

COUNCIL
26 FEBRUARY 2025
7.30 - 9.30 PM



Present:

Councillors Penfold (Mayor), Cochrane (Deputy Mayor), Allen, Bailey, Barnard, Bidwell, Brown, Collings, C Eberle, T Eberle, M Forster, S Forster, Frewer, Frost, Gaw, Gillbe, Haffegge, Harrison, Hayes MBE, Jefferies, Karim, McKenzie-Boyle, McLean, Mossom, Neil, O'Regan, Pickering, Pressland, Purnell, Robertson, Smith, Temperton, C Thompson, P Thompson, Virgo, Watts, Webb, Welch, Wright and Zahuruddin

Present Virtually:

Councillors Welch

Apologies:

Councillors Egglestone

44. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

45. Financial Plans and Revenue Budgets 2025/26

Councillor Neil, Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Improvement, gave a presentation on the financial plans and revenue budgets for the financial year 2025/26. Councillor Neil thanked the 135 respondents who participated in the budget consultation from December 11 to January 22 emphasising the importance of public engagement and how the feedback received had helped shape a budget that aligned with the community's priorities.

The following points were raised from her presentation:

- The council had faced several financial challenges, including inflationary pressures, increased demands for services, and uncertainty in funding for the next year.
- The base budget, excluding schools, was set to decrease slightly to £97.3 million before accounting for inflation.
- Total budget pressures amounted to £8.4 million, driven by the demand for social care and new legal requirements.
- The council had identified £5.3 million in savings through efficiency measures, income generation, and reductions in support services, resulting in a budget gap of £4.1 million before considering a council tax increase.
- The council's general reserves were estimated to be £9.85 million by March 2025. This healthy reserve level had been achieved through diligent management of spending within the approved budget.
- The council's funding position had improved due to announcements in the local government finance settlement. Additional funding for social care and the extended producer requirement waste scheme had been particularly beneficial.
- There were uncertainties in planning budgets for 2026-2027 and beyond. The previous government's funding reductions were particularly severe in areas

with higher deprivation and lower council tax bases. The current government had signalled its intent to reverse these reductions.

- The capital programme for 2025/26 to 2027/28 and for the next year equated to £14.386 million, with £8.388 million funded by the council and £5.998 million from external sources such as government grants, Section 106 contributions, capital receipts, and borrowing.
- Arising from the consultation it showed that there was strong public support for various proposals, including spending on roads, property maintenance, new school places, and homelessness support. Environmental work, temporary accommodation, and energy efficiency in council buildings also received significant support.
- The council had an increased reliance on borrowing for the capital programme and it was important to balance this borrowing with the need to maintain assets without putting additional pressure on the revenue budget.
- The flexible use of capital receipts would support the council's business change programme and medium-term financial strategy, helping to deliver important efficiencies and savings.
- The council needed to balance providing high standards of services with making decisions that aligned with its spending power. Anticipated changes in local government funding allocation would reduce future income, making it crucial to set a sustainable budget now.
- The consultation showed that the public generally agreed with the proposed revenue budget savings and increased spending in specific areas.
- There was support for making the garden waste service self-funding, focusing on essential maintenance work, and reducing the number of parking machines.
- The council was committed to achieving net-zero emissions by 2030 and a new climate change strategy outlined the approach to this goal, including investment in infrastructure, skills, and capacity. Consequently, the budget included vital social packages totalling £6.5 million, reflecting the administration's commitment to helping the most vulnerable. A proposed 4.9% council tax increase was necessary to advance the budget position.
- The council planned to support households just above the council tax threshold by increasing funding for financial advice and support schemes and this included a £30,000 increase to help residents with financial difficulties.

In concluding, Councillor Neil expressed confidence that the budget proposals were in the best interests of residents, maintaining a prudent financial approach while delivering quality services. The strategic council plan and budget aimed to set up the council for a stable future.

On the proposition of Councillor Neil, and seconded by Councillor Temperton, the recommendations as set out on the tabled papers were moved.

In line with procedure, the Opposition Groups were invited to respond to the budget in turn.

