

MINUTES OF THE BUDGET MEETING OF THE COUNTY COUNCIL HELD AT WOODHATCH PLACE, 11 COCKSHOT HILL, REIGATE, SURREY, RH2 8EF, ON 6 FEBRUARY 2024 COMMENCING AT 10.00 AM, THE COUNCIL BEING CONSTITUTED AS FOLLOWS:

Saj Hussain (Chair)
Tim Hall (Vice-Chair)

Maureen Attewell	Eber Kington
Ayesha Azad	Rachael Lake BEM
Catherine Baart	Victor Lewanski
Steve Bax	David Lewis (Cobham)
John Beckett	David Lewis (Camberley West)
Jordan Beech	Scott Lewis
Luke Bennett	Andy Lynch
Amanda Boote	Andy MacLeod
Dennis Booth	Ernest Mallett MBE
Harry Boparai	Michaela Martin
* Liz Bowes	Jan Mason
Natalie Bramhall	Steven McCormick
Helyn Clack	Cameron McIntosh
Stephen Cooksey	Julia McShane
Clare Curran	Sinead Mooney
Nick Darby	Carla Morson
Fiona Davidson	Bernie Muir
Paul Deach	Mark Nuti
Kevin Deanus	John O'Reilly
Jonathan Essex	Tim Oliver
Robert Evans OBE	Rebecca Paul
Chris Farr	George Potter
Paul Follows	Catherine Powell
Will Forster	Penny Rivers
John Furey	* John Robini
Matt Furniss	* Becky Rush
Angela Goodwin	Joanne Sexton
Jeffrey Gray	Lance Spencer
r David Harmer	Lesley Steeds
* Nick Harrison	Mark Sugden
Edward Hawkins	Richard Tear
Marisa Heath	Ashley Tilling
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

1/24 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE [Item 1]

Apologies for absence were received from Nick Harrison, David Harmer (remote), John Robini, Becky Rush.

2/24 MINUTES [Item 2]

The minutes of the meeting of the County Council held on 12 December 2023 were submitted, confirmed and signed.

3/24 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST [Item 3]

Rachael Lake BEM declared a non-pecuniary interest noting that her son works for Surrey County Council.

Keith Witham declared a non-pecuniary interest noting that his daughter works for Surrey County Council in the Finance department.

Bernie Muir declared a non-pecuniary interest noting that her son works for Surrey Choices.

4/24 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS [Item 4]

The Chair:

- Congratulated the Surrey residents who were honoured in His Majesty The King's New Year Honours; including Surrey County Councillor Rachael Lake, who received the British Empire Medal (BEM) for services to the community in Walton-on-Thames.
- Reported the death of former County Councillor Daphne Plaskow, she represented the Walton-on-Thames division between 1985-1989.
- Highlighted the social media drop-in session for Members with the Communications and Engagement team.
- Noted his thanks to the Chief Executive, Joanna Killian who would be leaving Surrey County Council on 6 March, and wished her luck in her new position as the Chief Executive of the Local Government Association.
- Celebrated the launch of the Super Access service at Horley Library.
- Noted that the rest of his announcements could be found in the agenda.

5/24 2024/25 FINAL BUDGET AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY TO 2028/29 [Item 5]

The Leader presented the 2024/25 Final Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy to 2028/29 and made a statement in support of the proposed budget.

A copy of the Leader's budget statement is attached as Appendix A.

Edward Hawkins arrived at 10.22 am.

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

Key points made by Will Forster were that:

- Thanked the Leader and officers for their hard work on the budget despite the cuts to local government by the Government, high borrowing costs, cost of living pressures and the short-term funding settlement.
- Noted that councils had to do more for less having lost one quarter of their funding in the past eight years, there was a £5.8 billion shortfall in the coming financial year.
- Called for fairer funding, stressed that the Government cannot continue to neglect local government, it would leave crises for years to come.
- Feared that the budget repeated past failures in not spending money properly and with multiple inefficiencies.
- Noted disappointment in the MySurrey project with a £10 million overspend, equivalent to residents paying an additional 1% on Council Tax.
- Noted that the Council spent £500,000 on compensation for pothole damage and redress payments concerning Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) because it did not get things right the first time; that money could have funded Short Breaks services.
- Noted that the Council spent at least £19,000 in legal fees regarding the High Court's Judicial Review into the Council's decision not to house a child in need, that money could have been spent on supporting vulnerable residents.
- Noted that whilst the Council would use some reserves to bolster its services it had £150 million in reserves, noted that it was difficult to explain that amount of money not being spent on potholes or Home to School Transport.
- Queried how viable and realistic the budget is as last year the Council did not achieve all the planned efficiencies.

Key points made by Catherine Powell were that:

- Acknowledged that the Leader had worked hard to lobby the Government for greater funding for local authorities, yet the response had been frustrating.
- Noted that the Council needed to be realistic in its approach and stressed that the greatest need should be targeted, focusing on those being left behind.
- Noted that due to the long-term lack of investment in targeted prevention, early intervention and support, need has escalated in Children's Services and Adult Social Care increasing demand for crisis and statutory services, despite that there had been a decrease in public health funding for local government.
- Noted that nationally, family hubs were being rolled out in areas of high deprivation, but there was nothing in Surrey.
- Noted that in terms of their education it would take children from areas of high deprivation ten years to recover from the impacts of the pandemic; children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) were impacted badly by delays to the EHCP system, shortages of specialist provision and support staff.
- Noted that children in the poorest areas were ten times more likely to be taken into care and had poorer life prospects.
- Welcomed the additional £5 million for children's prevention services but it was not adequate or targeted enough, there was a forecast overspend of £16.1 million regarding children's social care places which needed to be looked at.
- Welcomed the Intensive Family Support Service, but one centre in each borough was inadequate, satellite hubs were needed in areas of deprivation.
- Noted that the best option for Surrey children would be a Surrey placement with foster carers or in children's homes; the Council must listen to its foster carers on what they believe would make a difference to retention and recruitment.
- Noted that there had been a historic lack of investment in Surrey's key infrastructure, with reversals of bringing places back into Surrey's control.

- Noted that in 2023, the Council's debt was £0.6 billion and that was set to treble over the next five years, £100 million would need to be found annually out of revenue to service that debt.
- Noted that over five years the Council would borrow £300 million to maintain the highway network, yet gaps remained regarding the walking and cycling routes.
- Noted that the Safety Valve Agreement for the high needs block was based on £58 million for new SEND places, yet the Council received £8 million from the Government; the costs of SEND school places had risen dramatically.
- Noted that some of the capital spending in the budget was optional like Your Fund Surrey, whilst the individual schemes would have a positive impact on those able to access them it was not a targeted scheme for areas of deprivation; spending £1 million annually on the scheme's debt would fund two-hundred youth centres.
- Noted that stable revenue funding for universal services was critical in areas of high deprivation, including stay and play sessions, youth centres, social opportunities for older, poorer and isolated residents, and strength and balance classes; there was a constant pressure on charities to be more creative.
- Noted that the budget amendment would help address some of the issues raised, providing an alternative funding stream for revenue.
- Noted that the strategy for the budget next year must be different, work must start earlier on it.

Key points made by Jonathan Essex were that:

- Noted that yet again the Government failed to provide local government with the funding it needs, it was actively leaving people behind.
- Noted that the announcement to ensure that councils have 4% more spending power than last year means lower government funding, compared to the Government's desire for Council Tax to increase by 5%; therefore why not have a voluntary ask of those Surrey residents most able to pay to support those in need.
- Noted that over three quarters of the new bus funding or £8 million was for the roll out of Digital Demand Responsive Transport (DDRT) to rural areas, whilst mainly funded by a government grant to be spent next year that would create a £11.6 million shortfall in the budget for the year after.
- Noted that DDRT would address social isolation only for parts of Surrey, with much less investment in improving existing bus services in other areas, nor integrating and coordinating with existing community transport.
- Welcomed the cross-party support at the previous council meeting to bring forward phase two of the Freedom to Travel transformation programme into the budget, to better link the growing DDRT with Home to School Travel, community buses and NHS non-emergency patient transport; yet it was hard to see that in the budget but had been assured that the increased funding could be provided.
- Noted that it was unclear how much increase there would be in bus travel through the extra spending on DDRT, nor was there a target; and whether DDRT was the most effective way to increase bus use and achieve carbon reductions.
- Noted that the promise last year to set out the climate impact of the budget did not appear to have been considered.
- Noted concern that reductions in the budget for the new family centres contract by 5% could lead to a reduced service, there needed to be universal preventative level 2 services for under-fives and youth provision across Surrey.
- Queried whether the money set aside for the implementation plan regarding Vision Zero would be sufficient to meet that commitment by 2035, the budget implies that it could be achieved over ten years by introducing twenty miles per hour speed limits on a road by road basis.

