

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNTY COUNCIL HELD AT
WOODHATCH PLACE, 11 COCKSHOT HILL, REIGATE, SURREY, RH2 8EF, ON 7
FEBRUARY 2023 COMMENCING AT 10.00 AM, THE COUNCIL BEING
CONSTITUTED AS FOLLOWS:**

Helyn Clack (Chair)
Saj Hussain (Vice-Chair)

Maureen Attewell	Eber Kington
Ayesha Azad	Rachael Lake
Catherine Baart	Victor Lewanski
Steve Bax	David Lewis (Cobham)
John Beckett	David Lewis (Camberley West)
Jordan Beech	* Scott Lewis
r Luke Bennett	r Andy Lynch
Amanda Boote	Andy MacLeod
Harry Boparai	* Ernest Mallett MBE
Liz Bowes	Michaela Martin
Natalie Bramhall	Jan Mason
Stephen Cooksey	Steven McCormick
* Colin Cross	Cameron McIntosh
Clare Curran	Julia McShane
Nick Darby	Sinead Mooney
Fiona Davidson	Carla Morson
Paul Deach	Bernie Muir
Kevin Deanus	Mark Nuti
Jonathan Essex	John O'Reilly
Robert Evans OBE	Tim Oliver
* Chris Farr	Rebecca Paul
Paul Follows	George Potter
Will Forster	Catherine Powell
r John Furey	Penny Rivers
Matt Furniss	John Robini
Angela Goodwin	Becky Rush
Jeffrey Gray	Tony Samuels
Tim Hall	Joanne Sexton
David Harmer	Lance Spencer
Nick Harrison	Lesley Steeds
Edward Hawkins	Mark Sugden
Marisa Heath	Richard Tear
Trefor Hogg	Chris Townsend
Robert Hughes	Liz Townsend
Jonathan Hulley	Denise Turner-Stewart
* Rebecca Jennings-Evans	Hazel Watson
Frank Kelly	Jeremy Webster
Riasat Khan	Buddhi Weerasinghe
Robert King	Fiona White
	Keith Witham

*absent

r = Remote Attendance

Before commencing the business of the meeting, the Chair:

- Noted the Council's condolences with all those affected by the deeply tragic incidents: the death of a dog walker in the Tandridge area, the death of the headmistress of Epsom College and her family, the unfolding events in Turkey and Syria; and led the Council in a moment of reflection.
- Reported on the death of a former Surrey County Councillor for Guildford East from 2005 to 2009, Eddie Owen who passed away last summer. He had a keen interest in education, especially for children with special educational needs, and served on the Education Select Committee, as well as serving as a governor of two local schools and of a special needs school in London. He is survived by his wife Joan and their four children; she noted the Council's condolences.
- Welcomed the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) who would continue to attend future County Council meetings in person.

1/23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE [Item 1]

Apologies for absence were received from Colin Cross, Rebecca Jennings-Evans, Scott Lewis, Ernest Mallett MBE.

Members who attended remotely and had no voting rights were Luke Bennett, John Furey, Andy Lynch.

2/23 MINUTES [Item 2]

The minutes of the meeting of the County Council held on 13 December 2022 were submitted, confirmed and signed.

3/23 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST [Item 3]

There were none.

4/23 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS [Item 4]

The Chair:

- Thanked and congratulated all Surrey residents who were honoured in His Majesty The King's New Year Honours 2023; including Surrey County Councillor Robert Evans, Labour & Labour Co-operative Group Leader, who had received an OBE for Political and Public Service.
- Noted that the Council marked Holocaust Memorial Day on 27 January and remembered all those who perished so horrifically at the hands of Nazi Germany. Surrey History Centre showcased a devastating and thought-provoking exhibition based on the theme 'Ordinary People, Extraordinary Lives'.
- Noted that following the tragic death of Surrey County Councillor Alison Todd last year, a tree-planting ceremony in her name would take place in the Memorial Garden after the meeting and she invited Members to attend.
- Noted that the rest of her announcements could be found in the Council agenda front sheet.
- Reminded Members of the upcoming Member Development Day on Monday 20 February at Woodhatch Place, an opportunity for networking, training and personal development.

**5/23 2023/24 FINAL BUDGET AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY TO 2027/28
[Item 5]**

The Chair noted that the agenda was republished online to include the following amendment removing four words: Page 76, para 4.102 of the Annex: 2023/24 Final Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy to 2027/28, second bullet point, fifth dash:

~~‘Reducing total spend on the libraries book fund.’ and Community Partnered Libraries.~~

The Leader presented the 2023/24 Final Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy to 2027/28 and made a statement in support of the proposed budget. A copy of the Leader’s statement is attached as Appendix A.

Each of the Minority Group Leaders (Nick Darby, Will Forster, Robert Evans OBE and Jonathan Essex) were invited to speak on the budget proposals.

Key points made by Nick Darby were that:

- There was a “perfect storm” of high inflation and the cost-of-living crisis, increasing demand and support needed for the disadvantaged.
- The Cabinet had little to be proud of and should bear responsibility for the series of shortcomings, rather than Council staff who continued to do their best; attention to detail and efficient service delivery was needed.
- The £11 million extra cost for the IT project which was still not operational needed to be properly implemented and managed, and that public money should have been used to support other services to better effect.
- Highlighted the Home to School Transport issues including lengthy delays, lack of communication, unnecessary panel hearings and questioned how long it would take to address; noting the fifty recommendations of the Learning Review.
- The intended Guildford highway changes caused public anger, with a failed consultation and inadequate communication; the scheme had been delayed for new consultation, an opportunity to get it right and to listen and communicate.
- Regarding the Agile Office Programme; whilst there might be good reason to move from Quadrant Court, Woking, questioned whether it was necessary to carry out extensive and costly works, having done nothing for fifteen years.
- Children's Services was broken in many areas, progress had been slow since being rated as Requires Improvement by Ofsted last year, there were repeated Inadequate ratings on children's homes assessments and continued record-keeping failures, significant Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) delays; Looked After Children and foster carers were being left behind.
- Regarding the Highways reorganisation and new contract, Ringway replaced Kier, repairs were delayed and of poor quality needing further work and cost, promised extra work on potholes had not materialised, there were significant delays to the implementation of annual parking reviews and white lines not being refreshed. Support from the Government and Surrey MPs was ineffective.
- The Local and Joint Committees had been abolished with no prior consultation, and the Community Link Officers in their place were costly and not a success.
- Adult Social Care was broken, the changes delayed by two years by the Government were a financial concern for local authorities, Discharge to Assess arrangements were problematic and residents were being left behind.
- Regarding the Staff Pay Award which was a difficult balance for the forthcoming negotiations, the Council needed to be clear that it valued its staff, there were major retention and recruitment issues in Adult Social Care and Children’s

Services, there had been no response to the letter to HMRC on the mileage allowance for staff who drive as part of their duties, staff were being left behind.

- Regarding capital investment, agreed with officers who indicated that all projects needed reassessment with the requirement to produce a financial return.
- Noted the reduction in borrowing costs to £60 million for Your Fund Surrey; changing the base of calculating areas of deprivation without prior notice or explanation was unfortunate, targeted support for deprived areas was needed.
- Providing detail on the Housing Strategy and a County Deal was vital as well as improving relations with the borough and district councils.
- The Council Tax increase of 2.99% was a difficult decision yet the money could not be recouped in future years, the number of bands should be reviewed with more money paid by those in the top two bands.
- Questioned whether the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) would address climate change issues, for example no escape routes and scrappage or whether it was an attack on local businesses, especially those close to the Greater London border.
- Quoted from the Leader at Cabinet last week regarding a fear of crime and not actual crime and suggested that it be addressed by turning the streetlights back on.
- Thanked the Finance team for their helpful briefings over the past year.
- Budget suggestions were rejected by the administration.
- Would be voting against the budget, noting the need to obtain best value for money, to put vulnerable residents first and to have inspirational leadership; it was not the job of the opposition to produce an alternative budget.

