

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE EXECUTIVE
HELD ON 26 JANUARY 2023 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.25 PM**

Members Present:

Councillors: Clive Jones (Chair), Stephen Conway (Vice-Chair), Rachel Bishop-Firth, Prue Bray, Lindsay Ferris, Paul Fishwick, David Hare, Sarah Kerr, Ian Shenton and Imogen Shepherd-DuBey

69. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 24 November 2022 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair, subject to 'less' being added to the fourth paragraph of the Statement from the Leader after '£7,500'.

70. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillor Prue Bray declared an interest in agenda item 74.8: Temporary Closure Remenham Footpath No 4 Henley Festival, as a member of the Open Spaces Society, who had submitted an objection to this item. Councillor Prue Bray left the meeting room during the consideration of this item.

71. STATEMENT FROM THE LEADER

"We are beginning a piece of work to plan for what we want the future to look like in the borough. Wokingham Borough Council is embarking on a new approach to thinking about the future, one that is centred on the communities own aspirations. In the past, the Council has drawn up its own strategy and then consulted on it. Now we want to involve our external partners in shaping a vision for the future that the Council will then seek to implement, through its strategies and policies.

For the first time, the Council is embracing a bottom up rather than a top down approach. I've asked the Council's Deputy Leader, Councillor Stephen Conway to lead on this very important project and we are very happy that he is able to do this along with all of his other responsibilities.

We are looking for the involvement of the Council's external partners throughout the process. This will truly be a Borough vision, jointly authored by a range of interested parties not just the Council.

To begin the process next week there is a meeting in Wokingham Town Hall with representatives from town and parish councils, voluntary bodies, equality groups, businesses, faith groups, schools, young people and the Reading University to discuss this new approach.

The meeting will be facilitated not by the Council but by an organisation called NewLocal which specialises in community engagement. The Council will be represented by the leaders of the different political groups and the Chief Executive and senior officers. The Council will be there as an equal partner with the other parties, not as managers of the event.

The opening session next week will be followed by a series of workshops in February and March to enable us to share views and begin the task of preparing a Borough vision that will shape the Council's strategy over the coming years.

We have to lift our eyes from the immediate challenges and look ahead to map out the future that we can all feel part of. I am very pleased that so many local bodies have committed to attending the event next week and the follow up workshop. It is very important work for the future of the Borough and I urge Council partners to fully engage with this work.”

Director of Place and Growth, Steve Moore:

“Steve, is our Director of Place and Growth and is leaving us tomorrow after 18 months with us, to take up another appointment.

As Leader of the Council, I would like to thank him for the excellent work that he has done for us since he started here. Steve has been difficult to work with and challenging, but that’s what has made him such a good officer. Steve doesn’t say ‘yes’ to everything, he gives alternatives, points out pitfalls and is prepared to challenge the leadership. He challenges in a very nice way, without losing any temper, without being upset and for me, that is particularly important.

Those in senior roles in the Council have to be able to engage with councillors. Councillors have to be able to engage with officers in a respectful way and I can speak for the whole Executive when I say that we have a huge amount of respect for Steve and that he will be a very hard act to follow.

I know where Steve is going, I know he will still be available for a call at 7.15am. I shall miss the early morning calls that we have had. I will be talking to the people on the Council where you are headed, to let them know that they will be getting a good officer and that Steve can be difficult and challenging, but as I say, for me, that is something to be enormously respected and I think you’ve done an excellent job for us.”

72. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

In accordance with the agreed procedure the Chairman invited members of the public to submit questions to the appropriate Members.

73. MEL HORTON HAS ASKED THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HEALTH, WELLBEING AND ADULT SERVICES THE FOLLOWING QUESTION:

Question

How many adults with learning disabilities combined with mobility needs are on the waiting list/ have requested accommodation that the council has been unable to fulfil, for Supported Living Accommodation in Wokingham as of 1st Jan 2023?

Answer

Supported Living in Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) can range from a number of options including accessing general housing stock with outreach support, extra care support with access to background support overnight, and shared supported living accommodation which has access to 24-hour care and support. Adult Social Care, in partnership with colleagues in Housing and Operational Commissioning Services, hold a shared housing list specifically for those individuals on the housing register who have specialist needs. There are currently about 100 individuals on this list.