- Noted that last year the Local Government Association published its call for councils to lead local climate action, including through the One Public Estate retrofit programme, the Green Party Group's proposed 2023 budget amendment called on the Council to finance that working in partnership but it was not carried.
- Noted that if the Council can provide expertise and training to integrate the Greener Futures finance strategy across the public sector through an agreement to share services and it declares itself the lead local authority for climate change; without additional finance, queried what else was needed to ensure that happens.

Key points made by Robert Evans OBE were that:

- Echoed the thanks to the Leader and officers for the huge amount of work that had gone into preparing the budget.
- Noted his thanks and congratulations to the outgoing Chief Executive, who performed the job in difficult circumstances admirably and with good humour.
- Noted that all the previous budgets he had heard as a Member had been set under difficult economic circumstances including austerity and inept Government policies and budgets, and high inflation.
- Noted prices had not fallen they had risen less sharply, the cover report noted that the high inflation and increasing demand for key services meant an increasing cost of delivering services at a faster rate than the Council's funding.
- Asked how the Leader succeeded in achieving the additional £11 million from the Treasury, yet it was a small amount compared to the Council's £1.2 billion budget.
- Highlighted a startling piece of information in the budget whereby paragraph 1.16 stated that due to the annual publication of the Local Government Finance Settlement 'funding remains unclear beyond 2024/25' with decisions being postponed after the current Parliament and uncertainty to remain after the next General Election; the Council was being neglected by the Government.
- Noted that despite the Leader saying that local government must think differently for it to survive, in previous years there had been efficiencies and there was little evidence of that different thinking this year, the budget gives little hope for those who believe a strong youth service is vital and the reserves should be invested.
- Applauded the public engagement on the budget with a survey about priorities, which included better roads and pavements; yet that was not being delivered to his residents nor had gully cleaning or grass cutting.
- Noted that the Leader highlighted the public transport for rural areas, yet the public transport system in urban areas was not improving with delayed buses.
- Regarding making communities safer, whilst SFRS arrives quickly that was not true of the police when residents had reported antisocial behaviour; some had no confidence in the Police and Crime Commissioner for Surrey.
- Noted that the budget does not give him the confidence to inform his residents that there are improvements ahead, the budget amendment improves it.

Catherine Powell moved an amendment, presenting the following recommended alternative budget proposals (included in the second supplementary agenda items 5i and 6, published on 5 February 2024), which was formally seconded by Jonathan Essex. This was:

Recommendations

Council is asked to approve the following budget proposals, which are aimed specifically at providing support for some of the most vulnerable residents in Surrey in a targeted way, as well as establishing an ongoing funding source to ensure future funding for preventative activities:

- 1. Further investment in SEND Play and Leisure to address increased demand, track and address the waiting lists.**

Budget commitment: £0.5m additional ongoing revenue budget to enable providers to address increased demand due to increased numbers of children with EHCPs, tackle waiting lists and collate information on on-going demand for services to prevent escalation of need and family breakdown.

- 2. Provide funding to support the expansion of the current pilot, where providers of SEND Play and Leisure or Overnight respite groups would allow parents and carers to fund a session or place using their personal allowances, when they are struggling to recruit Personal Assistants (PAs) to provide respite and support.**

Budget commitment: One-off spend of £0.05m to enable providers to create the additional capacity required to enable parents and carers to spend personal allowances on Play and Leisure or Overnight respite places / sessions where PAs cannot be sourced after the current pilot finishes.

- 3. Support the implementation and roll out of the Surrey Fosters Carers Charter, developed alongside the Surrey Foster Carers Association, to support Foster Carers retention and recruitment and ensure the best possible outcomes for the children and young people in their care.**

Budget commitment: One-off spend of £0.3m to fund temporary additional roles within the Fostering Service and other engaged council services, dedicated to working alongside partner organisations including the Surrey Foster Carer Association to ensure that the Charter is fully implemented within 6 months.

- 4. Additional support in schools for neurodiverse children, specifically those in areas of high deprivation.**

Budget commitment: £0.7m additional ongoing revenue budget to enable the service to increase the reach of existing mechanisms and add services for primary schools in areas of high deprivation to support neurodiverse children in mainstream schools.

- 5. Additional revenue budget to create a fund to enable local communities to deliver Strength and Balance Classes in deprived areas and rural villages.**

Budget commitment: £0.2m additional ongoing revenue budget to support communities in deprived areas and rural villages with no regular bus service to create a fund for local communities to access, to provide strength and balance classes to support fall prevention and stroke rehabilitation as well as reducing social isolation.

- 6. Accelerate the roll out of Technology Enabled Care**

Budget commitment: £0.25m of ongoing funding to accelerate the roll out of technology enabled care across Surrey. This budget will cover further additional staffing for the extension of the existing scheme to cover the whole of Surrey over the next 2 years and to establish of an option for anyone to self-fund, at a fixed cost.

- 7. The establishment of a fund, created through voluntary contributions from residents, to provide an ongoing revenue funding source for specific early intervention, preventative and support services for residents in most need.**

The financial impacts are either requirements for initial one-off funding sources or ongoing budget requirements and, if approved, would result in changes to the Directorate envelopes of the Childrens, Families & Lifelong Learning Directorate and the Adults, Wellbeing & Health Partnerships Directorate in 2024/25.

Table 1. Summary of budget proposals

Proposal	2024-25 & annual ongoing revenue impact	One-Off costs	Notes
1. Children Services: Further investment in SEND Play and Leisure to tackle increase in demand, track and address the waiting lists to prevent escalating need and family breakdown	£500,000		Ongoing
2. Childrens Services: Provide funding to support the expansion of the current pilot whereby personal allowances can be used to fund a place at a SEND Play and Leisure or Overnight Respite.		£50,000	One-off funding for Year 1 only
3. Childrens Services: Support the implementation and roll out of the Surrey Fosters Carers Charter within 6 months to support Foster Carers retention and recruitment and ensure the best possible outcomes for the children and young people in their care.		£300,000	One-off funding for Year 1 only
4. Children's Services: Provide additional support for schools in areas of high deprivation for neurodiverse children in mainstream schools.	£700,000		Effectiveness to be reviewed to determine strategy for Year 2 and beyond
5. Adults' Social Care: Additional budget to create a fund to enable local communities to deliver Strength and Balance Classes.	£200,000		On-going
6. Adults Social Care: Accelerate the roll out of Technology Enabled Care	£250,000		
7. Voluntary Contribution Fund The establishment of a fund, created through voluntary contributions from residents, to provide an ongoing funding source for specific early intervention, preventative and support services for residents in most need.			Minimal promotional & administrative costs anticipated to set up. Donations to be utilised to provide ongoing financial support for prevention activities into the medium term
	£1,650,000	£350,000	

In support of her budget amendment, Catherine Powell made the following points:

- Noted extreme concern about the increasingly challenging financial environment and the urgent need for the Council to invest in effective early intervention and prevention, the amendment proposed that alternative funding stream.
- Welcomed the £5 million for Children's Services, but that non-Cabinet Members were not aware of the proposal until it appeared in the Cabinet agenda.
- Was horrified by the lack of additional funding for councils in the Local Government Finance Settlement despite the spiralling statutory service costs particularly in

Children's Services and Adult Social Care; had initially tried to build the amendment around non-statutory services and areas not providing value for money but realised that there would not be enough money available.