Key points made by Will Forster were that:

- He supported the Council Tax increase proposed which was appropriate in the circumstances, balancing the need for increased money for services whilst acknowledging that residents were struggling with the cost of living.
- He would be voting against the budget due to three main concerns: roads, reserves and cuts to social care.
- Regarding roads, after years of neglect by the Council and a tough winter Surrey's roads were falling apart, due to high inflation the money would not go as far as previously and questioned why extensive cuts were being made.
- Rather than invest in the roads to tackle the pothole epidemic the Council was planning future cuts to its highways maintenance of £51.8 million.
- By 2024/25 the highways maintenance capital fund would go from £70 million to less than £30 million, the local highway scheme reduces from £12.5 million to £1 million and the £100,000 divisional budget for Members would be abolished.
- Regarding reserves, residents did not understand why the Council was sitting on £150 million of reserves, yet its roads were left to crumble, some of that money should be invested to resurface roads and reduce the £500,000 pothole bill.
- Regarding Adult Social Care and Children, Families and Lifelong Learning (CFLL), the budget proposed a £30.5 million cut which was unacceptable, yearly Ofsted reports had deemed Children's Services to be inadequate, yet the budget proposed a £6 million cut from children in care.
- Suggested areas to save money such as the £12.5 million in the last year spent on temporary and locum social care workers, spend needed to be cut on agency staff and the Member question on the spend on consultants was unanswered.
- Essential services such as Home to School Transport had been cut by £3 million despite a high demand and would leave children behind.
- The budget had the wrong priorities, cutting rather than protecting services for vulnerable people, residents should not be responsible for the mistakes made by the current and previous Conservative Party administrations.

Key points made by Robert Evans OBE were that:

- He thanked the Leader and officers for their daily hard work.
- Members were elected to represent their own divisions and to help their residents through the challenging situations they faced which had become more profound over the past year.
- Fifty years since being incorporated into Surrey from Middlesex, many residents in Spelthorne felt left behind and forgotten; furthermore, many residents in his division felt like they were in the forgotten corner of Spelthorne.
- He agreed with the three areas of concern highlighted by residents in the engagement section in the budget, captured from in-depth research.
- Whilst there were many positives in the budget, he did not see it going down well in his division or his fellow Group member's division and other areas in Spelthorne; noting the closure of the local fire station and reduced night cover, the school transport issues and withdrawal of some bus services.
- Many felt as though they were not getting access to the services they needed and for which they paid their taxes, during local flooding some residents waited several days before they could leave their homes due to the raw sewage.
- Noted that on a recent trip to India he photographed a rural road which had a better road surface than many roads in Surrey.
- Noted that in budget the Council said it would work to explore further efficiencies on highway maintenance, he hoped that did not mean more cuts and welcomed the use of improved materials for road repairs.
- Stressed that the cost-of-living crisis was affecting poorer communities the most, the growth in food banks highlighted the inequality in society, many people in Surrey were being left behind; yet how the Council was fulfilling its stated aim of helping people cope with the rising cost of living was not clear in the budget.
- With inflation running at 10%, asked how the services would be maintained in the future or would it mean more efficiencies.
- Another complaint in his division was the effect of crime and anti-social behaviour, noting issues around county lines and drug trafficking, there was no police response to reports of youths on motorbikes terrorising the area and the Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner had rejected his request to visit.
- Regarding Your Fund Surrey and the £60 million of funds being invested in community-led projects, noted that was the case in affluent parts of the county and none so far in Spelthorne; he noted a recent scandal of a grant given to one of the wealthiest charities in the county.

Key points made by Jonathan Essex were that:

- He echoed the thanks for the hard work by officers and Members to pull the budget together, including opening-up the process to allow more scrutiny earlier.
- Was pleased to see the extra £2 million plus for Surrey foster carers and the additional programme to build more children's homes in Surrey, both would bring children back into Surrey and would save money.
- Welcomed the assurance that the Greener Futures capital pipeline items had been fully committed to but were awaiting investment grade business cases to be completed to ensure that those would be cost neutral.
- Some of the budget was ill-defined, it was unclear whether Surrey's huge highways maintenance budget would deliver best value for money, questioned whether there was the right balance between local structural repair and routine maintenance before wholesale road surface treatment.

- Adult Social Care and Children's Services including spending on mental health, needed greater budgets which required open discussion in public with the Government to get the level of funding that local government deserved.
- Last week parents called for better communication and listening for their children with special needs, for the Council to address its failings; he queried why parents won special needs tribunals twenty-five times more often than the Council.
- The high social worker vacancies locked the Council in a vicious circle of high caseloads and staff turnover with too many posts then filled with expensive contract staff at a cost of over £12 million; that needed to be remedied.
- Noting the broken care system, closing the Council's last Adult Social Care homes was a false economy in the long run, Surrey needed to make care better.
- Asked whether the proposed changes to Home to School Transport would address the overspend, the root causes of the issues and surge in appeals, it was unfair that in some cases parents had been assessed under the new policy having applied under the old policy.
- The 1% higher Council Tax in last year's budget sought to address mental health issues in Surrey, but there was a lack detail of how it would be spent and most was allocated to the Surrey Mental Health Investment Fund, only a few contracts had been awarded and a fraction spent. He asked whether the budget was enough to fund Mindworks Surrey to address the backlog and the delays.
- The budget should enable transformational delivery on the new strategies brought forward, Surrey's place-based ambition stated that the Council would deliver services to make its communities better with partnerships across twenty-nine towns and rural areas; asked what that meant in practice.
- Queried how the budget would back the co-created local transport plans needed to bring forward better local joined-up bus, rail, walking, cycling and electric vehicle charging provision; how much additional funding was needed to pump-prime new bus routes and cap fares.
- Asked whether the Council would seek healthcare support for twenty miles per hour speed limits across all Surrey's urban areas based on the health savings from the reduced mortality and accident rates.
- Asked whether the Council would follow Gatwick Airport's lead in introducing a workplace parking levy to increase staff journeys by public transport.
- Noted that the Council's vision of liveable neighbourhoods would not be a real choice for all to live and work in the same community without a shift in the delivery of affordable homes for all and stressed that the emerging Surrey Housing Strategy must lead to the successful lobbying of the Government to renew funding for affordable social housing for rent across the UK.
- Due to the need to increase ambition and clarity in the areas raised, he would not be supporting the budget.

Seventeen Members spoke on the budget proposals and the following key points were made:

- Could not support the budget as the efficiencies further reduced services based on statutory requirements rather than effective early intervention and prevention of escalating need; signposting to the voluntary sector was not the same as providing frontline support.
- The lack of early intervention in Children's Services created a lose-lose situation, poorer outcomes, staff turnover and a vicious circle affecting all involved; an example was provided of a child with additional needs receiving limited support. That circle needed to be broken by engaging with those on the frontline about what would make their lives better, simplifying the system and leaving no one behind.