Out of the 100 people on this list, around 14 individuals have a learning disability combined with mobility needs. None of these individuals have been assessed as having an urgent need for accommodation; all are currently accommodated with either families or are in settled accommodation with a requirement to move. For those people living with families who have assessed Care Act needs, robust packages of support are in place to assist carers and individuals.

I am very proud that in the last two to three years we have developed the housing stock in Wokingham. The success of this work has resulted in 29 individuals moving into adapted accommodation within the heart of Wokingham Borough. This accommodation was purpose built to support individuals with mobility needs. This has resulted in some wonderful outcomes for individuals who are becoming more independent and are being an active part of the community. We are now entering the second phase of planning to forecast and respond to a growing need for accommodation for those with specialist needs.

Supplementary Question

In light of the Learning Disability strategy and policy which is now in its fourth year, and the work to plan and design accommodation to meet the mobility needs of adults with learning disabilities in the community. How much additional supported living accommodation for adults with learning disabilities will become available in the next few months? My brother is waiting to move to Wokingham currently. As well as being assured his case is being reviewed weekly, it has been politely suggested we look elsewhere.

Answer

I can not say how much will be available over the next few months, as there are numerous factors involved. As with all other cases, your brothers case will be looked at, and we will continue to work to ensure a way forward is found.

74. KEITH MALVERN HAS ASKED THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HEALTH, WELLBEING AND ADULT SERVICES THE FOLLOWING QUESTION:

Question

An outline planning application (211777 valid on the 8th of June 2021) for up to 130 residential units and a 70 bed care home was approved, subject to conditions, at the end of last year. How much money has the Borough Council spent on this proposal before the application was submitted and since then?

Answer

The planning consent referenced in this question is for a new 70-bed care home and up to 130 residential units on the Council's land at Toutley East, in north Wokingham. The provision of a new care home is an important priority for the Council as a replacement for Suffolk Lodge and for a specialist Dementia care home and will ensure we can offer high quality local affordable care for our residents.

Approximately £340,000 was spent on site surveys, feasibility and design work and planning application preparation to secure outline planning consent. Following the granting of planning consent approximately £500,000 has been spent on detailed design and preparation for a start on site for the construction of the site-wide infrastructure and the care home. This spend is within the capital budget for the project, as allocated within the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan.

Supplementary Question

How much was spent to arrive at a solution which provides the necessary accessibility, and how much was spent explaining to residents and councillors what that is.

Answer

I can get this information from officers, I would say there has been large concerns around access, in a bid to make it as safe as possible. Ensuring safe access for residents, the care home and its staff.

75. JULIET SHERRATT HAS ASKED THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES THE FOLLOWING QUESTION:

Question

Please can you tell me what provision will be made for children on Free School Meals (FSM) during the school holidays in 2023, after Easter? I am aware that the government is continuing to fund the HAF programme, but will the FSM lunch vouchers be government funded? If not, will the council continue to fund them?

Ms Juliet Sherratt was not present at the meeting and so it was agreed that a written response would be provided and is included below:

Answer

The council has committed to providing funding for Free School Meals support during the holidays up until at least May half-term.

Whilst the government announced continuation of the Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAF) for three years and Household Support Fund (HSF) for another year in November during the Chancellor's speech, no details have yet been provided by the government on allocation of these funding streams or any requirements for their use.

Within Wokingham, most holiday support for children receiving Free School Meals is provided through the HSF administered by the Hardship Alliance.

The Hardship Alliance have reviewed provision of this support over the past year and an overview of was presented to the Inclusion Cross Party Working Group earlier in the month. Members of the Group will be meeting with the Hardship Alliance in February to further develop proposals for supporting pupils who are currently receiving Free School Meals and other households who are in need of support, but may not be signed up to FSM, or be marginally above the threshold.

Once the grant determination letter and government guidance on use of the HSF is published, proposals developed will be checked against eligibility to ensure that they meet government requirements. It is fully expected that eligibility will continue to include, but not be restricted to, support for children in receipt of Free School Meals.

We will continue to lobby the government to ensure that provision of funding for Free School Meals is continued, through the HSF or other means, and that the value is increased in recognition of the rising food costs experienced as part of the cost of living crisis having a greater effect on prices of basic food items.

76. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

In accordance with the agreed procedure the Chairman invited Members to submit questions to the appropriate Members

77. GARY COWAN HAS ASKED THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL THE FOLLOWING QUESTION:

Question

Does Wokingham Borough Staff have access to Welfare Support Services or to an Employee Assistance Provider (EAP) or any other such service that are not available to elected Councillors?

Answer

The welfare of staff and Councillors is of the upmost importance to the Council on this basis I can confirm that the Council does commission the services of a company called Vita Health Group to provide an employee assistance programme which is available for both staff and Councillors to access.

Other support the Council offers is Mental Health First Aiders these are staff members who can be approached if someone is experiencing poor mental health or emotional distress. They offer a non-judgmental space for someone to speak in confidence and if required, they can guide the person to appropriate professional support. This is currently a group that is available to staff but could be something we explore further for Councillors if it was felt it could be helpful.

Supplementary Question

Councillors should be treated in the same way as officers, I would welcome this. What action will you be taking?

Answer

I will bring this to the Constitution Review Working Group. Your point is valid, Councillors should be supported and treated the same as officers and have access to this support.

78. CHARLES MARGETTS HAS ASKED THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR PLANNING AND LOCAL PLAN THE FOLLOWING QUESTION:

Question

The only way to control development in the Borough is to create a Local Plan. The Liberal Democrat led coalition put the Local Plan on hold when it took control of the Council last year. In Council late last year you stated a timetable for a new Plan would appear in 2023. Please can you advise when this will appear and when you expect it to be completed?

Answer

You are mistaken. The Local Plan is not on hold, and it never has been.

A substantial body of work is continuing on the evidence base that will support future discussions and sound decision making. This includes work on transport and flood risk modelling, and housing, economic and retail assessments all of which you will agree are essential.

As you will be aware, the government is consulting on changes to national planning policy. I cautiously welcome some of the government's proposals, however it is important that we reflect on this before agreeing a revised programme for the local plan and publish the next stage.

Whilst preparing the evidence base is taking a little longer than previously expected, we continue to work on this and the plan, so that we are ready to push forward as soon as the national picture becomes clearer.

Supplementary Question

I note your comments and follow your logic, as a Ward member for Finchampstead there have been a number of applications recently which historically the council has been able to defend. If the next phase of the Local Plan is not expedited, it makes it easier for sites to be developed unopposed, which previously the Council has fought against. What other protection can you give in the short run to help defend these marginal sites which people feel very strongly should not be developed.

Answer

We have been doing what residents have requested and looking at the objections made by local people, including Finchampstead as well as many other places across the borough in a way that the previous Administration hadn't done. We have listened to objections and asked officers to see if there were any better options. Work is underway to look at four large areas in the borough, this is being done properly and it takes time. We inherited the issue around the five year land supply from the previous Administration.

If the government proposals as they currently stand come into force in April, are confirmed, two important areas are raised. The first is to take account of overprovision, if overprovision from the existing Local Plan is taken into account, this will work to Wokingham's favour. In addition, the draft National Planning Policy Framework discusses removing the housing buffer, which is calculated as 5% for Wokingham, 42 dwellings per year. This cumulative impact of this is significant and would equate to approx. 2,200 to 2,300 dwellings that the council would not need to plan. I think it is worth fighting for a Local Plan which requires approx. 2,200 less dwellings to be provided in the borough. I would urge you to lobby your MPs that those two matters in the draft NPPF remain in the finalised guidance.

78.1 Norman Jorgensen has asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question:

Question

The footbridge over the railway and A329M beside Earley station is an important link between Earley and Woodley. What are the plans to ensure this remains available?

Answer

The footbridge is on a quarterly monitoring programme. The last monitoring inspection was undertaken during December 2022 and there was no safety concern raised that would require consideration for closing the footbridge.

The Council is currently investigating improvements to this bridge and are engaged with our consultant and specialist contractor to carry out investigations for either a refurbishment, or replacement of the structure should that be required.

Supplementary Question

We were previously told it was not possible to repair the bridge, what has changed and what are the timescales.

Answer

We are currently engaging with our consultant and specialist contractor, we will need to await the findings of their work, that will determine next steps. Once I have received the report, I will update Ward Members and town councils.

