

Minutes of Council

Meeting date Tuesday, 27 February 2024

Committee Members present: Councillor Tommy Gray (Mayor), Councillor Gordon France (Deputy Mayor) and Councillors Tommy Gray, Gordon France, Sarah Ainsworth, Aaron Beaver, Julia Berry, Alistair Bradley, Alan Cullens, Karen Derbyshire, Margaret France, Danny Gee, Christine Heydon, Alex Hilton, Terry Howarth, Hasina Khan, Samir Khan, Zara Khan, Michelle Beach, Roy Lees, Adrian Lowe, Pauline McGovern, June Molyneaux, Alistair Morwood, Dedrah Moss, Beverley Murray, Alan Platt, Debra Platt, Aidy Riggott, Jean Sherwood, Chris Snow, Craige Southern, Arjun Singh, Kim Snape, Ryan Towers, Jenny Whiffen, Neville Whitham, Alan Whittaker, Joan Williamson and Peter Wilson

Committee Members present virtually (non-voting): Councillors Samantha Martin

Officers: Chris Sinnott (Chief Executive), Sarah Bullock (Deputy Chief Executive), Chris Moister (Director of Governance/Monitoring Officer), Louise Mattinson (Director of Finance/Section 151 Officer), Asim Khan (Director of Customer and Digital), Caroline Wolfenden (Director of Change and Delivery), Darren Cranshaw (Head of Democratic Services), Neil Halton (Head of Finance), Emma Lyons (Head of Communications and Visitor Economy), Alison Wilding (Head of Customer Services) and Ruth Rimmington (Democratic Services Team Leader)

Apologies: Councillor Michelle Brown, Mark Clifford and Matthew Lynch

A video recording of the public session of this meeting is available to view on [YouTube here](#)

79 Silence

The Mayor invited Members to observe a minute's silence in memory of former Councillor and Mayor, John Lucas.

The Leader of the Opposition, Councillor Alan Cullens, the Leader of the Council, Councillor Alistair Bradley and Councillor Alan Whittaker paid tribute and sent their condolences to the family.

80 Declarations of Any Interests

No declarations of interests were made.

81 Minutes

Resolved (unanimously) that the minutes of the Council meeting held on 30 January 2024 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Mayor.

82 Mayoral Announcements

The Mayor explained that Councillors Hasina, Zara and Samir Khan were undertaking a sponsored fast for Ramadan from 11 March, with all proceeds being donated to the Mayoral charities.

83 Public Questions

Three public questions were submitted.

Question One from Jenny Hurley

Although the Council has invested in "Housing where residents can live well", these appear to be in the scope of care facilities, namely a number of units at Tatton Gardens, Primrose Gardens and Woodlands; The scheme to adapt homes to sustainable heating and maintenance solutions for the most vulnerable is also commendable; and provision of affordable housing sounds positive.

They do not address the most financial, green and secure sustainable solution for Chorley Residents, however. The most secure way to ensure green solutions, providing safe homes for Chorley residents already housed or those needing to be housed, is to invest in Social Housing, provided by the Council, run by the council and maintained by the council.

The under-spend of the Capital Program to invest in this area is a clear indication of lost opportunity in a time where local council New House builds are not aimed at the most vulnerable but at the general housing market or specialised care facilities.

Neighbouring boroughs have started expansion in this area, with South Ribble having completed the first phase and Preston looking to move ahead with extensive plans.

Further, we have many residents living in squalid council funded properties, neglected by housing associations, and left bereft and with choice or voice.

Surely the first step would be to bring existing housing standards up to a safe level of health and safety by bringing their running in house and fully accountable.

Long term investment in truly affordable Council Houses, built sustainably, on existing brownfield sites would be the greenest option to long term, truly named, "housing where residents can live well."

In short, the capital program only invests in money making schemes, that creates revenue that is reinvested into money making schemes. It is a fine example of capitalism, and worthy of a Tory Council, but many people voted for a long term investment in its people and their well being.

Why haven't any of these issues been addressed over the years of low council housing investment?

Councillor Howarth, Executive Member (Homes and Housing), responded.