- Noted that the budget fully recognised the challenges faced, particularly the most vulnerable. Over the past year, all should be proud of the Council's provision of resources, financial support, advice and warm places.
- Surrey's communities needed to be protected from the impact of global events and applauded the decision to hold Surrey's Council Tax increase to well below the maximum, the budget was sound, and reserves were available.
- Council officers deserved applause for the help provided to the vulnerable and the community focused services were vital, thanked the work of the Community Link Officers and Local Area Co-ordinators who were working to join up and strengthen support across the local authorities and key partners.
- Members were empowered to help their local communities through the Members' Community Allocation, Your Fund Surrey and budgets for highways maintenance; the budget continued to build on previous ones by helping Members to do more in their community.
- Regarding road surfaces, thanked the Cabinet and the officers for money spent in the last year and allocated in the future; noted that the Ravenscote Junior School crossing was continuing to pay benefit, increasing the number of children walking to school; and had two major roads resurfaced using the Member fund and the Highways teams were repairing potholes.
- It was a balanced, sensible, and forward-looking budget and noted that it would be nonsensical to spend its reserves which were put aside for a rainy day.
- Reflected on the current point in time, having to make efficiencies once again and structural transformations, spending less to provide less; highlighted unused reserves, expensive relocation to Woodhatch Place, frivolous investments in empty department stores and other costly schemes.
- The current situation was partly due to circumstances outside of the Council's control, but in large part thanks to the culmination of years of unwise decisions by the Conservative Party administrations; residents were being left behind by deliberate political choice.
- Opposition Members' suggestions and borough and district councils' offers of support had been ignored.
- The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Communities and Community Safety noted that it was a budget of financial resilience with responsibility for council taxpayers hard earned money, it invested in the present and the future and supported vulnerable residents.
- The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Communities and Community Safety noted that the budget protected service delivery through maintaining fifty-two libraries, investing £26.5 million upgrading and adapting to meet the modern needs of Surrey's communities and rolling out open access across the network, expanding Your Fund Surrey to provide £50,000 to each Member to spend locally equivalent to £4 million with targeted engagement via the Community Link Officers and the Local Area Co-ordinators to tackle poorer health outcomes, investing in fire stations, training facilities and advanced technology through a £24.7 million capital programme and an increased revenue budget to £38.7 million for the Surrey Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS).
- The Cabinet Member for Adults and Health recognised that there were pressures across Adult Social Care and Public Health in Surrey, exacerbated by inflation, rising overheads and staff shortages, the need for more national funding, and an increasing demand. Through the engagement work residents accepted the need to increase Council Tax for those less fortunate or vulnerable aligning to the key principle of 'no one left behind'.
- The Cabinet Member for Adults and Health noted that teams in Surrey across Adult Social Care and Public Health were working tirelessly alongside its partners to protect the lives of residents, the Council was innovating and using technology

more to improve services, delivering the new one front door approach, the Discharge to Assess system and new extra care housing.

- The Cabinet Member for Adults and Health noted that the Council owed a huge debt to many thousands of unpaid carers across the county.
- The Cabinet Member for Adults and Health noted that the Council was driving forward preventative strategies to promote a healthier Surrey, it sought to launch an education programme for residents around mental and general health and social care.
- The Cabinet Member for Education and Learning noted that providing services for children and young people was the Council's highest priority and the budget reflected that, there had been an increase in the CFLL Directorate's budget of £28 million, increasing the total amount to £249.8 million, to be able to meet the demands and inflationary pressures, meeting the forecasted increases in pay and reward for social workers and foster carers, meeting the increases in referrals to social care and children at risk of harm and neglect.
- The Cabinet Member for Education and Learning noted that the budget enabled the Council to continue to invest in early intervention and prevention, driving through the improvement programme and transformation of services for children and young people with additional needs.
- The Cabinet Member for Education and Learning commended the capital programme being delivered by the Land and Property team for the CFLL Directorate, which included £220 million over five years for specialist schools and places, and alternative provision locally for children with additional needs.
- Noted that during the current challenging time with high inflation and rising energy costs, keeping the burden of taxation as low as possible was the right choice for the Council to make for residents, whilst delivering good services.
- Responding to the criticism of the Council's cuts, noted the cuts to service delivery at Woking Borough Council for the most vulnerable residents.
- Noted that the 0.99% increase in core Council Tax with a 2% increase for Adult Social Care was amongst the lowest rises compared to neighbouring authorities, an average of 94% for a Band D property - this was thanks to the hard work done over the last five years by the current Conservative Party administration.
- Noted that due to the prudent approach taken, futureproofing and keeping reserves secure, the Council would continue to deliver on its 2030 Community Vision of ensuring that 'no one is left behind' and Your Fund Surrey was a critical part of that vision, alongside the Capital Programme.
- The Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources noted that the comments made by some of the opposition Members were depressing; it was a responsible budget and put the Council's finances into a robust position and all Members had multiple opportunities to put forward ideas and proposals had been scrutinised and incorporated into the final set of budget proposals.
- The Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources noted that residents, staff and partners had their say on the proposals and indicated that they wanted the Council to protect and fund their services, to support vulnerable residents. The budget was designed to ensure the ongoing delivery of frontline services and it did not draw on reserves, it set aside a contingency fund of £20 million and noting the high inflation, the proposed Council Tax increase was set at 2.99%.
- The Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources noted that the Council was asked to approve a £1.1 billion revenue budget - which represented an increase of almost 6% - and the £1.95 billion Capital Programme over the next five years, the budget invested in the future of the county.
- Within the Capital Investment Programme, the Accommodation with Care and Support programme was a key part of delivering what residents wanted - 725 new

units were to be developed by 2028 for extra care housing to support older people with care needs including dementia and cognitive impairments.

- In addition to that programme, there were Supported Independent Living schemes by 2030 for adults with learning disabilities and autism - that greater independence would improve life experience and health outcomes - and for individuals with mental health needs. Members had an opportunity to be involved in the development of the strategies via the select committee process.
- Questioned whether the Community Link Officers which replaced the Local and Joint Committees were adding value; they costed around £500,000 to £700,000; money that would be better spent on recruiting and retaining social workers, noting an example of the recruitment board with only a few successful applicants.
- Noted a local school with children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) whose EHCPs were not being funded and the school was funding them through their debit budget; officers had since intervened.
- Highlighted work undertaken by Surrey Highways that they had been waiting for in their division for three years, it was meant to take two days but had overrun and two weeks later it was not finished; also in their division, they had to get involved to stop the upcoming works on pavements along a row of shops as Surrey Highways did not inform the traders of those works.
- Noted that through the Capital Programme the Council was investing significantly in road improvements, the River Thames flood alleviation scheme and in Adult Social Care.
- Noted that over a five-year period £44 million would be invested in extra care housing across Surrey for example in Ottershaw. With an ageing population there was an increasing need for more specialised older persons housing of the right quality and type, which the budget would fund.
- Supported the budget as resources were directed towards supporting vulnerable people and towards charities who provided a lot of social care in the county.
- Supported the budget which fulfilled the Council's duty to protect residents and to keep Council Tax as low as possible particularly during the current challenging economic situation faced by the country.
- Responding to the criticism of the administration's management of the Council, noted examples of mismanagement at Guildford Borough Council.
- Noted that all council budgets were required to balance by law, on the funding side the decision of the Leader to limit the Council Tax increase to nearly 3% was an interesting and brave decision; however, the budget looked right with £60 million in contingencies and the additional general fund of £48 million.
- Regarding the spending side noted that it was the quality of the budget reductions or efficiencies that mattered, for example looking at the Adult Social Care budget, allowing for inflation, pay pressures and demand increases, it was offset by efficiency savings of £19 million - that was a stretch given the £18 million overspend in care packages in the current year - of which £10 million of savings would come from twenty initiatives, that would be challenging and would affect vulnerable residents.
- Noted that the Council had been successful in making savings through strength-based commissioning techniques, yet having made many savings year on year, was doubtful if more savings could be made whilst achieving what was needed.
- Regarding the CFLD Directorate budget there were £11 million of savings planned, £7 million of savings were in Looked After Children, compared to £6 million in savings in last year's budget; an overspend in the current year looked likely again, the Council should not be implementing that level of cuts for the vulnerable group of children and young people.