79. ALISON SWADDLE HAS ASKED THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ACTIVE TRAVEL, TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS THE FOLLOWING QUESTION:

Question

How does the Council propose to continue the current level of road maintenance residents expect if there is not to be increased provision in the budget?

Answer

Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) has a duty to maintain all adopted highway assets within Wokingham. To ensure the duty is fulfilled, WBC carries out periodic safety inspections of various highway assets to ensure they are safe for public use. Any found to be safety critical will be addressed by carrying out repair work.

The condition and service inspections are carried out in accordance with the annual inspection programmes and the latest data is fed into various asset management systems to maintain an up-to-date central record of the asset condition and carry out required capital works within available budgets to extend assets longevity.

Supplementary Question

The Conservatives doubled Highways maintenance budget for this budget year, not just to improve maintenance but to improve minor works and roads too. For this budget year the Conservatives had set aside £11m for road maintenance. With inflation at 10%, surely this is going to mean cuts. With cold weather, roads will need more maintenance not less. What hope can we offer residents of proper maintenance.

Answer

Each year the Annual Local Authority Road Maintenance (ALARM) surveys are undertaken with the latest being in March 2022. The surveys cover all local roads in England and Wales. In that last survey, ALARM raised the point that over £12.6 billion worth of a backlog of highway maintenance funding existed across England and Wales. Government have underinvested in local highway roads for a long time. Without the necessary funding from the government, our assets will continue to deteriorate.

In the meantime, we are left with a revenue budget to undertake pothole repairs. We have approx. 5,300 road works annually in Wokingham alone, 75% of these are undertaken by utility companies. This work immediately creates a weak area of road. We have just gone through the coldest December since 2010. Second wettest start in 102 years. Both combined, coldest and wettest lead to a detrimental impact on the condition of our roads.

80. MATTERS REFERRED TO THE EXECUTIVE

80.1 Playing Pitch Strategy Approach

The Executive Member for Environment, Sport & Leisure reported that the proposals in the report sought approval to cease further work at Maiden Erlegh at this stage and to reassess the needs of the Earley and Lower Earley area within the strategic review of playing pitches.

RESOLVED that the Executive agreed to cease any further work at Maiden Erlegh at this stage and reassess the needs of the Earley and Lower Earley area within the strategic review of playing pitches. This review would inform optimal pitch locations incorporating a 3G pitch development plan going forward across the Borough.

Reasons for Decision

In July 2022, the Executive approved a proposal for a 3G pitch at Maiden Erlegh School, supporting the need for additional 3G sites across the Borough. Consultation identified several difficulties with the site, while at the same time confirming the demand for such facilities.

Simultaneously, costs escalated, and the Council's financial situation worsened, so that 3G provision in the Earley and Lower Earley area needed to be reassessed. It was agreed that reassessment would be effectively carried out as part of a new Borough-wide Playing Pitch Strategy.

80.2 Energy Procurement Contract

The Executive Member for Climate Emergency and Resident Services reported that the proposals in the report would facilitate cost avoidance and a move towards cleaner energy. Together with the Executive Member for Finance, she thanked officers for their work on this.

RESOLVED that the Executive;

- i) approved in principal the procurement strategy set out in the Procurement Business case for the migration of the Councils energy buying strategy from the current framework provider (CCS – Crown Commercial Service) to the Laser framework;
- ii) recommended the Procurement Business Case to Council for approval;
- iii) noted that an updated Procurement Business Case would be reported back to Executive and Council, with proposed contract terms and timescales for implementation.
- iv) delegated authority to the Director of Resources and Assets, in consultation with the Executive Members for Finance and Contracts, to engage with framework suppliers and negotiate on future contract provision, in line with the approved procurement strategy.

Reason for Decision

The rationale to move framework suppliers is to ensure best value (energy price) for the Council. Energy prices have been rising significantly for the last eighteen months and whilst WBC have appropriate financial provision for this financial year, there is a risk to energy budget from rising costs, for the next financial year and beyond. The Energy Team have been carrying out market analysis assessments on energy pricing and the Council could reasonably be faced with an additional 50 – 60% on today's energy prices.