- Noted as there could not be additional Council Tax bands without Government approval, she researched the idea of setting up a voluntary contribution fund called the Surrey Community Contribution Scheme, to be advertised and open to all with disposable income to supplement the lack of local government funding.
- Recognised that many residents already make contributions in terms of time and money to charities.
- Noted that over 200,000 households in Surrey were in Bands F, G or H, if everyone in those households gave £10 that would raise £2 million for the voluntary contribution fund, if those in Band H give £100, that would also raise £2 million and that amount would cover the cost of the proposals in her amendment.
- Noted that the results from the budget consultation showed that younger residents aged between 18 to 25 years old were most likely to prefer the Council to allocate resources to those in greatest need.
- Believed that the process should begin now for the voluntary contribution fund as the pressures on statutory services continued to increase.
- Acknowledged that the proposed spending recommendations might not be what everyone would choose, however they were formed from having listened to a broad range of Members and those working with the most deprived communities and vulnerable residents.
- Regarding the proposal to increase SEND Play and Leisure provision, more than 80% of the parents impacted by losing services had reported significant mental health pressures on the whole family since services closed in April 2023; capacity must be increased and waiting lists addressed to protect statutory services.
- Noted that finding Personal Assistants for many families with SEND children was challenging, more must be done to help them.
- Stressed that the Council must do more to help Surrey foster carers, the Surrey Fosters Carers Charter must be delivered quickly and efficiently.
- Noted that Mindworks Surrey was not taking any referrals for neurodiverse children from schools or GPs, the Council must do all it can to support schools, particularly those in deprived areas.
- Noted that key interventions for adults highlighted in her discussions were long-term funded targeted strength and balance classes which were life-changing and accelerating the roll out of technology enabled care.

As seconder to the budget amendment, Jonathan Essex made the following points:

- Welcomed the amendment's focus on strengthening prevention and early intervention spending in Children's Services and Adult Social Care to mitigate expensive costs later, as prevention's long-term benefits were often overlooked.
- Referring to the proposal to support the roll out of the Surrey Foster Carers Charter, the Council had underspent on foster carers by £1 million compared to an overspend on other placement types reflected in the £20 million budget pressures next year to provide homes in Surrey for Looked After Children and Care Leavers.
- Noted that the overspend was due to a reduction of in-house foster carers despite an increase in their allowances last year, it was a tragedy that the Council like many other local authorities, could not find enough places in Surrey, the proposal therefore was important as it prioritised sufficiency.
- Noted that the Council was building new children's homes in Surrey to address some of the 3,000 national shortage of places, that would be vital as all the public sector services in Surrey could collaborate under the Council's guidance.

- Noted that the Council was becoming more reliant on foster carers procured through private agencies at double the cost and who were far away from Surrey, a transformation programme for foster carers was needed, starting with a commitment to work more closely and listen better to the needs of the existing foster carers and the Surrey Foster Carers Association.
- Noted that the voluntary contribution fund for those most able to pay was not a tax, it provided people with an opportunity to supplement their Council Tax, as people trust that councils know where the most need is.

The Leader did not accept the budget amendment and therefore the budget amendment was open for debate.

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

- Welcomed that it was acknowledged that the Council and the administration were focused on prevention and early intervention, by 2027 £165 million would be spent on preventative activity.
- Noted that £535 million of the capital expenditure was on preventative activity such as building homes for children and creating more specialist independent living facilities for elderly residents.
- Noted that the amendment had not been to the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture (CFLLC) Select Committee, nor had there been a conversation with its Chair or the Executive Director - Children, Families and Lifelong Learning.
- Asked yesterday if the proposer would withdraw the amendment so it could be reviewed by the CFLLC Select Committee which can choose to make recommendations to the Cabinet, along with looking at the proposals from the Executive Director - CFL for how to spend that additional funding from the Government; reiterated the need for a review by the select committee.
- Noted that there had been seventeen select committee budget meetings and the proposer had chaired five Budget Task Group meetings and officers had spent hours going through the detail, so did not understand why the amendment came now.
- Noted that in November 2023 the Cabinet received the draft budget and there had not been representation from the opposition, in January 2024 the Cabinet received the final budget yet the proposals of the amendment were not included in the recommendations from the Budget Task Group.
- Regarding the voluntary contribution fund, urged the proposer to think seriously about the appropriateness of asking residents in certain Council Tax bands to make that contribution, that moral pressure was disrespectful to them and all they do in terms of supporting charities with their time and their money.

Sixteen Members spoke on the budget amendment:

- Endorsed what the Leader had said about ensuring that the amount proposed on Children's Services and Adult Social Care can be scrutinised properly by the select committees.
- Described the voluntary contribution fund as a resident tax, it was not the Council's responsibility to act as a charitable organisation, residents would feel insulted as they already pay their Council Tax and expect services to be delivered.
- Noted that residents' money would be spent to publicise the voluntary contribution fund to ask residents to give the Council money.
- Noted that the voluntary contribution fund does not align with the Fundraising Regulator's Code of Fundraising Practice which aims to develop a culture of honesty, openness and respect between fundraisers and the public, as it is not a

respectful approach as it singles out residents based on the value of their properties, it applies pressure and does not treat the public fairly.

- Noted that the Community Foundation for Surrey voluntarily distributes over £2 million annually to Surrey beneficiaries, the voluntary contribution fund is divisive and overlooks the financial contributions made by Surrey's wealthy residents to voluntary and charitable organisations.
- Had called for additional Council Tax bands to be established in Surrey to cover higher value properties, yet that could only be granted by the Government.
- Noted that the highest value property in Surrey was on sale for £17 million, its Council Tax was £3,500 a year or 0.0002% of the value, whilst some of the lowest value properties at £160,000 had a Council Tax of £1,367 or forty times as much as the percentage of a higher value property.
- Highlighted that the proposal for the voluntary contribution fund ringfenced within the Community Foundation Surrey was deemed viable and within the Council's legal powers to implement, it should not be trivialised by being called a tax.
- Noted that the idea for the voluntary contribution fund was not mad or without supporters, Westminster City Council had introduced the Community Contribution Fund which sometimes had generated £500,000 in extra money a year; Surrey is five times bigger.
- Highlighted that those not in Band H might feel guilty and feel that they have to contribute and that they did not want donations to charities to be diverted to the voluntary contribution fund instead; and urged people to donate to the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector.
- Queried how much the voluntary contribution fund would cost to run, the Council would have to ensure transparency and scrutiny on how money is collected and from who, people may want to stipulate that their donation is spent in their local area; it would be difficult to manage and staff would need to be employed to run it.
- Noted that in response to the proposer's call for the budget process to start earlier, clarified that the first discussion had on the budget was on the afternoon of last year's budget Council; over the past year there had been numerous scrutiny meetings, Cabinet meetings and one-to-one meetings with the proposer and none of the proposals had been raised during that process.
- Noted that regarding the voluntary contribution fund, targeting Band H households to pay a surcharge on their Council Tax bills was unacceptable, it was not the role of a local authority to raise money in that way or to decide how it would be spent; it should not be assumed that residents in Band H properties are able to contribute.
- Noted that there was no guarantee that the proposer might not attempt to extend the voluntary contribution fund to Bands F and G or any other band.
- Noted that the proposal was unworkable, the Section 151 officer's commentary noted that there was no mechanism in place to either administer or collect the contributions, and the Council would be unable to place any reliance on it as a funding stream as the amount generated was uncertain.
- Noted concern that Members had either not understood the voluntary contribution fund or had misinterpreted it as it was not a tax, it encouraged donations from those able to afford it; hoped that people do donate to charities.
- Noted that the amendment highlighted that the Council Tax banding is unfair and ridiculous, Buckingham Palace is valued at around £1 billion and it is a Band H property and its Council Tax is only £1,828.
- Noted that the way the Conservatives reacted to the amendment or dared question it being put forward was over the top, it is a democratic institution and the opposition are obligated to suggest alternatives or highlight weaknesses.
- Noted that regarding the due process, there was no requirement for any amendment on the budget to be brought via select committee, nor was that the norm in most other councils.

- Highlighted that if no amendment had been proposed by the opposition then the administration would have condemned that.
- Noted that it was unsurprising that the Conservatives were revolted at the idea of asking the wealthiest residents to consider making a voluntary contribution.
- Noted that all the proposed voluntary contribution fund would require was additional text in the Council Tax letter highlighting how people could donate, it could be administered using existing resources.
- Noted that when talking to people about whether they would be happy to pay a bit more to see things better, many were willing to do so provided they now where the money went - that amendment specified that.
- Noted that the administration should not be focusing on the voluntary contribution fund but at the other proposals within the amendment and what the Council should be doing for its children and their parents.