- Responding to comments on the cuts to Children's Services, the Cabinet Member for Children and Families clarified that the CFLL Directorate would receive a 5% salary increase, which amounted to £6 million.
- The Cabinet Member for Children and Families noted that regarding fostering and Looked After Children, the Council in 2023/24 to 2027/28 was investing over £28 million to build accommodation that would bring children placed out of county back into Surrey.
- The Cabinet Member for Children and Families noted that regarding the multiple challenges within the CFLL Directorate, as part of the Council's commitment to embedding change in children's social care she had taken over chairmanship of the Children's Social Care Transformation and Assurance Board, it was cross-party, had an independent member and was driving forward improvements.
- Supported the sound and prudent budget and noted the accomplishment of the 2.99% Council Tax increase - less than the 5% maximum - despite the 10% inflation rate and whilst significantly improving services for residents.
- Noted the many complaints from opposition Members without any constructive suggestions nor credible reasons for opposing it.
- Disagreed with the comments made that opposition Members had multiple opportunities to make suggestions, as many suggestions had been made in the last months and those had been rejected; stressed that the Budget meeting of the Council was the time when the opposition had an opportunity to tell the public that they had a different vision.
- Referred to the comments made by the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Communities and Community Safety who said that she had maintained the fifty-two libraries, yet that was only after the intervention by two opposition Members to stop the cuts to the services proposed for the Community Partnered Libraries.
- Referred to the comments made by the Cabinet Member for Education and Learning boasting that more money had gone into Children's Services, however it was not the amount of money but what was done with it that was important. The Conservative Party administration and that Cabinet Member had presided over many failures in Children's Services.
- The fact that Members were lectured on financial management by the former leader of Woking Borough Council said it all about the Conservative Party administration's approach to finances.
- Noted that despite the likely outcome of the vote with the budget being agreed, the opposition parties would leave the meeting knowing they had won the argument; residents did not believe the administration's policies, nor would they appreciate the budget.

Jonathan Essex moved an amendment, presenting the following recommended alternative budget proposals (included in the second supplementary agenda items 5i and 6, published on 6 February 2023), which was formally seconded by Catherine Baart. This was:

Recommendations

Council is asked to approve the following budget proposals:

1. That commitment is made to a Phase 2 of the existing Children's Homes programme within Children Services.

Budget commitment: £18m additional capital (self-financing borrowing) to deliver an additional 24 beds within Children's Homes, in addition to the 24-beds approved by Cabinet in November 2022.

2. That the Greener Futures Retrofit Programme is expanded to provide further support to the NHS, private landlords and commercial premises.

Budget commitment: £270k to fund additional resources required. These costs would be fully recouped via charging for the services offered and therefore the net budget impact would be zero.

3. That increased bus usage is encouraged across Surrey by:

- 3.1: allocating specific budget to implement improvements to existing routes and/or provision of new bus routes, following the Future Bus consultation.

Budget commitment: £1m one-off revenue budget to implement the outcomes of the Future Bus Consultation. Any ongoing future budget commitment will be determined based on assessment of the consultation responses.

- 3.2: undertaking detailed analysis and a feasibility study of the transformation business case for a future £2 maximum bus fare across Surrey, drawing on relevant evidence, impact and learning from the trial of a £2 flat (single) bus fare in Surrey in early 2023.

Budget commitment: £50k consultancy budget specifically to carry out data analysis and feasibility study to better understand the results of the Government pilot and inform future decisions on the potential implementation of a standard £2 bus fare across Surrey.

- 3.3 enabling the fast tracking and extension of the potential reach of the Freedom to Travel Transformation Programme.

Budget commitment: £707,500 over 2 years (£310k in 2023/24) to fund additional resources required.

The proposed budget amendments all focus on areas of further transformation and/or pilots for additional activity. The financial impacts are either requirements for initial one-off funding sources or full cost recovery proposals. As such, there are no direct impacts on Directorate budget envelopes for 2023/24. Some proposals may lead to future budget commitments, depending on the outcomes from the pilots proposed.

Table 1. Summary of budget proposals

Proposal	2023-24 revenue impact	2023-28 capital impact	Notes
1. Children Services: Commit to a Phase 2 of the existing Children's Homes programme.		£18,000,000	Assumption that the revenue costs associated with the borrowing required would be offset by the revenue efficiencies achieved (subject to business case).
2. Greener Futures Programme: Retrofit Expansion to support NHS, private landlords and commercial premises	Net nil		Additional expenditure budget of £270k, offset by recoupment of costs via charging for services provided.

3. Increase bus use across Surrey:			
3.1 Allocate specific budget to implement improvements to existing/provision of new bus routes, following the Future Bus consultation.	£1,000,000		Year 1 would need to be funded from one-off resources, with future commitments to be determined
3.2 Analysis and feasibility study of the transformation business case for a future £2 maximum bus fare across Surrey.	£50,000		Suggested initial funding from one-off reserves to finance the data analysis and feasibility study. Any decision on implementation of a standard fare across Surrey would be dependent on future decision.
3.3 Enable fast tracking and extend the potential reach of the Freedom to Travel Transformation Programme.	£310,000		Suggested funded from one-off reserves as one-off investment, also requires commitment of £397,500 in 2024/25.
	£1,360,000	£18,000,000	

In support of his budget amendment, Jonathan Essex made the following points:

- Thanked officers for their help in working on the three budget proposals.
- Firstly, on children's homes. The proposal was raised at the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee in October. The budget provided funding for twenty-four new children's home places and two previous homes were being re-provided to.
- Noted that some privately run children's homes the Council used costed up to £20,000 for one child weekly and those children were placed out of Surrey. Government guidelines stated that all Looked After Children by councils should - except in extreme cases - be within twenty miles from their home in Surrey.
- Noted that the Council needed to increase foster caring in-house, as an alternative to the costly, out of county Independent Fostering Agencies.
- Noted that the proposal sought to further expand the Council's ambition for children's homes in-house places, as was the case in Hampshire and Kent, which had seventy to eighty children's homes each in their counties, Surrey had around seventeen.
- Noted that the current strategy was to use six private care homes in Surrey and to have 20% of its Looked After Children in care homes placed out of the county; the amendment proposed was that the Council should provide Surrey run children's homes for all its Looked After Children as appropriate.
- Secondly, on the energy retrofits of buildings. The Greener Futures team had a plan to decarbonise the Council's operational assets and transport, Surrey was ahead of others in terms of staff expertise; he queried why not use that capability to facilitate leadership across the rest of the public sector, notably the NHS.
- Regarding housing he noted that the Council could build on its successful Solar Together scheme, to have a 'Retrofit Together' programme for owner-occupier households anchored by commitments from private landlords, which would also help them deliver on the Government's minimum energy efficiency standard for the sector. Elmbridge Borough Council was trialling enforcement of that.
- Noted that the Council could facilitate delivery at pace and scale for a fee, either cost-based or with profit, the Council could lead by offering to share its expertise to those that it needed to join in winning the race to zero carbon in Surrey.
- Thirdly, on buses. The Government's £2 maximum bus fare trial would save people money before the average energy price rises; a further 43% as set out by Money

Saving Expert in April. However, that trial was not for long enough nor had it been widely enough promoted to transform the use of buses, it would simply help those already using buses.

- Noted that many areas had inadequate bus services. The concept of 'Total Transport' meant using the same bus service for all different needs. The proposal set out a commitment around which to expand new bus services with a capital budget in place so that the Council could respond to its recent future bus network review with money for improvements that was not currently in the budget, with a plan to roll out a maximum bus fare in the longer term in Surrey.
- Noted that the proposal sought to widen the current Freedom to Travel Transformation team so it would have greater capacity to accelerate the planning and delivery of the bus routes, partnerships and patronage that could help the Council transform the hardest to shift part of Surrey's carbon footprint, car use, by using buses better.
- Whilst the first two proposals would take an invest to save approach, the third proposal required a limited draw on reserves for 2023/24, but those were sufficiently able to be funded within the current contingencies.
- Hoped that the amendment was perceived in a positive spirit, as a constructive addition to the budget, adding value to the hard work already underway.