The Council is also very concerned with the conditions of properties provided by Housing Associations and those provided via the Private rented sector. Last year the Council invested in a new Housing Standards Officer post. The role of this officer is to raise the standards of rented homes in the Chorley area by responding to complaints and proactively contacting landlords to inspect properties to ensure they are safe to live in. The officer uses the legislation in the Housing Act 2004 to ensure homes are safe, healthy, and free from things that could cause serious harm.

If anybody is aware of people living in rented properties neglected by Housing Associations, we want to know about it and our Housing Standards Officer can inspect and take enforcement action if necessary.

The supplementary question was not related to the main question so the questioner was asked to ask a relevant question. This request to follow procedure was not complied with. At 7.15pm the Mayor adjourned the meeting.

The Mayor reopened the meeting at 7.35pm.

Question Two from Catherine Waring

I note on the agenda for this £353,000 to be spent improving bus shelters. I would like to attend to ask if this means there will be a more regular local bus service than now.

Councillor Bradley, Executive Leader, Executive Member (Economic Development and Public Service Reform), responded.

Chorley Council support and subsidise bus services, alongside Lancashire CC. For the year to date (April 2023- March 2024) we have spent £59,373 supporting local bus services. We estimate that we will have spent £85,554 by the end of the quarter, the figure exceeds the total amount paid for 22/23 (which was £65,731).

We support the following routes:

117 – Chorley to Chorley via Pilling Lane

118- Chorley to Lower Burgh

119- Chorley to Preston

24A- Chorley to Blackburn via Lower Wheelton, Abbey Village and Feniscowes

These routes are governed by 2 contracts, one covering the daytime 117, 118 and 119 services, this contract is in place until March 2025. The other contract is for the Sunday and evening services of the 24A, 118 and 119. This contract is reviewed every 12 months. For the Sunday and evening services, three quarters of the costs are funded by Chorley Council.

Like all council services, our contribution to bus services and the routes involved are subject to regular review. During our 12 months review, in conjunction with service providers we consider the demand for services from customers, evidence around routes and the available budget to subsidise the services.

Question Three from Humayra Atiq

Is the increase in garden waste a green agenda? If so how?

Councillor Lowe, Executive Member (Customer, Streetscene and Environment), responded.

No, the increase to the garden waste charge is not part of the green agenda, but rather part of our annual review of fees and charges. The charge is determined to cover the costs of providing the service. As costs of service provision increase, fees and charges are adjusted to ensure that costs are recovered.

84 Council Tax Local Discounts & Premiums Policy

The Executive Member (Customer, Streetscene and Environment), Councillor Adrian Lowe, presented the report of the Director of Customer and Digital which set out options for changes to amounts of local discounts and premiums in a revised Council Tax Local Discounts and Premiums Policy.

The Executive Member (Customer, Streetscene and Environment), Councillor Adrian Lowe proposed and the Deputy Executive Leader, Councillor Peter Wilson seconded, and it was **Resolved (unanimously)**

- 1. The following amounts of council tax discount on empty and substantially unfurnished properties are approved from 1 April 2024:**
 - a. 100% discount for up to 3 months**
 - b. 50% discount for 3-6 months**
 - c. 0% discount for 6-24 months**
- 2. A 100% council tax discount for up to 12 months for uninhabitable properties is approved from 1 April 2024.**
- 3. The period after which a long-term empty council tax premium applies is amended from 2 years to 1 year from 1 April 2025.**
- 4. A council tax premium of 100% on second homes is approved from 1 April 2025.**
- 5. The Government's proposed exceptions when empty homes and second homes council tax premiums should not be applied are mirrored in the revised Local Discounts and Premiums Policy.**

85 Revenue Budget 2024/25, Medium Term Financial Strategy and Capital Programme 2024-2027

The Deputy Executive Leader and Executive Member for Resources, Councillor Peter Wilson, presented the Executive's Revenue Budget 2024/25, Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and Capital Programme 2024-27.

Councillor Wilson thanked officers and the Labour Group for their hard work and input into the proposed budget.

The 2024/25 budget and the MTFS for the next two years had been updated to take account of the Local Government Finance Settlement announced in February and the latest financial information, forecasts and economic outlook, and were reflective of the following:

- due to the continued pressures on council budgets, alongside reduced levels of funding from government to meet these increasing costs, the figures include a proposed 2.99% increase in council tax in 2024/25;
- the figures include a proposed 1.99% increase in council tax in 2025/26 and of 1.99% in 2026/27; these proposals would be revisited each year as part of the budget setting process and would be dependent upon the outcome of the government's reviews of both the future funding framework and the future distribution of funding between councils, the review of the business rates system and the development of the 'Levelling-Up' agenda;
- continued investment is reflected in ongoing revenue budgets to ensure delivery of corporate strategy priorities.