A Member raised a point of order under Standing Order 16.3 regarding the relevance of speech strictly to the budget amendment and asked whether the Chair would rule out of order any Member who refers to the budget amendment as a tax scheme, when it is clearly a voluntary scheme. The Chair noted that the debate was on the budget amendment as published.

- Noted that having searched on the internet, had not found anything about the results of a voluntary contribution scheme at a London authority that proposed the idea in 2019; if it was a success it would have been promoted.
- Felt that it would be wrong to suggest to any resident where they should donate their money and felt uncomfortable with some residents being singled out to contribute more.
- Congratulated the proposer on the way she handled the work of the Budget Task Group and its contributions to the budget, the Cabinet had delivered on the main recommendations put forward; the list of proposals in the amendment and their costings required proper analysis.
- Noted that there was an assumption that the Council was a charity which it was not and the voluntary surcharge would hit charities, a lot of hard work went into charity fundraising.
- Noted that the opposition complained about debt yet they sought higher spending and the use of reserves which was irresponsible.
- Noted the outrageous attitude shown towards charities which were independent and so was appalled at the idea of political interference, the voluntary contribution fund destroys the nature of charity donations being freely given to the causes the donors support, and donors also provide their valuable time.
- Noted that the proposals were innovative and creative, and as Chair of the CFLLC Select Committee was pleased for the select committee to review those to see how they could be taken forward and to review the proposals from the directorate in terms of the additional government funding for Children's Services.
- Noted that the borough and district councils collect Council Tax, regarding the voluntary contribution fund the money would have to be properly handled and distributed with a clear audit trail and that would be a further cost.
- Highlighted the importance of digital for serving residents and was offended by the singling out of the Communication, Engagement and Public Affairs and the Customer & Communities directorates for a staff review, making those hard-working staff feel vulnerable.
- Noted that despite Surrey being a prosperous part of the country, for example Waverley had the highest multiple of house prices in the country outside of London, the Council was not wealthy having been underfunded by the Government.

- Noted that the select committees were advisory committees on budget matters, the Council makes the final decision so could choose to support the proposals in the amendment.
- Noted that the younger generation had been failed by the Government over the past decade.
- Noted that it was easy to find the reports on the successes that Westminster City Council had on their Community Contribution Fund which raised £400,000 in its first year from voluntary contributions, it operated through a charitable trust and Gift Aid could be claimed back.
- Represented some of the poorest divisions in the county with 32% of the population having at least one of the deprivation indexes meaning those families cannot pay their Council Tax or afford to heat their homes, the Government would withdraw the Household Support Fund in April which was a lifeline for many families and therefore asking those able to contribute was fair and decent.

The Chair asked Catherine Powell, as proposer of the budget amendment to conclude the debate:

- Reiterated that the voluntary contribution fund was open to all, it would not be collected via Council Tax so would not impact the borough and district councils, it would be collected via the Community Foundation for Surrey.
- Noted that she speaks to wealthier residents in her division with disposable income and working as a key member in a local charity that works closely with one of the 21 Key Neighbourhoods, encourages them to donate directly to that charity, and many do but the funding is limited.
- Noted that the voluntary contribution fund provided an opportunity to address the fact that funding from the Government for early intervention, prevention and support services would never be prioritised over statutory services.
- Welcomed the additional £11 million from the Government and wished she had known about it earlier, the amendment tried to find ways to fund those gaps by asking people to make donations to help those most in need; it was not about diverting funding away from charities.
- If the amendment was not carried, she hoped that the recommendations for spending and raising funds would be taken to the select committees to be given proper consideration based on the facts contained in the amendment; hoped the select committee chairs would be supportive of that and if not in place by the end of the year she would bring the proposals back.

The budget amendment was put to the vote with 33 Members voting For, 43 voting Against and no Abstentions.

The following Members voted for it:

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

The following Members voted against it:

Maureen Attewell, Ayesha Azad, Steve Bax, Jordan Beech, Luke Bennett, Natalie Bramhall, Helyn Clack, Clare Curran, Paul Deach, Kevin Deanus, John Furey, Matt

Furniss, Tim Hall, Edward Hawkins, Marisa Heath, Trefor Hogg, Robert Hughes, Jonathan Hulley, Saj Hussain, Rebecca Jennings-Evans, Frank Kelly, Riasat Khan, Rachael Lake BEM, Victor Lewanski, David Lewis (Cobham), David Lewis (Camberley West), Scott Lewis, Andy Lynch, Ernest Mallett MBE, Cameron McIntosh, Sinead Mooney, Bernie Muir, Mark Nuti, John O'Reilly, Tim Oliver, Rebecca Paul, Lesley Steeds, Mark Sugden, Richard Tear, Denise Turner-Stewart, Jeremy Webster, Buddhi Weerasinghe, Keith Witham.

Therefore it was **RESOLVED** that:

The budget amendment was lost.

Returning to the original budget proposal and recommendations as published in the agenda, fourteen Members spoke on it:

- Highlighted the £10 million overspend on the MySurrey IT system, that amount could have funded a team of one hundred top-notch people for a year; it could have been used to fund much needed services.
- Noted that central to the Leader's speech was caring for residents from cradle to grave, yet the reality for residents of that experience was that the Conservative Council let people down due to the inadequate provision of many services and little progress made on climate change, the budget repeated that.
- Noted that in a difficult time for local government finance, the budget was positive for Surrey's residents and focused on their priorities, having been informed by extensive consultation with the public and stakeholders.
- Noted that the extra £32 million of highways investment was making a difference, for example three roads in Woking South-West were scheduled for resurfacing.
- Welcomed the extra £5 million investment for Children's Services which was focused on providing extra capacity for children with additional educational needs, used their Member allowance to support 'Appeer' which provided help to girls and women with autism.
- Noted that the number of specialist school places had increased by 1,000 since 2019 as a result of the administration's capital programme.
- Noted that the overall the budget provided another £95 million of spending for next year despite several grants being less than expected, the Council Tax rise and efficiencies sought to protect the provision of services.
- Noted that the cross-party Budget Task Group and select committees played a constructive role in helping set the budget.
- Noted that the Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee had scrutinised the transport and infrastructure elements of the budget describing the capital programme as ambitious in terms of its significant investment; but asked whether the £11 million additional funding could be used to fully fund the implementation of the Task & Finish Group recommendations.
- Noted that the Council was not immune from the challenges of increased inflation and rising demand for its services, despite that the Council's finances were robust and holding that level of reserves was a responsible way to operate and had over five years enabled the delivery of more services.
- Welcomed the £10.9 million of additional funding which would enable increased investment in further preventative measures.
- Noted that the proposed revenue budget for next year amounted to a total funding of £1.197 billion, or an increase of £95 million or nearly 9% compared to last year.
- Noted that the Council was legally required to balance the budget, that would require an increase in Council Tax by 2.99% and a 2% increase in the Adult Social Care precept; a rise of £1.61 weekly for a Band D property.