As seconder to the budget amendment, Catherine Baart made the following points:

- Supported the amendment and noted that she had no further comments to add.

The Leader of the Council spoke on the budget amendment, making the following points:

- Thanked Jonathan Essex for his proposed amendment and for the conversations that they had on the matter over the last few days.
- Regarding the second budget proposal, noted that it would fit in neatly with the existing work of the Greener Futures team that were looking at low-cost loan schemes, for example for decarbonisation with private landlords. Suggested that the recommendation be referred to the Greener Futures Reference Group - a Task Group of the Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee - for consideration.
- Regarding the third budget proposal, noted that the bus consultation had not yet closed and there had been nearly 5,000 responses from residents and it would be discussed at the Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee in March anyway, so it would be helpful to have the suggestions included in the select committee's review of that work.
- Regarding first budget proposal, noted that he could not agree with it as it was more complicated than was set out in the amendment. He noted that there were several children's homes that would be opened shortly, and he could circulate the details of those to Members.

No other Members spoke on the budget amendment.

The Chair asked Jonathan Essex, as proposer of the budget amendment to conclude the debate:

- Thanked all for listening and thanked the Leader for responding.
- Noted that the bus review had closed, and the responses were being reviewed by officers.
- Noted that he was happy to withdraw the budget amendment and was happy with the Leader's suggestion to refer budget proposals two and three to the Greener

Futures Reference Group and the Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee; to be considered in a cross-party manner and in-depth.

- Regarding the first budget proposal, he understood that the Council recently closed a children's home and had converted a children's home into a No Wrong Door centre; the new openings were effectively following two recent closures. He also understood that there was a budget to provide some new children's homes and he noted that the first budget proposal was nothing more than asking the Council to do more on the matter.

Under Standing Order 20.2 Members consented to the withdrawal of Jonathan Essex's budget amendment.

The Chair confirmed that Jonathan Essex had withdrawn his budget amendment.

Returning to the original budget proposals, the Leader made the following comments in response:

- Reminded Members that there had been multiple briefings on the budget since June 2022 and plenty of opportunities to engage in the process, including two all-Member budget briefings, multiple informal select committee briefings, an opposition party briefing, the early draft budget went to the Cabinet and the select committees scrutinised the draft budget proposals and the final draft budget went to the Cabinet in January 2023.
- Noted that there was the same approach annually from the opposition parties at the Council's Budget meeting with political grandstanding, and questioned what the point was of having the select committees if they did not engage with those; no budget amendment was put forward from the Residents' Association and Independent Group - the largest opposition group - whose Group Leader was the Chairman of the most important select committee.
- Clarified that all the recommendations that went to the Cabinet from the select committees and then to Council had been accepted, nothing had been ignored.
- Concluded that there were no budget amendments from the other three opposition parties, no suggestions on how to spend the budget until today, no support for a legal budget, no input through the select committee process; no leadership, accountability or responsibility and that they should be ashamed.

After the debate the Chair called the recommendations, which included the Council Tax precept proposals, and a recorded vote was taken with 41 voting For, 31 voting Against and 1 Abstention.

The following Members voted for it:

Maureen Attewell, Ayesha Azad, Steve Bax, Jordan Beech, Liz Bowes, Natalie Bramhall, Helyn Clack, Clare Curran, Paul Deach, Kevin Deanus, Matt Furniss, Tim Hall, David Harmer, Edward Hawkins, Marisa Heath, Trefor Hogg, Robert Hughes, Jonathan Hulley, Saj Hussain, Frank Kelly, Riasat Khan, Rachael Lake, Victor Lewanski, David Lewis (Cobham), David Lewis (Camberley West), Cameron McIntosh, Sinead Mooney, Bernie Muir, Mark Nuti, John O'Reilly, Tim Oliver, Rebecca Paul, Becky Rush, Tony Samuels, Lesley Steeds, Mark Sugden, Richard Tear, Denise Turner-Stewart, Jeremy Webster, Buddhi Weerasinghe, Keith Witham.

The following Members voted against it:

Catherine Baart, Amanda Boote, Harry Boparai, Stephen Cooksey, Nick Darby, Fiona Davidson, Jonathan Essex, Robert Evans OBE, Paul Follows, Will Forster, Angela Goodwin, Jeffrey Gray, Nick Harrison, Robert King, Eber Kington, Andy MacLeod, Michaela Martin, Jan Mason, Steven McCormick, Julia McShane, Carla Morson, George Potter, Catherine Powell, Penny Rivers, John Robini, Joanne Sexton, Lance Spencer, Chris Townsend, Liz Townsend, Hazel Watson, Fiona White.

The following Members abstained:

John Beckett.

Therefore it was **RESOLVED** that:

Council noted the following features of the revenue and capital budget, and in line with Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003:

1. The Deputy Chief Executive & Executive Director of Resources' (Section 151 Officer) conclusion that estimates included in the Final Budget Report and Medium-Term Financial Strategy are sufficiently robust in setting the budget for 2023/24; and
2. That it is the view of the Deputy Chief Executive & Executive Director of Resources (Section 151 Officer), that the level of reserves is adequate to meet the Council's needs for 2023/24. These reserves and contingencies include the following amounts, (totalling £106.0m) set aside specifically to provide financial resilience:
 - the General Fund (£48m).
 - Specific contingencies built into the 2023/24 budget (£20m); and
 - Unused contingency brought forward from previous years (at least £38m depending on 2022/23 outturn).

Proposed budget: Council approved the following Revenue and Capital budget decisions:

3. The net revenue budget requirement be set at £1,101.5 million (net cost of services after service specific government grants) for 2023/24 (Annex B), subject to confirmation of the Final Local Government Financial Settlement.
4. The total Council Tax Funding Requirement be set at £866.0 million for 2023/24. This is based on a council tax increase of 0.99% and an increase of 2% in the precept proposed by Central Government to cover the growing cost of Adult Social Care (Annex E).
5. For the purpose of section 52ZB of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, the Council formally determines that the increase in core council tax is not such as to trigger a referendum (i.e. not greater than 3%).
6. Sets the Surrey County Council precept for Band D Council Tax at £1,675.08, which represents a 2.99% uplift. This is a rise of £0.94 a week from the 2022/23 precept of £1,626.39. This includes £217.94 for the Adult Social Care precept, which has increased by £32.46. A full list of bands is as follows:

**Council tax by valuation band
2023/24**

Valuation band	Core precept	ASC precept	Overall precept
A	£971.43	£145.29	£1,116.72
B	£1,133.33	£169.51	£1,302.84
C	£1,295.24	£193.72	£1,488.96
D	£1,457.14	£217.94	£1,675.08
E	£1,780.95	£266.37	£2,047.32
F	£2,104.76	£314.80	£2,419.56
G	£2,428.57	£363.23	£2,791.80
H	£2,914.28	£435.88	£3,350.16

7. Delegated powers to the Leader and Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Resources (Section 151 Officer) to finalise budget proposals and recommendations to County Council, updated to take into account new information in the Final Local Government Finance Settlement;
8. The Total Schools Budget of £599.3 million to meet the Council's statutory requirement on schools funding (as set out in Section 9 of the 2023/24 Final Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy to 2027/28).
9. The overall indicative Budget Envelopes for Executive Directorates and individual services for the 2023/24 budget (Annex B).
10. The total £1,950.4 million proposed five-year Capital Programme (comprising £1,202.4 million of budget and £748.0 million pipeline) and approved the £308.7 million Capital Budget in 2023/24 (Annex C).
11. The Council's refreshed Transformation Programme (as set out in section 3 of 2023/24 Final Budget Report and Medium-Term Financial Strategy to 2027/28):

Noted that the investment in Transformation required to deliver improved outcomes and financial benefits is built into the proposed Medium-Term Financial Strategy (as set out in section 3 of 2023/24 Final Budget Report and Medium-Term Financial Strategy to 2027/28).

