19 January 2021 and at Corporate Board on 12 and 26 January 2021.

**MOTION:** Proposed by Councillor Jo Stewart and seconded by Councillor Clive Hooker:

That the Council:

“consider the proposed draft Member Development Programme and ensuing resource implications for approval of the Programme for the 2021 Municipal Year”.

Councillor Jo Stewart confirmed that the programme had been developed as part of the cross party Member Development Group and had been approved by Corporate Board. It was one of those programmes that was ever changing but it included some training sessions which were mandatory for Members. There needed to be some flexibility in order that it could adapt and include sessions as necessary. It was also proposed that £5,000 should be set aside from the Corporate Training budget to fund any external training required by Members.

Councillor Stewart commended the teams involved in delivering the training sessions during 2020 as they had had to make use of new technology to deliver the sessions. It was a testament to those members of staff who had risen to the challenge and had found a way to deliver the programme in difficult times.

The Motion was put to the meeting and duly **RESOLVED**.

### 71. **Response to Proposed Fireworks Motion (C3972)**

The Council considered a report (Agenda Item 21) concerning the response to the Proposed Fireworks Motion which had been submitted to Full Council on 10 September 2020 by Councillor Richard Somner.

**MOTION:** Proposed by Councillor Hilary Cole and seconded by Councillor Richard Somner:

That the Council:

“(1) note the report which was taken to the Licensing Committee on 8 February 2021 which considered the PPP response to the proposed motion;



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- (2) approve the recommendations of the Licensing Committee and agree the amended Motion;
- (3) recommend a West Berkshire Fireworks Policy be presented to the next Licensing Committee for their approval.”

The Chairman of the Council proposed that due to a shortage of time this item should be deferred to the Council meeting on 8 July 2021. This proposal was moved and seconded by Councillors Hilary Cole and Richard Somner.

The amended Motion was put to the meeting and duly **RESOLVED**.

### 72. Notices of Motion - Public Funds for Public Access

The Council considered the under-mentioned Motion (Agenda item 22 refers) submitted in the name of Councillor Tony Vickers relating to Public Funds for Public Access.

**MOTION:** Proposed by Councillor Tony Vickers and seconded by Councillor Howard Woollaston.

The Chairman noted that the mover of the Motion had left the meeting and it was therefore proposed that it would be deferred to the Council meeting on 8 July 2021.

The proposal to defer the Motion was put to the meeting and duly **RESOLVED**.

### 73. Members' Questions

A full transcription of the Member question and answer session is available from the following link: (link to pdf on website)

- (a) A question standing in the name of Councillor Adrian Abbs on the subject of carbon contribution would receive a written response from the Executive Member for Environment.
- (b) A question standing in the name of Councillor Martha Vickers on the subject of meeting the need of children for opportunities to play and socialise in the coming months would receive a written response from the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education.
- (c) A question standing in the name of Councillor Phil Barnett on the subject of the number of redundancies in the last five years would receive a written response from the Executive Member for Internal Governance.

A full transcription of the public and Member question and answer sessions are available from the following link: [Transcription of Q&As](#). *(right click on link and 'Edit Hyperlink'. Insert URL to pdf on website in 'address' field)*

*(The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and closed at 10.30 pm)*

**CHAIRMAN** .....

**Date of Signature** .....