- Noted that the budget would allow the Council to make significant investments in its bus services including on-demand buses, highways and in environmental services, with an additional £30 million for the core highways maintenance budget for the next two years, Member Highways Allocations had increased by a further £20,000 to £120,000 annually.
- Noted that the budget would enable the Council to further support the most vulnerable residents across the county, by 2028/29 it was forecasted that the Council would be spending £165 million on preventative activities, in addition to £538 million of planned spending on the capital programme over five years.
- Noted that the Council's capital programme was ambitious but affordable with a proposed spending of £1.9 billion over the next five years, the proposed spend next year was a further £409 million; the Council was investing in the future of the county and vital services to leave no one behind.
- Noted that the Leader had been consistent in asserting that the improvement of services for children and young people was this Council's absolute priority, the Children's Services budget had increased to a total of £286 million.
- Noted that the Children's Services spending was rigorously managed, welcomed the cautious support given by the Chair of the CFLLC Select Committee which had been clear in its recommendations about the budget.
- Noted that Children's Services was needs driven and continued to face pressures in terms of contacts and referrals about children at risk of harm and neglect, Looked After Children and duties towards Care Leavers, there were more children with EHCPs and there were national pressures around the recruitment of social workers, placement and Home to School Transport costs had increased.
- Noted that despite the local and national pressures, the Children's Service continued its focus on increasing the quality of frontline services, concerning early intervention and prevention that was through the investment in the Family Safeguarding Model of social care since 2018 and the Edge of Care work.
- Noted that the additional £5 million funding for Children's Services would be targeted on services prioritised by the directorate, on preventative services such as Short Breaks, Early Help networks and support for foster carers.
- Noted that Children's Services was driving through several key capital projects spending over £30 million on the residential estate for children and young people, £140 million was being invested to expand the specialist school estate keeping children rooted in their communities in Surrey.
- Noted that the Adult Social Care directorate was focused on optimising technology enabled care working in partnership to support people to live independently, the significant long-term transformation plan streamlined the current referral process and sought to maximise reablement.
- Noted that the Council was investing an extra 6% in Adult Social Care or £27.2 million, an achievement considering the increasing national demand for services, the impact of the living wage and inflationary increases; the number of people awaiting assessments across the country had risen by 500,000 since last spring.
- Noted the target in Surrey to deliver 725 units of extra care by 2030, planning permission had been secured at one site with construction to start shortly and outline planning permission at two further sites with construction to begin in 2025.
- Noted that the Council had also started the delivery of 500 units of supported independent living for people with a learning disability or autism, of those 200 units were for residents living with mental health issues and Short Break facilities.
- Noted that the Council seeks to have an equal and financially sustainable care market and was working with providers, the Surrey Care Association and a wider market to look at managing inflation, stabilising the social care workforce and reducing high-cost variations.

- Noted that the benefits from Your Fund Surrey projects had exceeded expectations, £17 million had been invested delivering 35 large projects across Surrey, £1 million had been distributed by Members at a divisional level to deliver 119 small projects across Surrey delivering accessible, free or affordable community activities and facilities for thousands of residents; enabling local ownership and leadership, and tackling rural and urban decline.
- Noted that £23 million had been injected into the Libraries Transformation Programme to realise the potential of the 52 libraries, enabling Surrey's libraries to become modern community hubs with extended hours, well-equipped resource centres, and residents were involved in the co-design of the services.
- Thanked the Leader and Cabinet for taking on board the CFLLC Select Committee's recommendations particularly around Short Breaks.
- Represented a very poor area with people struggling to pay Council Tax, yet one part was well-off with wealthy inhabitants so queried why the Council could not charge the millionaire homes more.
- Noted that whilst there was a lot of good in the budget, the spending of millions of pounds in some areas could have been avoided by investing in a secure base, and elsewhere grass cutting had not been done and youth services had reduced.
- That as Chair of the CFLLC Select Committee, thanked the Cabinet Member and Leader for accepting the select committee's budget recommendations, however would have liked to have seen less of a focus on efficiencies.
- Recognised the Leader and Cabinet's commitment to putting the additional funding provided by the Government into Children's and Family Services, progress was being made and it would continue to be an area of high demand and affected by high inflation.
- Noted that additional costs above what was planned in the budget for children's placements this year was £16.1 million on top of an increased budget for Home to School Transport at £45 million with an overspend of £4.7 million, it was disappointing that Government funding would likely not increase soon.
- Noted that expectations had increased within the CFLLC Select Committee, which would not stop making suggestions and hoped that it would get the same response next year.
- Welcomed the appreciation given to the administration regarding the progress made in Children's Services, over the year the recommendations had received unanimous support including the £400,000 for Short Breaks.
- Noted that it was the best budget produced by the administration, it was pragmatic and compassionate, delivering for the most vulnerable.
- Noted that in December the Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee strongly questioned the idea to have efficiencies of £400,000 for the Surrey Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS), as the last two Inspectorate assessments had deemed the SFRS to need improvements for technical reasons.
- Referred to the Brightwells Yard scheme in Farnham, last week the Leader attended the opening of a cinema and met the Farnham Visitors' Forum; welcomed the Council's support and take-over of the finding of tenants for the commercial part of the scheme from the supplier.
- Noted the importance of the Farnham Infrastructure Programme locally, thanked the Leader for continuing to support that.
- Noted that £0.9 million savings had been made regarding waste re-procurement as part of the strategy to move to a disaggregated contract model, £3 million savings had been made on outsourcing the Facilities Management service and across the agile programme.
- Noted the ambitious capital programme and the following had been delivered: forty-four SEND classes, school expansions and refurbishments, two new schools, seventeen school expansions and refurbishments were on site, with one new school

on site and another twenty expansions and refurbishments would be delivered in 2025/26.

- Noted the delivery of a temporary mortuary, two new salt barns would be delivered shortly, noted the library refurbishments and community hubs, two new children's homes had been delivered and were on site at another one, a family centre had been delivered, work on Short Breaks sites would start soon in Woking and Banstead, work was underway on the independent living and extra care sites.
- Highlighted that there would be over fifty projects under construction across the county this summer and once built those would deliver revenue savings, the Council was disposing of empty properties and was selling land for residential housing, getting large capital receipts for Surrey.

The Leader of the Council made the following comments in response:

- Emphasised that it was the most serious meeting that the Council has where Members each year decide how residents' Council Tax money should be spent.
- Noted that he had no issue with the amendment's proposer and other opposition Members who wish to write to their residents - not using Council resource - asking them for a voluntary contribution and would be interested in the outcome; wondered whether the Community Foundation for Surrey had been contacted about whether they would be prepared to administer it.
- Stressed that if the opposition vote against or abstain from the vote on the budget, that meant they were saying that they would not spend £1 of their Council Tax on Council services.
- Reiterated that since becoming Leader, any substantial policy changes had been scrutinised by the select committees and would continue to do so; praised the select committees' invaluable work.
- Clarified that the budget for SFRS in 2023/24 was £39.2 million, increasing to £41.1 million in 2024/25, a significant investment would be made in rebuilding new training facilities to make those compliant.
- Supported the investment in Farnham and was delighted to attend the opening ceremony of the REEL Cinema last week and to address the Farnham Visitors' Forum on the work and support provided by the Council; would be pleased to see the road improvement works starting before the summer.
- Agreed with the need for the reform of local government funding with many well-managed councils struggling, had lobbied the Government for a long-term funding solution in his role at the County Councils Network and would continue that fight.
- Noted that the services provided by Children's Services were targeted, the Council had to ensure that the areas highlighted and recommendations in the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) and SEND area inspection must be followed through.
- Emphasised the need for a whole-system approach, for example EHCPs required the commitment of the health service and partners such as the police and voluntary sector for effective services to be delivered.
- Stated that he would welcome Jonathan Essex's attendance at a Surrey Leaders' Group meeting to make the case for the Council to be the lead climate authority.
- Explained that he secured the additional funding by putting forward a focused case around the need for additional support for Children's Services, last year councils received £2 billion funding for Adult Social Care and noted that he would honour the pledge that the additional funding would go into Children's Services; that additional funding was a result of a small group of mainly Conservative Members of Parliament lobbying the Prime Minister.

- Regarding youth services, recognised that Robert Evans OBE had alongside fellow trustees worked hard to try to reopen the youth centre in Weybridge; noted that several years ago the Council took the decision to focus time and money on supporting those with additional needs, it provided funding to independent organisations that then picked up and carried on those universal services.
- Noted that the budget had increased by £100 million this year, with around £25 million more for Adult Social Care and £40 million more for Children's Services.
- Noted that over £1 billion was being spent to improve the lives of Surrey's residents, £500 million was being spent on prevention and early intervention through capital projects to support the extra facilities across the directorates.

After the debate the Chair called the recommendations, which included the Council Tax precept proposals, and a recorded vote was taken with 43 voting For, 23 voting Against and 10 Abstentions.

The following Members voted for it:

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

The following Members voted against it:

Catherine Baart, Harry Boparai, Stephen Cooksey, Jonathan Essex, Robert Evans OBE, Chris Farr, Paul Follows, Will Forster, Angela Goodwin, Jeffrey Gray, Robert King, Eber Kington, Jan Mason, Julia McShane, Carla Morson, George Potter, Penny Rivers, Joanne Sexton, Lance Spencer, Ashley Tilling, Liz Townsend, Hazel Watson, Fiona White.