Capital and Investment Strategies: Council approved the following:

12. The Capital, Investment and Treasury Management Strategy which provides an overview of how risks associated with capital expenditure, financing and treasury will be managed as well as how they contribute towards the delivery of services (Annex F).
13. The policy for making a prudent level of revenue provision for the repayment of debt (the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy) (Annex G).

6/23 MEMBERS' QUESTION TIME [Item 6]

Questions:

Notice of eighteen questions had been received. The questions and replies were published in the second supplementary agenda (items 5i and 6) on 6 February 2023.

A number of supplementary questions were asked and a summary of the main points is set out below:

(Q3) Robert Evans OBE referring to the £57.2 million increase using the Consumer Price Index (CPI), asked what assurance the Cabinet Member could provide that it would address and adequately cope with the pressures on the service due to inflation.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Adults and Health noted that he could not guarantee that the above figure would be enough due to the uncertainty around inflation and the day-to-day pressures in Adult Social Care. He provided assurance that the money would be used effectively and it was a good step forward.

(Q5) Catherine Powell reiterated part (c) of her question which had not been fully answered, she noted that those private businesses included companies called CareCo and Healthcare Pro which were the only two private businesses selected for bath lifts. She asked how those were selected.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Adults and Health would provide a written response once he had more information.

(Q6) Fiona White asked whether the Leader would agree that whilst it was prudent to use agency or temporary staff for one-off projects, their use on a long-term basis was costly and was not in residents' best interests. Referring to the overall spend of which 55% was spent on locum workers in the Children, Families and Lifelong Learning Directorate, she asked the Leader whether he would agree that the money would have been better spent on an enhanced offer to make working for Surrey more appealing, both for the recruitment and retention of workers.

Jonathan Essex asked the Leader to confirm how much over and above the payroll cost was the spend on agency staff.

In response to Fiona White, the Leader agreed that the Council did not want to be dependent upon agency or temporary staff, it was a consequence of there being a shortage of suitably qualified people; it was a challenge to recruit people into Surrey, partly due to the cost of housing. He hoped that as part of the pay negotiations with the Trade Unions, the Council would be able to support those key frontline staff. He noted that one of the key priorities for the new Director for People and Change, was to help progress the ongoing recruitment and retention work regarding permanent staff.

Responding to Jonathan Essex, he noted that he did have a breakdown of all the areas where the agency and temporary staff were being used but would liaise with the People and Change (HR) team to find out that uplift.

(Q7) Lance Spencer asked whether the Leader was unable or was simply unwilling to answer his question.

In response, the Leader asked for him to define what he considered a consultant to be and then he would provide a full answer; for example, some of the agency and temporary staff were referred to as consultants.

(Q10) George Potter calculated from the figures that there was an 18% vacancy rate for lawyers and a 22% vacancy rate for support staff, which were being filled on a locum basis. He asked what impact the shortfall had, particularly the impact on large capital projects involving the Land and Property team such as building schools for SEND pupils and extra care housing for the elderly and or disabled people.

In response, the Leader noted that the Director of Law and Governance was working hard to recruit and retain lawyers. He had regular updates with him and was not aware that there was any negative impact on the delivery of service as a result of having to be dependent upon locum lawyers.

(Q11) Liz Townsend pointed out that no other areas had seen the dramatic cut in short break services as seen by some of the most vulnerable residents in the boroughs of Waverley and Guildford. She asked the Cabinet Member if she had assessed the additional travel cost to families and how that would be funded, and what assurance she could provide that her residents would be able to access critical short break services in other boroughs and districts as the response noted that their funding in real terms had also been cut.

Jonathan Essex asked whether the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) could be shared, concerning the cut in outcome services which had been made.

In response to Liz Townsend, the Cabinet Member for Education and Learning noted that difficult decisions are made when dispersing money and resources within a directorate across the services that are required. Due to the pressure on the CFLL Directorate's budget, one such decision made was that it was not possible to increase the number of resources that went into short break services. The range of services provided by some suppliers had reduced due to inflation, high demand and workforce challenges. The Directorate had tried to use the funds available to ensure that as much provision could be provided for vulnerable families, and it was regrettable that there was not as much provision on offer in some parts of the county. She could not give her that assurance, however she highlighted the support provided to those families through holiday clubs for vulnerable children including SEND provision through the Club4 programme. She noted that a high percentage of families and children eligible for short breaks chose to use their personal budgets to make the choices that suited them, including respite, overnight and holiday care; the service ensured that a shortfall in Council short breaks provision did not coincide with a shortfall in NHS respite provision. She recognised that short breaks were a lifeline and the service tried to ensure an equitable share across Surrey.

Responding to Jonathan Essex, the Cabinet Member would look to provide the EIA if one had been prepared.

(Q13) Mark Sugden noted that the residents of Claygate looked forward to the upcoming repairs to Woodstock Lane South. He asked the Cabinet Member to ask Surrey Highways at the time of repairs to pay particular attention to drainage as there was significant local flooding at that location when it rained.

Edward Hawkins noted that he was under pressure to spend next year's capital maintenance allowance on two major schemes: firstly, the Maultway which suffered severely from delamination and potholes due to the Esso pipeline works and secondly, Ravenswood Roundabout. He would be grateful if the Cabinet Member would assist him in bringing forward those two works.

In response to Mark Sugden, the Cabinet Member for Highways and Community Resilience would pass that information on to the Highways team.

Responding to Edward Hawkins, the Cabinet Member noted that would liaise with him on the matter; he sought to resolve Members' issues and tried to get the best repairs possible.

(Q15) Robert Evans OBE asked the Cabinet Member whether he could answer the second sentence of his question without deviation, repetition and without reference to or blaming the weather in affecting the roads.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Highways and Community Resilience noted that the role of the opposition was to blame.

(Q16) Catherine Powell noted that the new British Association of Social Workers (BASW) guidance was generated because of an increased number of cases being brought regarding Fabricated or Induced Illness (FII) within Surrey and nationally. Whilst the review was underway, she asked the Cabinet Member what steps were being taken to ensure that further cases of inappropriate FII being raised against parents were dealt with, she noted a case in her division.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Children and Families acknowledged that there was work to do. She would provide a written response including a clear timeline of the work underway.

(Q17) Lance Spencer asked whether it was normal for a property to be waiting for five years before the Council moved forward with a business case to the Cabinet. If approved, he asked how long it would take for the replacement building work to start.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Property and Waste explained that the Lakers Youth Centre burnt down and there had been two years of Covid-19. Since then, the Lakers Centre site had been identified as a potential site for Supported Independent Living and it was decided that it was not suitable and was currently being identified for short breaks provision. She hoped that once approved by the Cabinet, work would proceed quickly through the RIBA (Royal Institute of British Architects) stages and the Council would be on site in 2023 with the work to be delivered in 2024/25.