Although the level of funding in cash terms has decreased by £0.8m (4.5%) from £17.6m in 2016/17 to £16.8m in 2024/25, there had been a further real terms reduction as the rate of inflation (as measured by CPI) has increased by 31.9% over this period.

Despite this, the council had been, and remained, ambitious in its approach to addressing the budget deficit by generating efficiency savings and additional income.

The council continued to invest in the borough and the budget included £22.450m of capital investment from 2024/25 to 2026/27, including investment in:

- the provision of affordable housing, support for refugees and adaptations to assist residents in their homes;
- improving and transforming the leisure centres to encourage our residents to be active and healthy, along with investment in play, recreation and open spaces;
- driving economic development through the delivery of the Woodlands development site;
- supporting our town centre through the town centre masterplan and the recently awarded Levelling-Up Fund, for which plans are currently being developed;
- delivering the green agenda, including decarbonisation of council properties;
- rationalisation of council accommodation, including relocation of the Bengal St depot and works to the Town Hall and the former White Hart public house;
- investment in a programme of refurbishment and replacement of bus shelters across the borough through the Asset Improvement programme.

The Deputy Leader, Councillor Peter Wilson proposed and the Deputy Portfolio Holder- Resources, Councillor Arjun Singh, seconded the recommendation.

The Leader of the Opposition, Councillor Alan Cullens, thanked the officers for their work in presenting a balanced budget, and noted the Opposition would have looked to reduce debt and would not have invested in bus shelters. He suggested that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee review the events program and Councillor Wilson agreed.

In line with the legal requirement for all budget decisions to be recorded, this proposal was put to the vote and recorded as follows:

For: Councillors Sarah Ainsworth, Aaron Beaver, Julia Berry, Alistair Bradley, Alan Cullens, Karen Derbyshire, Gordon France Margaret France, Danny Gee, Tommy Gray (Mayor), Christine Heydon, Alex Hilton, Terry Howarth, Hasina Khan, Samir Khan, Zara Khan, Michelle Beach, Roy Lees, Adrian Lowe, Pauline McGovern, June Molyneaux, Alistair Morwood, Dedrah Moss, Beverley Murray, Alan Platt, Debra Platt, Aidy Riggott, Jean Sherwood, Chris Snow, Craige Southern, Arjun Singh, Kim Snape, Jenny Whiffen, Neville Whitham, Alan Whittaker, Joan Williamson and Peter Wilson

Against: None.

Abstain: None.

The vote was unanimous, and it was therefore **Resolved:**

- a) **Approve the budget and proposals set out in this report, including the level of Council Tax as set out in the Formal Council Tax Resolution for 2024/25, including Special Expenses & Parish Precepts, at Appendix A;**
- b) **Note the advice of the Chief Finance Officer in relation to the robustness of the estimates within the overall budget, including the risks contained within it and the adequacy of the proposed level of financial reserves, as set out in the Statutory Report at Appendices B1 – B3;**
- c) **Approve the council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) at Appendix C;**
- d) **Note the council's forecast Cumulative Budget Deficit and Budget Strategy 2024/25 to 2026/27 at Appendix D, including the analysis of the movement in the 2024/25 Budget from the position approved by Council in February 2023;**
- e) **Note the analysis of the Directorate Budgets for 2024/25, by expense type, at Appendix E;**
- f) **Approve the capital programme for 2024/25 to 2026/27 (Appendices F1, F2 & F3);**
- g) **Approve the Capital Strategy at Appendix G;**
- h) **Approve the Treasury Management Strategy at Appendix H1 and note the advice of the treasury management consultants at Appendix H2;**
- i) **Approve the council's Pay Policy at Appendix I for publication on the council's website from April 2024 (including Appendix I (i) – the payscales for Chorley Council and Appendix I (ii) – the payscales for Shared Services);**
- j) **Note the Budget Consultation 2024/25 Report at Appendix J;**
- k) **Note the Impact Assessment of the Budget Proposals for 2024/25 at Appendix K.**

Mayor

Date