The following Members abstained:

John Beckett, Amanda Boote, Dennis Booth, Nick Darby, Fiona Davidson, Andy MacLeod, Michaela Martin, Steven McCormick, Catherine Powell, Chris Townsend.

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 2024/25; 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 2024/25. These reserves and contingencies include the following amounts, (totalling £107.0m) set aside specifically to provide financial resilience:
 - the General Fund (£49m).
 - Specific contingencies built into the 2024/25 budget (£20m); and

- Unused contingency brought forward from previous years (at least £38m depending on 2023/24 outturn).

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

3. The net revenue budget requirement be set at **£1,197.1 million** (net cost of services after service specific government grants) for 2024/25 (Annex B), subject to confirmation of the Final Local Government Financial Settlement.
4. The total Council Tax Funding Requirement be set at **£914.9 million** for 2024/25. This is based on a council tax increase of 4.99%, made up of an increase in the level of core council tax of 2.99% 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 £1,758.60, which represents a 4.99% uplift. This is a rise of £1.61 a week from the 2023/24 precept of £1,675.08. This includes £251.44 for the Adult Social Care precept, which has increased by £33.50. A full list of bands is as follows:

Valuation band	Core precept	ASC precept	Overall precept
A	£ 1,004.77	£ 167.63	£ 1,172.40
B	£ 1,172.24	£ 195.56	£ 1,367.80
C	£ 1,339.70	£ 223.50	£ 1,563.20
D	£ 1,507.16	£ 251.44	£ 1,758.60
E	£ 1,842.08	£ 307.32	£ 2,149.40
F	£ 2,177.01	£ 363.19	£ 2,540.20
G	£ 2,511.93	£ 419.07	£ 2,931.00
H	£ 3,014.32	£ 502.88	£ 3,517.20

7. The use of £5m of the additional social care funding, announced in January 2024, to enable additional targeted preventative and early intervention investment in children's services.
8. 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;
9. The Total Schools Budget of £656.7 million to meet the Council's statutory requirement on schools funding (as set out in Section 9 of the 2024/25 Final Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy to 2028/29).
10. The overall indicative Budget Envelopes for Directorates and individual services for the 2024/25 budget (Annex B).
11. The total £1,902.4 million proposed five-year Capital Programme (comprising £1,291.3 million of budget and £611.1 million pipeline) and approved the £404.9 million Capital Budget in 2024/25 (Annex C).
12. 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 2024/25 Final Budget Report and Medium-Term Financial Strategy to 2028/29).

Capital and Investment Strategies: Council approved the following:

13. 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).
14. The policy for making a prudent level of revenue provision for the repayment of debt - the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy (Annex G).

6/24 MEMBERS' QUESTION TIME [Item 6]

Paul Follows and Penny Rivers left the meeting at 13.00 pm.

Questions:

Notice of thirteen questions had been received. The questions and replies were published in the supplementary agenda (items 5i and 6) on 5 February 2024.

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

(Q1) Joanne Sexton referred to the second paragraph of the response around the trial of the machinery and regarding the wording of 'they felt' and 'we do not believe', she asked the Cabinet Member to confirm why the advantages and disadvantages were not included in his response. She requested a detailed report as to why the Council was not proceeding with the innovative idea and to confirm how it was evaluated and analysed.

The Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth noted that there was a detailed report and he would check with the Highways Laboratory regarding whether it could be shared with Members. The JCB Pothole Pro was found to be more suited to wider surfacing repairs and that had not achieved better results than existing machinery, there were concerns around the compacting of the material and need for additional transportation to move it across Surrey.

(Q3) Will Forster asked whether the Cabinet Member could let Members know when the final costs are agreed with the aggrieved family.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Families, Lifelong Learning would provide that information.

(Q4) Hazel Watson referred to the problems with issuing paper parking permits for visitors with only twenty-eight residents applying for those, and asked what was being done to monitor and to ensure that all residents who want paper permits get them. She also asked when the Council's website would be updated on the application process.

The Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth noted that he would talk to officers about updating the website, there was also a phone number available. He noted that residents were written to about the changes to the contract. He explained that the team could look at SFRS' vulnerable list to determine whether other people needed to be contacted on the matter. The team would be happy to contact any other residents that required assistance.

(Q5) Stephen Cooksey noted that as it was a statutory requirement, he sought assurance that the information would be published as soon as received.

Chris Townsend referred to the last sentence of the response that monthly reports on local enforcement activity were being sent to Members, he noted that those reports did not include information on enforcement around schools and he sought assurance that it would be included.

The Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth responded to Stephen Cooksey noting that once received that information would be published and it would be included in the monthly update, he noted that some of the borough and district councils had not provided the information requested. Responding to Chris Townsend he noted that the schools programme would be added into the monthly report once it was up and running.

(Q6) Jonathan Essex asked whether the Cabinet Member would agree that it was unacceptable that since public health had become local authorities' responsibility, it had a lower increase than it had within the NHS. He noted that if the Council was serious about prevention, he asked whether the Cabinet Member could write to the Government to demand an increase at least in line with Council Tax.

The Leader noted that yesterday the Government announced the coming year's public health grant and the Council would receive an additional £400,000, there was £700,000 more in the Council's budget for next year compared to this year.

The Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing, and Public Health noted that he would welcome more money for public health, he congratulated the team for their hard work in the efficient use of the money available working in partnership across the system on prevention. Lobbying the Government for more money was ongoing.

(Q7) Catherine Baart noted that the baseline data was from 2019, she asked what was causing the delay in publishing the newer baseline data and when would the first measurement be made against that.

The Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth would provide a written response.

(Q8) Catherine Powell noted that the Foster Carers Portal was critical to the Council and welcomed that the project was in the build phase, but the roll out deadline of 31 March was challenging. She asked the Cabinet Member to advise how and when an End User Acceptance Group would be chosen and how much testing was proposed by the end of March.

Steven McCormick was astonished at the response given the MySurrey project for which business as usual issues remain ongoing since its go live in June 2023. He highlighted several areas of concern in the response around the Foster Carers Portal project which culminated in the potential delay in the implementation, he queried whether nothing had been learnt from implementing the MySurrey project and stressed the need to ensure that the same mistakes are not repeated. He asked for the Foster Carers Portal project plan to be urgently reviewed and a realistic and achievable plan be created and republished to improve its chances of a timely and on budget implementation.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Families, Lifelong Learning agreed that the Foster Carers Portal was an important project for the Council, the Fostering Service and foster carers, it was an enhancement designed to make foster carers' lives easier. She welcomed the comments made and would ask the Fostering Service to expand on the plans and circulate information appropriately.

(Q9) Robert Evans OBE noted that his question had implications for all Members. He asked whether the Cabinet Member was happy with the change in admission criterion and asked what advice she would provide to parents about the problem that they now could not get a place at their nearest school. He asked whether the Cabinet Member understood that if those changes were not challenged, there would be more families travelling further across Surrey taking their children to school. It seemed absurd that children were not allowed to have a choice of going to their nearest primary school.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Families, Lifelong Learning urged the Member to read the response closely which had been provided by the admissions service and to understand that it was in line with guidance issued by the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA) and admissions law. Governing bodies can replace the words 'nearest school' for example the school in her division replaced the wording with 'proximity of the child's address to the school'. The wording had changed but not the principle, the OSA asked for the removal of that wording to make it clearer to parents when making an application to a school regarding the likelihood of being admitted based on their distance from the school.

(Q10) Catherine Powell welcomed that the team had acknowledged that there was a secondary school shortage in Farnham and it was significant and growing, without an easy solution. She asked the Cabinet Member to advise when she thinks there would be a solution to the problem. Having looked at locations in Farnham where a school could be constructed there did not seem to be the sites, yet the Council was building more homes; the Home to School Transport budget would increase.

Michaela Martin noted that as lead member of the Farnham Neighbourhood Plan Group, asked whether it would be possible to put the matter in writing to Farnham Town Council and for it to be made more aware of any developments in the future.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Families, Lifelong Learning responded to Michaela Martin noting that the question and response had been published in the public domain and therefore could be shared with Farnham Town Council. Responding to Catherine Powell, she could not say when a new school would be built in Farnham to meet the additional need. She urged the Member to keep in touch with the Education Place Planning team on the matter. She was aware that the planning for and delivery of a new school could take many years and she hoped that a solution could be found whether that would be the building of a new school or otherwise.