(Q18) Catherine Powell noted that the response confirmed that the green hydrogen in the UK would not be available for many years and would instead be imported from Rotterdam and Saudi Arabia in the short to medium term. She asked the Cabinet Member to provide details of the carbon footprint calculations that he had referred to and whether he thought green hydrogen would be available in the UK sooner or later than 2030.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Transport, Infrastructure and Growth noted that he would provide the details of the carbon footprint and that he would be speaking with Metrobus on the matter. He explained that the Council was investing £16 million on low emission buses on top of the £50 million commitment to the bus network. The new hydrogen buses would start driving the hydrogen delivery within the UK and he was speaking to several companies within Surrey who were looking to produce hydrogen locally. He anticipated that green hydrogen would be available in the next few years in the UK.

7/23 STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS [Item 7]

Eber Kington (Ewell Court, Auriol & Cuddington) made a statement on a house fire in his division that occurred on 12 December 2022. Five fire appliances attended in total, the first appliance from Epsom arrived within nine minutes, followed by the second appliance from Esher one minute later; both well within Surrey Fire and Rescue Service's (SFRS) attendance time requirements. One adult was found dead within the property and therefore Surrey Police took ownership over securing the property, whilst the fire team

stayed on site to support the police. Over the subsequent days, the crews from Epsom Fire Station carried out wellbeing visits in the local area. He recorded his thanks to the SFRS teams who attended that difficult incident, who supported the police with their work and who offered support to local residents.

8/23 REPORT OF THE CABINET [Item 8]

The Leader presented the report of the Cabinet meetings held on 20 December 2022 and 31 January 2023.

Recommendations on Policy Framework Documents:

31 January 2023:

- A. Refresh of the Organisation Strategy 2023-2028

RESOLVED:

That County Council adopted the updated version of the Organisation Strategy.

- B. The Surrey School Organisation Plan and a Lifetime of Learning Strategy 2030

RESOLVED:

That County Council endorsed and approved the School Organisation Plan 2022-2032 which will meet the Council's statutory duties to ensure that there are sufficient high-quality places for pupils in Surrey.

- C. Admission Arrangements for Surrey's Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools for September 2024 and Surrey's Relevant Area

RESOLVED:

That County Council agreed:

1. That the catchment for Southfield Park Primary School is extended for 2024 admission to include the Parkview estate as a replacement for 'nearest school', as indicated in Enclosure 1 and Appendix 3 of Enclosure 1.
2. That the tiebreaker within catchment for Southfield Park Primary School is changed to straight line distance from the school for 2024 admission, as indicated in Enclosure 1.
3. That a catchment area is introduced for Stamford Green Primary School for 2024 admission to replace 'nearest school', as set out in Enclosure 1 and Appendix 4 of Enclosure 1.
4. That the Published Admission Number (PAN) for Reception at Beauclerc Infant School is reduced from 40 to 30 for 2024 admission, as set out in Appendix 1 of Enclosure 1.
5. That the Published Admission Number (PAN) for Reception at Farncombe Infant School is reduced from 50 to 30 for 2024 admission, as set out in Appendix 1 of Enclosure 1.
6. That the change to the Published Admission Number (PAN) and admission criteria for Year 3 at St Ann's Heath Junior School is not progressed, so that the admission arrangements for this school remain as determined for 2023, as set out in Enclosure 1 and Appendix 1 and 2 of Enclosure 1.

7. That the Published Admission Numbers (PANs) for September 2024 for all other community and voluntary controlled schools (except Beauclerc and Farncombe infant schools which are covered by Recommendations 4 and 5) are determined as they are set out in Appendix 1 of Enclosure 1.
8. That the aspects of Surrey's admission arrangements for community and voluntary controlled schools for September 2024 for which no change has been consulted on, are agreed as set out in Enclosure 1 and its appendices.
9. That Surrey's Relevant Area is agreed as set out in Enclosure 4.

D. 2023/24 Final Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy to 2027/28

RESOLVED:

That the recommendations regarding this item had already been approved under item 5.

Reports for Information/Discussion:

20 December 2022:

- E. Development and Introduction of Your Fund Surrey - Small Community Projects Fund
- F. Agile Office Estate - North-West and South-West Corporate Office Workspace
- G. Arrangements for Civil Parking and Moving Traffic Enforcement in Surrey from 2023/24

31 January 2023:

- H. Surrey County Council People Strategy 2023-2028
- I. Surrey Inclusion and Additional Needs Strategy

- J. Quarterly Report on Decisions Taken Under Special Urgency Arrangements: 3 December 2022 – 3 February 2023

RESOLVED:

1. Noted that there had been no urgent decisions in the last two months.
2. Adopted the report of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 20 December 2022 and 31 January 2023.

9/23 MINUTES OF CABINET MEETINGS [Item 9]

Eber Kington made a statement on the matter of the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ), concerning item 7: Cabinet Member of the Month, Minutes - Cabinet, 31 January 2023. He noted that the extension of ULEZ to the county boundary was a major concern for residents in his division, which bordered the London boroughs of Kingston and Sutton. Following his email to the Cabinet Member for Transport, Infrastructure and Growth on the matter, he was pleased that the Cabinet Member had written to the Mayor of London advising him that his failure to engage on the disruption and additional costs to Surrey residents and businesses would have consequences. He noted that a discussion was needed with the Mayor of London on reducing the ULEZ boundary from its proposed extension up to the London-Surrey boundary, on extending the scrappage scheme to residents and businesses in neighbouring authorities; and on significant improvements to cross-border transport.

[Meeting ended at: 12.37 pm]

Chair

Leader's Statement – County Council (Budget Meeting), 7 February 2023

Madam Chair, Members, today we look in detail at our proposed budget for the forthcoming financial year – an incredibly important process, that enables us to deliver the vital services that the people of Surrey rely on to live their lives. Financial competence and sound budgets are an absolutely essential responsibility of local government, and can I start by thanking both Officers and Members for their hard work in producing what I believe is a good and fair budget. In particular, the Select Committees that have been actively involved in the detail, from last September and throughout the budget setting process.

Without balanced budgets, and responsible financial management, we cannot function as an organisation, our services would be at risk – things that people depend on, would fail.

We have seen the pressures in our sector up and down the country.

We have seen Government Commissioners intervening in Local Authorities.

We have seen some areas cut services all together.

We have seen elsewhere reserves depleted and Council Tax hiked to the highest level possible.

There are many factors in this – local, national, and indeed global – and balancing priorities and budgets in local government is no easy task.

Historically, this Council too has gone through that sort of financial turmoil.

Recently we've seen the added pressures of spiralling inflation meeting increasing demand.

However, we have worked incredibly hard over the last five years to ensure our finances are in a solid and stable state.

We must acknowledge how far we've come as an organisation, transforming our culture and how we deliver services, to enable us to manage our finances responsibly, prepared to face the huge, unexpected challenges of the last few years.

Madam Chair, the rise in the cost of living, increased inflation and interest rates have all impacted the Council as an organisation, as well as our residents.

Everything we do has simply become more expensive to deliver. That can be seen in our budget papers, showing increased spending in almost every area.

However, some years ago we set about transforming this organisation,

We focussed on setting balanced budgets, increasing reserves to a safer level, delivering services in a smarter way and – and in many areas - improving the experience of our residents and staff.

Our ambition has been to be an organisation fit for the future, ready to tackle any challenges that come our way.

That work enabled us to lead Surrey's response to the Covid Pandemic, to act as a financial bedrock to our partner organisations and communities.

And now, it has put us in the best possible shape to face the global economic downturn.

Our transformation, coupled with our efforts to be as efficient as possible and our strong voice to government on behalf of local authorities, mean we do not have to increase Council Tax by the full 4.99% allowed.

We are proposing a total Council Tax increase of 2.99% this year – made up of 0.99% Core Council Tax increase, and a 2% Adult Social Care Precept. That 94p per week increase on a band D property.

This is significantly less than the total permitted by government, and that levied by the vast majority of other councils across the UK.

It is also well below any current measure of inflation.