Councillor Allen spoke on behalf of the Conservative Group, and made the following observations:

- The Conservative Group recognised the significant challenges faced in setting the council's budget. There were financial pressures from rising adult social care costs, inflation, and reduced government funding creating a difficult environment for all councillors. However, they did not feel that the

recommendations addressed the need for fiscal responsibility and long-term sustainability.

- Recognising the necessity of increasing council tax to cover rising costs, it was felt that a 4.99% increase was excessive and placed an undue burden on residents.
- Felt that more should be done to explore partnerships with private sector providers and community organisations to deliver high-quality social care at a lower cost.
- Recognising the impact of government funding cuts and inflation on the council's budget, believed that reliance on increasing taxes was not a sustainable solution.
- They agreed that adult social care was a priority but believed that allocating the entire council tax increase to this area was short-sighted proposing a more balanced approach that also considered the needs of other essential services, such as education, public safety, and infrastructure.
- It was understood the need to compensate for smaller increases in previous years. However, it was believed that significant tax hikes were not the answer and proposed a gradual and predictable increase in council tax that allowed residents to plan their finances accordingly.
- Challenges posed by insurance increases and the resulting shortfall were recognised and recommended exploring alternative insurance providers and risk management strategies to minimise costs while maintaining adequate coverage.
- There was support for initiatives to improve recycling and welcomed the government funding. However, it was felt that budgeting lacked clarity and foresight. It was felt that a more detailed plan was required for the use of funds, ensuring that recycling improvements were sustainable and cost-effective.
- It was recognised that reserves should be used during financial difficulties. However, the Conservative group was concerned about the recommendation for extensive use of reserves, leaving limited funds for future needs.

In conclusion, the Conservative group believed that the recommendations on the budget did not adequately address the need for fiscal responsibility and long-term sustainability and an alternative recommendation with an amendment was proposed. The group requested a more a balanced approach that prioritised essential services, explored cost-saving measures, and ensured financial stability for the future.

Councillor Mike Forster, spoke on behalf of the Liberal Democrats, and made the following points:

- The Liberal Democrat group welcomed the Council's continued commitment to a thorough public consultation on the draft budget for the financial year 2025-2026. They expressed gratitude for the greater assistance provided by officers on the issue. Additionally, they recognised and welcomed the changes to the budget aimed at providing more council tax support to the most vulnerable households.
- It was noted that achieving a balanced budget was challenging due to the unavoidable increase in expenditure and the tight and declining government funding. They highlighted that many councils were facing dire financial trouble and numerous pressures and uncertainties. Despite this, they were pleasantly surprised by the more optimistic outlook of the current budget compared to their expectations.

- Concerns were raised about the budget's heavy reliance on achieving savings in demand-led services, particularly adults' and children's services. They pointed out the challenges hospitals faced in discharging patients due to the lack of social care packages, which could quickly deplete the contingency reserve. They emphasised the importance of looking after frail and elderly relatives and anticipated significant savings from alternative and cheaper services. However, they were worried about how current users of adult social care services would perceive these changes and trusted that cost-cutting measures would be handled sensitively with proper consultation.
- The group expressed disappointment that their observations and requests made during the consultation were overlooked. They challenged the provision for essential maintenance of the council's property assets, warning of the implications of neglecting maintenance. They also suggested the provision of public toilets in town centres and libraries to enhance usability for residents.
- Lastly, they criticised the general reduction in funding for public services over the past 14 years and urged reflection on this issue.

In conclusion, Councillor Forster advised that despite acknowledging the risks associated with the budget, the Liberal Democrat Group believed it offered a solid foundation for future investments.