(Q11) Robert Evans OBE noted that the Cabinet Member asked in 2019/20 for Government changes, he asked whether four years was long enough to have those changes. He asked what advice he would give to residents who cannot walk along the pavement outside their house as it is blocked by vehicles, or those residents in a wheelchair or with a pram who cannot use blocked pavements. He noted that phoning the police was not a solution. The Leader had recently visited his division and saw many vehicles parked on pavements.

John O'Reilly asked whether the Cabinet Member would agree that it would be appropriate that the Member lobbies the Labour Party on the matter.

Mark Sugden noted that the consultation on pavement parking closed in November 2020 and no report had been published. He asked whether the Cabinet Member or former portfolio holder had received any answers from the Department for Transport (DfT) to their requests regarding when the report would be published.

The Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth responded to Mark Sugden noting that DfT stated that the report would be published in due time, he would chase DfT again on the matter. Responding to Robert Evans OBE he noted that the law was that people could ring the police if a vehicle was blocking a pavement and he urged them to do so. Unless there were yellow lines or a parking restriction then the pavement could not be enforced. He noted that in his division having rung 101, a police officer did move a vehicle along that was blocking a pavement.

(Q12) Catherine Powell thanked the Cabinet Member for confirming that the Performance Indicators were being regularly monitored and asked for him to advise which of those indicators he thought were the most concerning to him and what action he was taking.

Edward Hawkins asked whether the Cabinet Member was aware that for the past seven years he had problems with an area on a shopping precinct which had been designated as highway land, over the Christmas period and despite bad weather Ringway worked hard and carried out a superb job; he noted his thanks.

The Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth welcomed those positive comments from Edward Hawkins. Responding to Catherine Powell, he noted that there was not a particular indicator that was a concern, the Performance Indicators should be looked at together and those changed throughout the year. Due to the mild winter, there had been fewer potholes. He urged the Member to attend the Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee to see the Performance Indicators and comment on those as appropriate.

7/24 STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS [Item 7]

Rachael Lake BEM (Walton) made a statement on a new free school with 950 pupils which had nearly completed its improvement works, it had successfully admitted its second intake. Opposite that free school there would be a new Special Educational Needs school and those places were desperately needed. There had initially been problems around the improvement works to the free school but those had been eliminated through the communication and reassurance provided to residents by BAM Construction; she had not received any complaints in the last nine months.

Maureen Attewell (Laleham and Shepperton) made a statement on the recent flooding in her division, she shared her immense gratitude and appreciation to all those that played a vital role in the collective response. Residents of Abbeyfields had been helped by the Surrey Fire and Rescue Service to evacuate their homes on 8 January. In response, Spelthorne Borough Council opened a rest centre in Shepperton and the Adult Social Care service was notified and service managers assessed the needs of the residents in a caring way and provided reassurance.

8/24 REPORT OF THE PEOPLE, PERFORMANCE AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE [Item 8]

As Chairman of the People, Performance and Development Committee, the Leader introduced the report.

RESOLVED:

1. Appointed Leigh Whitehouse as Interim Chief Executive and Head of the Council's paid service of Surrey County Council with effect from 7 March 2024.

2. Appointed Anna D'Alessandro as Interim Statutory Section 151 Officer with effect from 7 March 2024.

9/24 REVIEW OF MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES FOR 2024 - 2025 – REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL [Item 9]

The Leader introduced the report noting that regarding recommendation 6 for the Council to consider lobbying the Government to reinstate the right to vote remotely, that had recently been debated in the House of Commons and was rejected.

Regarding recommendation 8 the Leader proposed the following amendment with additional words in bold/underlined:

That the council provides a one-off payment to members **in May 2025** for bespoke IT solutions. The payment would be to cover a four year term of office but would not be repeated should the member be re-elected.

Regarding recommendation 9 the Leader proposed the following amendment with deletions crossed through:

That the payment be ~~in the range of £200-£300.~~

The Leader acknowledged that in the current term of office some Members might have incurred additional costs by buying a computer screen for example and therefore there was the flexibility for any Member to claim that payment, however if re-elected they would not be able to claim that payment again.

RESOLVED:

Relating to the Basic Allowance

1. That the Council continues with the 2020 recommendation of linking the basic allowance to the CPI. This should be adjusted on the 1st of April each year.
2. That the increase in basic allowance is capped at the level of the average staff salary increase if this is lower than the CPI.

Relating to Special Responsibility Allowances

3. That the Council continues with the 2020 recommendation of linking any increase to SRAs to the CPI. This should be adjusted on the 1st of April each year.
4. That the increase in SRAs is capped at the average level of the staff salary increase if this is lower than the CPI.

Relating to Inclusivity

5. That the Council conducts an audit of its meeting schedule with a specific focus on mandatory in-person attendance and any need for the meeting to be during the working day or on a particular day.
6. That the Council considers lobbying Central Government to reinstate the right to vote remotely, as was utilised during the COVID pandemic.

Relating to Expenses and food provision

7. That the Council retains its existing subsistence and expenses framework including the provision of a lunch for appropriate meetings.

Relating to Hybrid Working

8. That the council provides a one-off payment to members in May 2025 for bespoke IT solutions. The payment would be to cover a four year term of office but would not be repeated should the member be re-elected.
9. That the payment be £300.

10/24 AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION [Item 10]

The Chair noted the proposed changes to Part 2 – Articles of the Constitution.

RESOLVED:

1. Approved the amendments to Part 2 of the Constitution as set out in this report.

11/24 REPORT OF THE CABINET [Item 11]

The Leader presented the report of the Cabinet meetings held on 11 December 2023, 19 December 2023 and 30 January 2024.

Recommendations on Policy Framework Documents:

30 January 2024

- A. 2024/25 Final Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy to 2028/29

RESOLVED:

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

- B. Admission Arrangements for Surrey's Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools for September 2025

RESOLVED:

Approved the admission arrangements for community and voluntary controlled schools, including the Published Admission Numbers (PANs), for September 2025 as set out in Annex 1 and its appendices.

Reports for Information/Discussion

11 December 2023:

- C. Local Area Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) Inspection Outcome and Actions

19 December 2023:

- D. Special Guardian and Foster Care Remuneration
- E. A New Draft Vision Zero Road Safety Strategy and 20 mph Speed Limit Policy
- F. Acquisition of Corporate Office Hub in Northwest Surrey

30 January 2024:

- G. Strategic Investment Board Annual Report - Financial Year 2022/23
- H. Quarterly Report on Decisions Taken Under Special Urgency Arrangements: 5 December 2023 – 2 February 2024

RESOLVED:

1. Noted that there had been no urgent decisions since the last Cabinet report to Council.
2. Adopted the report of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 11 December 2023, 19 December 2023 and 30 January 2024.

12/24 MINUTES OF CABINET MEETINGS [Item 12]

No notification had been received by the deadline from Members wishing to raise a question or make a statement on any matters in the minutes.

The Chair thanked the Finance team for proposing a sustainable budget.

[Meeting ended at: 13.35 pm]

Chair

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Leader's Statement – County Council (Budget Meeting), 6 February 2024

Mr Chairman, Members, welcome to the first full Council meeting of 2024, and with it one of the most important items we discuss all year – our budget for the forthcoming 12 months, and beyond.

As I've said many times here, we take our duty and responsibility to the people of Surrey extremely seriously.

We are making decisions with our residents' council tax – a significant proportion of people's household budgets – and with it, providing services they rely on every day, to improve their lives and stay safe and well.

Ensuring we do that responsibly - setting a balanced budget, focusing on the right priorities, ensuring our foundations are strong for the future and our services are sustainable – is one of the most important duties we have.

As I will set out in a moment, this budget does just that.

Let's not pretend otherwise, times for local government at the moment are tough.

And there is no doubt that things are going to get tougher.

Although inflation is slowing and interest rates are plateauing, costs have soared across the sector – in many areas well beyond the rate of that high inflation we've seen over the last 12 months.

Our costs are rising much faster than our income, and it would be impossible and irresponsible to attempt to pass all of that on to our council taxpayers.