We believe it is essential to only levy the absolute minimum we need to meet increased costs – cost increases largely driven by inflation - in order to protect people's household budgets as much as possible at this time.

Members - we are making the decision to face this financial challenge in the fairest way possible, balancing our needs and ambitions with the immediate cost of living impact on our residents.

We know further, deeper challenges are on the horizon, and we must be prepared for them.

Our challenge to ourselves – to be fit for the future - has never been more important, and we will continue our transformation, focusing on preventing future problems and doing things more effectively, to ensure Surrey's services are protected over the coming years.

Setting out our budget helps us reflect on the range and depth of services that we are responsible for delivering in Surrey.

It is often easy for us to focus on the most 'visible' services, the things we get the most comment on from our residents, or the services that Members may have the most interest or expertise in.

But looking across the organisation, and the incredible array of talented officers we have in place, gives us a sense of perspective.

It demonstrates what an important balancing act we have to play in setting our budgets and prioritising services.

As we know, the vast majority of our money is spent on those services that provide care and support to our residents who need it most.

We are the place people turn to when they really need help – whether that's Adult Social Care looking after many people with really complex needs, helping them live their lives day-to-day and working to improve their quality of life.

Or Children's Services, playing such a crucial role in providing nurturing care, guidance, and love to young people in our county that simply do not have that in their lives, for various reasons.

These young people should have access to the same life chances as everyone else, and it is our job to ensure they are not left behind.

These services demonstrate our profound responsibility.

It is such an important role, with really complex factors at play, and yes, I'm afraid sometimes it goes wrong. But when it does, it is important to interrogate why and put the right things in place to improve.

That is part of our culture as an organisation, and I know Members play a significant role in that through the scrutiny system in place.

I am confident that these services are improving. That is backed up by independent inspections and peer reviews.

But it is imperative that improvement continues – that we do not get diverted, that we do not lose any of our drive and determination to constantly get better, and that we are always open to new ways of delivering a better service to our residents.

That goes for all our services – from highways improvements to Surrey Fire and Rescue Service. From supporting schools to managing our countryside.

We are clear in our responsibility, and we are clear in our ambitions.

Madam Chair, our services can work together to deliver Surrey's priorities.

Look at our Countryside Team - working with Public Health, and Children, Families and Lifelong Learning - improving access and facilities across Surrey's countryside for young people, to increase awareness around biodiversity and protecting our environment, while ensuring that more people can experience the mental and physical health benefits of the great outdoors.

Or our Fire and Rescue Service – as well as our Adult Social Care teams - visiting vulnerable people in their homes, introducing technology and advice that improves their quality of life, their safety and helping them live independently, in their communities for longer.

Madam Chair – we are one organisation, with a great many services all pulling together, with a clear vision and a clear set of priorities.

This is the Surrey Way – understanding our purpose, and the organisation and people we need to deliver it.

We want to help grow a sustainable economy – by providing the right conditions for business to thrive, delivering skills, jobs, and opportunity for all.

We want to tackle health inequality – by improving life expectancy and quality of life for all and addressing the root causes of ill-health.

We want to deliver a greener future – by tackling the Climate Emergency, together, to protect our future.

We want to empower our communities – by being an active partner with local communities to deliver projects, opportunities and support that is right for local places.

All of these things will help us in our mission to ensure no one in Surrey is left behind.

Our organisation strategy sets this out in more depth, outlining our guiding principles, the Council we are striving to be, the culture we want to foster, and the priorities we must deliver for Surrey.

Indeed, this is a budget that will see more investment in all of our key services.

- Adult Social Care will see an increase of nearly £40m from 22/23. That's £440m each year looking after people with disabilities or extra needs as they get older
- £255m giving young people the best start in life with additional support for those that need it
- £153m improving our roads and public transport, managing our countryside, and tackling the climate emergency
- £40m to help people live healthier lives and keep them safe and well
- Nearly £40m to fund our Fire and Rescue Service – an increased budget of more than 10% from 22/23

And we continue to deliver our ambitious capital programme – over £300m this next year delivering projects that will see more money invested in:

- our highway maintenance programme and road safety schemes
- low emission buses
- flood alleviation schemes
- building new independent living facilities and providing more accommodation for our Looked After Children closer to home
- investing in our library estate
- creating more places for children with additional needs in both mainstream and specialist schools with £50m of investment

These are all really important schemes that will support our four strategic priorities. No one can, or indeed does, pretend that delivery of a balanced budget every year is not a challenge – a challenge to ensure that we prioritise those most in need of our help and support but equally recognising that residents don't always see or access many of our services. But that is what a caring and democratic society expects – that those that need that extra lift in life can turn to their local council for help. Indeed, the feedback from our resident surveys is clear that we should prioritise those individuals, even if that means an increase in Council Tax.

And we will repay that trust by ensuring that every single penny of the 94p per week increase next will be spent on exactly that – working hard to prevent anyone from being left behind.

Madam Chair, I am in no doubt that we are heading in the right direction – our budget position is the latest example of that.

But we know there is much, much more to do. In fact, we will always be looking to improve as an organisation, and we will never shirk from our responsibilities.

I know there are recent instances and issues that demonstrate that there is more to do.

And when things go wrong, we must be relentless in our task to put them right, to learn lessons, to find out what went wrong and why. We will not put our heads in the sand.

As I said earlier, we have a huge responsibility in providing such vital services – so when we fall short, it can have a big – and sometimes devastating - impact on people's lives.

We will always listen, respond, and engage with our residents. Just last week I spoke directly to parents of children with additional needs about their frustrations, understandable frustrations, and if anything, a stark reminder of our need to communicate with all our residents fully and regularly.

While sometimes our answers, and the practicalities of what we can do, may not please everyone – in public service that is almost impossible – it is important that we understand what different groups and individuals are experiencing, so we can shape our services appropriately.

We have set high standards here in Surrey. We want to be leading the way in public service delivery, and we care deeply about what we do.

When we fall below those standards, I am determined that we face up to it, admit our failures and do everything we can to get things right first time, every time.

This culture, our collective endeavour and clarity of purpose, helps us stay fit for the future.

As the last few years have shown, we live in an uncertain world with new challenges - varying in scope and scale - appearing all the time.

We must be fit and ready to take those challenges on, whether it's welcoming thousands of new arrivals into the County from Ukraine, or other parts of the world, or mobilising support across Surrey to help people through tough financial times.

We have shown we can do that and demonstrated our role as a County-wide convenor and active partner.

As we approach a year since Ukraine was so brutally invaded - a despicable act that required a global response – it is important to note Surrey's particular role in helping the people of that great country.

Surrey has opened its doors to Ukrainian families, with over 3,000 people arriving having fled the war – the second highest number out of 152 council areas in England.

There is an extensive network already established in Surrey that helps these families to gain their independence, and begin to feel at home, during their stay in the UK.

We are rightly proud of our communities here in Surrey, and we will continue to do all we can to foster that enthusiasm and spirit for making the world - and our corner of it - a better place.

Madam Chair, I look forward to the discussion of our budget in the hope that there is sensible recognition of both the challenges we face – not just in Surrey, but as a country – and the progress we have made as an organisation.

Progress that enables us to keep the Council Tax rise to a level lower than that of many other places in the country, much lower than the level of inflation, and certainly lower than if we had not embarked on such radical transformation in recent years. We can deliver this budget and its continued investment in our services without using our limited reserves, reserves that will almost certainly be needed to be called on in the coming years.

We are a progressive, forward thinking, responsible council – always striving to be the best.

There is more to do, but we will not falter to ensure the Surrey Way is the standard bearer – that we keep raising the bar and stand ready to face any future challenge.

That is our ambition.

That is our vision.

That is our intention.

Madam Chair, I commend this budget to the Council.