Councillor Collings, spoke on behalf of the Green Party, and raised the following points:

- The Green Party acknowledged the significant pressures on local government spending, both in Bracknell and across the country, due to the cost of living crisis and inflation. They thanked officers for their hard work and dedication in responding to these pressures and the budget process. Despite a decrease in consultation responses this year, they noted that the feedback was largely positive.
- They were pleased to learn that the council's finances for 2024-2025 were looking better than expected and accepted the need for the maximum council tax increase to protect future finances. They highlighted that Bracknell Forest's council tax was one of the lowest among unitary authorities and welcomed continued support for vulnerable residents.
- The Green Party welcomed the increased provision at Larchwood, the council's short-term break children's home, and the installation of air conditioning to reduce the risk of seizures in children with epilepsy. They also supported continued spending on repairs and improvements to ageing infrastructure, including essential maintenance for South Hill Park and the Wilde Theatre.
- They praised the funding of environmental works to make council buildings more energy-efficient, aligning with the council's climate emergency declaration. They highlighted the importance of prevention measures at ponds, streams, and wetland areas to prevent flooding and welcomed investment in the council's climate change team. They emphasised the need for more resources to deliver the new climate change strategy and criticised any proposed reductions in climate change expenditure.
- The Green Party noted the benefits of climate change action, including cost reductions and increased energy security, and supported the council's efforts to achieve net zero by 2030 or as close as possible. They expressed disappointment that national government funding did not fully compensate for increased national insurance contributions and supplier costs. They appreciated the council's approach to promoting independence through early

intervention and assistive technology and welcomed the increase in fees for optional council schemes and various parking proposals.

In conclusion, the Green Party supported the budget proposals for 2025/26 and the cabinet's recommendations.

Following all three opposition groups speaking, an amendment to the motion was proposed and seconded by Councillors Allen and Barnard respectively as follows:
(The section highlighted in red is the amended wording)

Proposed amended recommendation (part)

RECOMMENDED:

- The budget proposals set out in Table 1 (page 3) of the summary report for Council, subject to the changes identified in sections 3.2 to 3.5 (pages 3 to 6), 3.7 (page 7), 3.9 to 3.10 (pages 8 to 9), 4.1 to 4.5 (pages 10 to 13), 4.7 (page 16) and 6.2 to 6.3 (page 18) of the report, which are reflected in the final pressures and savings proposals in Annexe D (pages 77 to 89), be agreed except that;
- A new pressure of £0.055m be added for an enhanced cleaning regime in the council-owned parts of the Lexicon, and
- A compensating reduction be made to the Climate Change pressure, from £0.250m to £0.19.

Councillors Neil and Temperton did not accept the proposed amendment and, therefore, the amendment was debated.

During the debate, a point of order was raised around the seconder's right for coming back towards the end of the debate to speak. Councillors were advised that the wording of procedural rule 13.3 of the constitution was not specifically clear as to who would speak last albeit it did imply that would be the seconder. This rule would be reviewed following the meeting.

A recorded vote was called by both Councillor Haffegée and Councillor Barnard on the amendment and the voting was as follows:

FOR (9): Councillors Allen, Barnard, Gaw, Hayes, Harrison, McKenzie-Boyle, McLean, Mossom and Robertson.

AGAINST (29): Councillors Bailey, Bidwell, Brown, Cochrane, Collings, C Eberle, T Eberle, M Forster, S Forster, Frewer, Frost, Gillbe, Haffegée, Jefferies, Karim, Neil, O'Regan, Penfold, Pickering, Pressland, Purnell, Smith, Temperton, C Thompson, P Thompson, Watts, Webb, Wright and Zahuruddin.

ABSTAIN: (1): Virgo

On being put to the vote the amendment was lost and debate continued on the original substantive motion.

On being put to the recorded vote the substantive motion was carried with a record of votes as follows:

FOR (38): Councillors Allen, Barnard, Bailey, Bidwell, Brown, Cochrane, Collings, C Eberle, T Eberle, M Forster, S Forster, Frewer, Frost, Gaw, Gillbe, Haffegée, Hayes, Jefferies, Karim, McKenzie-Boyle, McLean, Mossom, Neil, O'Regan, Penfold,

Pickering, Pressland, Purnell, Robertson, Smith, Temperton, C Thompson, P Thompson, Virgo, Watts, Webb, Wright and Zahuruddin.