I very much welcome the recent, additional allocation of extra funding to councils through the Local Government Funding Settlement – something that I personally lobbied hard to achieve. That additional money has now been confirmed at £11million pounds and I would like to personally thank Jeremy Hunt, Michael Gove and the Prime Minister for their help and support in securing that funding.

It will certainly help, and we will direct that extra funding to prevention measures and support for children with additional needs and disabilities.

But it is not enough, and we will continue to work constructively with the government to push for more sustainable, longer-term funding certainty for local government and where appropriate reform to outdated legislation.

As well as cost, demand is also increasing at an alarming rate, and with growing complexity.

In many areas of Adult Social Care and Children's Care, our provision of services is non-negotiable, and we must support people to live their lives safely and with the right level of care and support.

More than 70% of our entire budget is spent on these areas – more than £2m every single day spent on what is a relatively small proportion of our population, but it is those people who need us most.

And we will not leave those people behind.

But we know that our more visible services, like road maintenance, libraries, countryside management, and community recycling centres, are the ones experienced by the most people.

Lots of what we do – particularly across Surrey Fire & Rescue Service, Trading Standards, and Environmental Services – is about keeping people safe and preventing or responding to serious incidents.

We will not ignore these responsibilities either.

In fact, we're increasing investment in our Highways and Environment Services, following a task and finish review undertaken by Cabinet earlier in the year that identified areas that would benefit residents the most.

That will see service improvements including refreshing road lines, additional investment in gulley cleaning, area stewards, and grass-cutting – things we know matter to our local communities, increasing pride in where we live, as well as safety on our roads.

This budget also includes significant investment in supporting and enhancing bus services across Surrey, with the introduction of a half price travel scheme and expansion of our digital demand-responsive buses, which have proved hugely popular, reducing car journeys, making travel easier and improving access to essential services, particularly in our more rural communities.

Our libraries are some of the most visited in the country and improving all the time, with Super Access enabling more people to use them, for more hours of the day.

We are investing in our countryside sites to increase access to that natural asset we're so lucky to have.

We are managing the county's waste responsibly, with comparatively high levels of recycling and all our CRCs providing a vital service for residents.

We are investing as much as we can afford in maintaining and improving Surrey's 3000 miles of roads and pavements, street lighting, and bridges.

Our Fire and Rescue Service are working night and day to keep people safe, investing in the latest technology and equipment to respond to emergencies effectively, and working alongside residents and businesses to improve safety and stop those emergencies happening in the first place.

We are actively supporting arts and culture across Surrey, recognising the huge benefits of the creative sector on people's lives.

We are registering births, deaths, and marriages across the county.

We're responsible for over a billion pounds a year using that money to have a positive impact on each and every resident, from cradle to grave and to make Surrey a better place.

Mr Chairman, our capital investment programme is focused on getting the right building blocks in place to ensure demand can be met more effectively and sustainably in the years ahead:

More modern forms of care accommodation and supported independent living schemes will enable elderly people and those with additional needs to live within the community for longer, increasing resilience and reducing reliance on expensive and often less effective institutionalised residential care.

Our programme of building more modern children's homes, to give those young people in care the best possible start in life, increasing their life chances, and health and

wellbeing, so they are better able to forge a successful, stable, more independent life when leaving the care system.

Building better schools – providing the best possible learning environment, with modern settings and technology, enabling young people in Surrey to develop the life skills that will help them flourish in the world.

Funding community-led projects through Your Fund Surrey, which benefit local communities by increasing participation, connections and mutual support – helping communities help themselves to thrive.

Investing in Surrey's transport infrastructure and town centres, to enable easier, cleaner travel around our county, reducing emissions, improving air quality, health and wellbeing, and fundamentally tackling the climate emergency.

This investment speaks to our forward-thinking – investing in the foundations of a modern preventative service, fit for the future.

If local government is to survive, and indeed thrive, we must think differently again.

We have to re-energise our transformation work – a mindset that has been hugely effective for us over the last few years.

Looking to the future.

Embracing change.

Applying best practice.

Thinking boldly and innovatively.

Delivering our services in different ways, to deliver better outcomes more efficiently.

We're already progressing with several transformation projects to do just that.

From our Fire & Rescue Service Improvement Plan, to redesigning how we provide Children's Health and Care services alongside Surrey Heartlands.

From mental health to environment, infrastructure and growth.

We are redesigning how we provide services, how we organise ourselves, how we operate.

We are setting out a renewed focus on customer service, ensuring our residents can engage with the council positively, understand the services they need, and access them more seamlessly.

We will understand our communities better, through improved insights and intelligence, more consistent methods of engagement, all leading to more effective policy making.

This is a continuation of the journey we have been navigating for the last six years, something we have proved that we can do even in the face of huge challenge - and do it effectively.

This budget presented today outlines in stark terms the challenges we face, but also how we intend to tackle them.

By strengthening our foundations, ensuring we are fit for the future and that our residents and our communities are supported to thrive.

I note a late attempted amendment from the opposition, following months of engagement with at least 25 separate opportunities, via Scrutiny Committees and meetings, to input constructively into our budget setting process. Mr Chairman, it is bewildering that this submission comes one working day before this meeting.

I will speak to the amendment in due course, but I will make the same point as I have done for the last 5 budget meetings, that any suggestions or recommendations need to be discussed with the Executive Directors and taken through the Select Committee process for their comment and support.

I will also be speaking against the further resident tax they are proposing. We have many philanthropic residents in this county that willingly give of their time and money, and it is not for this council to tell them what to do.

This is a solid, balanced budget, in the face of unprecedented pressure and challenge faced by local government in this country.

But Surrey leads the way in responsible financial management.

So, Mr Chairman, we look ahead.

To a year that promises more challenges, more opportunities, more uncertainty, but the potential for fresh starts and new ideas.

We will no doubt see a general election in 2024 and will look forward to continuing to work constructively with any new government that is formed, especially as we forge ahead with a County Deal and the opportunities that can bring.

Here in Surrey, we do not simply ask for handouts, or look to Westminster to solve our problems.

We roll up our sleeves and work hard to develop the right solutions for our communities, and in turn we are part of the solution for the country.

We are determined to keep moving forward, to both get the basics right now – and right first time – and also to have the foresight to invest in Surrey’s future, making decisions now that will benefit future generations.

That is what this budget will do, and I am proud to present it today for approval.

But I must also recognise that this will be our Chief Executive Joanna Killian’s final council meeting here at Surrey, as she departs to take on the challenge of leading on behalf of the entire sector, as Chief Executive of the Local Government Association.

Joanna arrived at Surrey six years ago, when the council was very different to the organisation it is today.

Not only were our headquarters located outside the county, in an old, not-fit-for-purpose building, but our financial position was close to the brink, many of our services were weak, the council was bloated and ultimately inefficient.

With the wider circumstances at the time, and over the years that followed – political instability, uncertainty, ever-tightening public finances, a global pandemic and lockdowns – it is clear to see the organisation we have become under Joanna’s guidance.

The fact that the LGA looked to Surrey for its new Chief Executive – and, I am told, had to use its considerable powers of persuasion – demonstrates the high regard in which this council is now held by the wider sector.

We are industry-leading, a bastion of best practice, fuelled by high ambition and forward thinking.

That is in no small part down to Joanna’s expert leadership – alongside her top team and the many dedicated officers we have in the organisation.

I have no doubt whatsoever that the LGA will be greatly improved for Joanna's presence, but I'm also confident that the trusted, stable, ambitious organisation she leaves behind will continue to go from strength to strength, thanks largely down to the solid foundations we now have in place.

We say goodbye to Joanna with a heavy heart, but also immense pride and gratitude.

I personally will miss her wise and constructive counsel, and I know I speak for all of us here when I say we will also miss you as a true friend and companion. I would ask all Members to show their appreciation for all that she has done these past 6 years for this council and for the residents of Surrey.

While we recruit a permanent successor to Joanna – someone with a strong track record, and with energy and ambition to match our own – we plan for Leigh Whitehouse to take on the Chief Executive role on an interim basis.

We know Leigh well, and I am certainly confident that he will pick up the baton and continue the momentum we currently have.

And, in turn, the ever-capable Anna D'Alessandro will take on the duties of the 151 Officer while Leigh is stepping up.

We know what we need to do.

We will stick to that plan.

And we will do it.

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