80.3 Revenue Monitoring 2022/23 Q3

The Executive Member for Finance reported that whilst most areas had made savings, this had not been possible in Children's Services where pressures remained to grow. The Executive Member for Children's Services reported that Children's services were a demand led service, children who required social care intervention and/or other services, must be accommodated. Particular pressures in Wokingham were as a result of being a small authority. Significant pressures this year had arisen from unaccompanied asylum seeking children. The Government had made it mandatory for local authorities to accept children and pressures to the budget could be attributed to the increased numbers of

children moving into the borough. These children would often progress through social care and leaving care, which created a significant pressure on budgets.

The Deputy Leader reported that the Council had faced unprecedented pressures to budgets this year. Significantly increased Inflationary pressures and increases to the demand for services had culminated to significant budgetary pressures.

The Leader, Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Finance, thanked officers for all their hard work on the budget and in particular, the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Resources & Assets who had worked extremely hard to ensure the Council remained financially resilient.

RESOLVED that the Executive noted the overall forecast of the current position of the General Fund revenue budget, Housing Revenue Account and Dedicated Schools Grant illustrated in the Executive Summary and appendices attached to the report.

Reason for Decision

To allow the Executive to note the current forecast outturn positions for 2022/23 for the Council's net revenue expenditure, its General Fund Balance, the Housing Revenue Account and the Dedicated Schools Grant.

80.4 Capital Monitoring 2022/23 - Q3

The Executive Member for Finance reported that many projects had been moved into future years to respond to the challenging budget position that the Council faced. £388,000 had also been allocated to schools to support them with their energy efficiency arrangements.

RESOLVED that the Executive:

- i) noted the position of the capital programme at the end of Quarter 3 (to 31 December 2022) as summarised in the report below and set out in detail in Appendix A to the report.
- ii) approved and noted the proposed carry forwards in the capital programme as set out in Appendix B.
- iii) approved the increase of the schools devolved capital budget by £388,333 to ensure the revised budget allocation matches the confirmed ringfenced grant funding.

80.5 Corporate Peer Challenge - Follow Up Visit

The Chair reported that the members of the Corporate Peer Challenge were wholly independent and impartial, with the assessing team including a Chair from the ruling group of another local authority alongside two senior officers from other local authorities. It had been unfortunate that there had been some misleading social media posts relating to this.

It was clear that there had been palpable and positive improvement seen at Wokingham Borough Council. The Council had clearly embraced issues identified in the original Peer Challenge. The Council's approach to this work had led to the senior management team working in a more joined up way, there had been many positives realised as a result of this work for the Council.

RESOLVED that the Executive noted the progress report of the Corporate Peer Challenge at Appendix 1 of the report.

Reason for Decision

The report presents the findings and conclusions of the Corporate Peer Challenge follow-up visit that took place in October 2022 providing residents with an independent assurance of the Council's progress and improvements since November 2021. The Executive is asked to note the progress report.

80.6 Revised Local Bus Services Improvement Plan

The Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport & Highways reported that local bus services were vital and played an important role for people to access jobs, community, leisure activity, hospital and medical appointments and many other services and activities. Local buses provided a lifeline for the community.

The Bus Service Improvement Plan included ambitious policies which would help the Council to reach carbon neutrality by 2030, for example by implementing electric buses and reducing the need for a private car.

It was noted that all proposals would be subject to securing funding from the Department of Transport.

The Executive Member, Leader and Deputy Leader thanked officers for their work on this.

RESOLVED that the Executive approved the Revised Local Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) for publication, with the delivery of proposals subject to Department for Transport funding being available.

Reasons for Decision

Wokingham Borough Council was unsuccessful in achieving any BSIP grant funding in May 2022 for the October 2021 submission. Therefore, the BSIP has been revised to take account of feedback from the DfT and changes in the local bus market since October 2021. The key changes to the draft BSIP are:

- Updated background information
- Strengthening the role of partnership working
- Revised targets and policies

80.7 NEC Systems - Contract Renewal

The Executive Member for Climate Emergency and Resident Services reported that she welcomed this report as it amalgamated contracts and created cost avoidance. She thanked officers for all their work on this.