AGAINST (0):

ABSTAIN: (1): Councillor Harrison

Therefore, it was **RESOLVED** that:

1 Capital Programme 2025/26 - 2027/28

- i) The General Fund capital funding of £14.386m for 2025/26 in respect of those schemes listed on pages 203 to 205, of which £8.388m be funded from Council resources;
- ii) The inclusion of £5.998m of expenditure to be externally funded (including £0.380m of S106 funding) as outlined in the summary report for Council (page 199) and included on pages 203 to 205;
- iii) Those schemes that attracted external grant funding be included within the 2025/26 capital programme at the level of funding received;
- iv) Capital schemes that required external funding could only proceed once the Council has received confirmation that the grant would be awarded;
- v) To the inclusion of an additional budget of £1m for 'Invest to Save' schemes;
- vi) The Flexible Use of Capital Receipts policy for 2024/25 to 2026/27 included on pages 206 to 213 be approved.

2. Revenue Budget 2025/26

- i) The budget proposals set out in Table 1 (page 3) of the summary report for Council, subject to the changes identified in sections 3.2 to 3.5 (pages 3 to 6), 3.7 (page 7), 3.9 to 3.10 (pages 8 to 9), 4.1 to 4.5 (pages 10 to 13), 4.7 (page 16) and 6.2 to 6.3 (page 18) of the report, which were reflected in the final pressures and savings proposals in Annexe D (pages 77 to 89), be agreed;
- ii) Fees and charges as set out in Annexe G (pages 135 to 193) be approved;
- iii) A provision for inflation of £4.616m be approved;
- iv) A further council tax discount of £50 for working age households receiving council tax (£0.170m), and a one-off increase of £0.088m in the budget allocated for Section 13A Council Tax reliefs and associated administrative support (£0.045m), be funded by Bracknell Forest Council in 2025/26 from the Financial Hardship Reserve (section 3.10.1(a) pages 8 to 9);
- v) The additional grant funding received in the Final Local Government Finance Settlement announced on 3 February 2025 be allocated to Children's Social Care (an additional £0.008m of Children's Social Care Prevention Grant) and to the Contingency Fund (£0.042m of Employer National Insurance Contribution Grant) with no net budget impact;
- vi) The commitment budget as set out in Annexe A in the agenda papers be approved (pages 20 to 26);
- v) The Council should make additional funding available for distribution to schools through the local funding formula at the level set out in section 4.1 (page 10) of the summary report for Council subject to any minor amendments made by the Executive Member for Children, Young

- People and Learning following the receipt of definitive funding allocations for Early Years and High Needs pupils;
- vi) A general contingency totalling £3.992m be included, use of which is authorised by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Executive Director: Resources in accordance with the delegations included in the Council's constitution;
 - vii) Subject to the above recommendations the revised draft budget proposals be agreed;
 - viii) Total net expenditure (after use of balances) of £105.597m (page 19), be approved;
 - ix) The Council's Council Tax requirement, excluding Parish Council precepts, be set at £85.667m (page 19);
 - xi) The Council Tax for the Council's services for each Valuation Band be set as follows:

Band	Tax Level Relative to Band D	£
A	6/9	1,131.18
B	7/9	1,319.71
C	8/9	1,508.24
D	9/9	1,696.77
E	11/9	2,073.83
F	13/9	2,450.89
G	15/9	2,827.95
H	18/9	3,393.54

At the meeting on 11 February 2025 the Cabinet recommended the 2025/26 Treasury Management Strategy Statement and noted that strategy together with the Prudential Indicators and the Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement were matters which the Council needed to approve.

- xii) The following indicators, limits, strategies and policies included in Annexe E (pages 90 to 125):be approved:
 - The Prudential Indicators and Limits for 2025/26 to 2027/28 contained within Annexe E(i);
 - The Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy contained within Annexe E(ii);
 - The Treasury Management Strategy Statement, and the Treasury Prudential Indicators contained in Annexe E(iii);
 - The Authorised Limit Prudential Indicator in Annexe E(iii);
 - The Investment Strategy 2025/26 to 2027/28 and Treasury Management Limits on Activity contained in Annexe E(iv);
- xiii) The Reserves and Balances Policy Statement included in Annexe F (pages 126 to 134) be approved;
- xiv) The formal Council Tax Resolution contained in section 3 be approved.

3 COUNCIL TAX RESOLUTION

3.1 It be noted that the amounts calculated for the year 2025/26 in accordance with Section 67 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 be;

i) **50,488 TAX BASE FOR THE WHOLE COUNCIL AREA**

being the amount calculated by the Council, in accordance with regulation 3 of the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 1992, as amended, as its council tax base for the year

ii) **TAX BASE FOR PART OF THE COUNCIL'S AREA**

EACH PARISH AREA

Binfield	4,892
Bracknell	21,318
Crowthorne	3,679
Sandhurst	8,033
Warfield	5,577
Winkfield	6,989

being the amounts calculated by the Council, in accordance with regulation 6 of the Regulations, as amended, as the amounts of its council tax base for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which one or more special items relate

3.2 The following amounts be now calculated by the Council for the year 2025/26 in accordance with Sections 31 to 36 of the Local Government and Finance Act 1992 as amended (the Act):

i) **£398,952,296 TOTAL EXPENDITURE INCLUDING GENERAL FUND, PARISH PRECEPTS AND THE COUNCIL'S SHARE OF ANY DEFICIT ON THE COLLECTION FUND**

being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(2) of the Act

ii) **£308,800,048 TOTAL INCOME INCLUDING GOVERNMENT SUPPORT AND THE COUNCIL'S SHARE OF ANY SURPLUS ON THE COLLECTION FUND**

being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(3) of the Act

- iii) **£90,152,248** **BOROUGH AND PARISH PRECEPTS NET EXPENDITURE TO BE FINANCED FROM COUNCIL TAX**

being the amount by which the aggregate at 3.3(a) above exceeds the aggregate at 3.3(b) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31A(4) of the Act, as its council tax requirement for the year

- iv) £1,785.62 **AVERAGE BAND "D" COUNCIL TAX FOR WHOLE BOROUGH**

being the amount at 3.3(c) above, divided by the amount at 3.2(a) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31B(1) of the Act, as the basic amount of its council tax for the year (including Parish precepts)

- v) £4,485,724 **PARISH PRECEPTS**

being the aggregate amount of all special items referred to in Section 34(1) of the Act

- vi) £1,696.77 **BOROUGH COUNCIL TAX FOR BAND "D" PROPERTIES**

being the amount at 3.3(d) above less the result given by dividing the amount at 3.3(e) above by the amount at 3.2(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 if there were an area of the Borough to which no special item relates

vii)	Part of the Council's area	BOROUGH AND PARISH COUNCIL TAX FOR EACH PARISH FOR BAND "D"	£
		Binfield	1,758.90
		Bracknell	1,801.02
		Crowthorne	1,798.37
		Sandhurst	1,778.45
		Warfield	1,754.52
		Winkfield	1,783.68

being the amounts given by adding to the amount at 3.3(f) above the amounts of the special item or items relating to dwellings in those parts of the Council's area mentioned above divided in each case by the

Royal Berkshire Fire Authority	57.54	67.13	76.72	86.31	105.49	124.67	143.85	172.62
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- 3.5 In having calculated the aggregate in each case of the amounts at 3.3(h), 3.3 and 3.4 above, the Council, in accordance with Section 30(2) of the Act, hereby sets the following amounts as the amounts of council tax for the year 2025/26 for each of the categories of dwellings shown below:

(a)	Part of the Council's area	TOTAL COUNCIL TAX FOR EACH VALUATION BAND							
		A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Parish		£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Binfield		1,418.99	1,655.49	1,891.99	2,128.49	2,601.49	3,074.48	3,547.48	4,256.98
Bracknell		1,447.07	1,688.25	1,929.43	2,170.61	2,652.97	3,135.32	3,617.68	4,341.22
Crowthorne		1,445.30	1,686.19	1,927.07	2,167.96	2,649.73	3,131.50	3,613.26	4,335.92
Sandhurst		1,432.02	1,670.70	1,909.36	2,148.04	2,625.38	3,102.72	3,580.06	4,296.08
Warfield		1,416.07	1,652.09	1,888.09	2,124.11	2,596.13	3,068.16	3,540.18	4,248.22
Winkfield		1,435.51	1,674.77	1,914.01	2,153.27	2,631.77	3,110.28	3,588.78	4,306.54

Chair