RESOLVED that the Executive approved the compliant direct award via the **Crown Commercial Services: Data and Applications RM3821** framework on a five year basis to NEC for the provision of the following systems:

- NEC iWORLD
- NEC Housing
- NEC Information at work

Reason for Decision

Executive approval is required as the total value of the contract exceeds 500k for the five year duration.

The report sets out the proposal for Executive consideration to procure all systems currently provided by NEC to the Council for five year period under a single contract.

The Systems include:

- NEC iWorld – used by Council Tax and Revenue and Benefits.
- NEC Housing – used by the Housing service
- NEX Information at Work - Electronic Document Management System used corporately across the Council.

Entering into a five year contract protects the Council from year on year inflation increase and enables the Council to know the total cost of ownership for the next five years.

80.8 Temporary Closure Remenham Footpath No 4 Henley Festival

Councillor Prue Bray declared an interest as a member of the Open Spaces Society, who had submitted an objection to this item. Councillor Prue Bray left the meeting room during the consideration of this item.

The Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure thanked officers for their work on this.

RESOLVED that the Executive;

- i) approved the making of an order for the closure of Footpath Remenham No 4, for a closure of an 80m section of the footpath for the set up and de rig of the Festival stage from Monday 3 to Wednesday 5 July 2023 inclusive and from Monday 10 July to Tuesday 11 July 2023 inclusive;
- ii) included within the closure a 620m section for evening performances from Wednesday 5 July to Sunday 9 July 2023 inclusive and day time performances on Saturday 8 July and Sunday 9 July 2023, under Section 16A of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, subject to the receipt of the requisite consent of the Secretary of State for Transport.
- i) approved a change to the process for any future applications for the closure of the Thames Path and the Blackwater Valley footpath to delegate the decision as to whether a closure will be made to the Director of Place and Growth in consultation with the Executive Member for Environment.

Reason for decision

A request has been received from the organisers of the Henley Festival of Music and the Arts for the closure of part of the Thames Path National Trail at Remenham (Remenham Footpath 4). The Festival Trust applies annually for this closure to enable the safe management and execution of a locally and regionally enjoyed festival.

The Trust has stated that it is necessary to restrict traffic for the holding of the event and that it is not reasonable for the organisers to hold the event other than on the road in question.

The Authority is required to consider whether it is necessary for traffic to be restricted for the purpose of facilitating the holding of a relevant event and whether it is reasonably practical to hold the event otherwise than on the highway (in this case a footpath).

The applicant has stated that it is necessary to restrict traffic for the holding of the event and that it is not reasonable for the organisers to hold the event other than on the road in question.

Therefore, a decision is needed on whether to approve the making of the closure order if the event is to proceed. The duration of the closure is also required to be approved by the Secretary of State for Transport.

80.9 Chief Finance Officer Report 2023-24

The Executive Member for Finance reported that the Borough was facing some of the most acute challenges in many years and this was borne out in this report. The report provided an independent view from the Chief Finance Officer. It highlighted the shortfall in government settlement. Wokingham had suffered a year on year reduction in budget over the last 14 years.

The Council's reserves had been called upon in previous years and this was no longer an option if financial stability and resilience was to be maintained. There had been numerous significant impacts on the budget during the year which has been unplanned, such as the war in Ukraine, creating an increase in supporting children who had fled the conflict as well as considerable inflationary pressures.

Overall, the report showed Wokingham to be one of the most robust councils in the Country. The Executive Member, together with the Leader and Deputy Leader thanked the Chief Finance Officer for all his hard work on this.

RESOLVED that the Executive;

- i) noted the Chief Finance Officer (CFO) report (Appendix A attached to the agenda papers) and the issues contained within, including the local government finance settlement and the sections on key risks, and that they consider these when setting the council tax for 2023/24 and agreeing the Council's medium term financial plan (MTFP);
- ii) supported the Council's response to the local government finance settlement as set out in Appendix 6 of the Chief Finance Officer report attached to the agenda papers.

Reason for Decision

The Local Government Act 2003 requires the Chief Finance Officer (Deputy Chief Executive and CFO) to report to Members, when setting the level of Council Tax, on the robustness of the budget presented and adequacy of reserves. The CFO report highlights the strong financial management the Council. It also outlines the major financial issues facing the Council in the medium-term period, which without the Council taking a commercial approach could increase the reliance on council tax income as well as impact on the future delivery of Council services.