

## Press Release from Buckinghamshire Council

16 February 2021

### **Cabinet agrees final budget recommendations in 'difficult and challenging' circumstances due to Covid**

Cabinet today confirmed its final proposals for a 1.99% increase in basic council tax and a 2% increase in the Adult Social Care Precept, resulting a total increase of 3.99% for the new financial year starting in April.

The detailed billion-pound proposals will now go forward for discussion and final agreement by the full council when it meets on 24 February.

While the level of council tax stays the same as Cabinet's original proposals agreed on 5 January, other changes have now been incorporated as a result of the final Local Government Settlement from national Government, the continuing effects of Covid-19 and the recommendations from the recent three-day Select Committee review.

Leader of Buckinghamshire Council, Martin Tett said that the continuing Covid pandemic made this budget setting difficult and challenging. "This is a set of proposals focussed almost entirely on getting us through the next year and hopefully then to more predictable times," he said.

"Despite the massive financial strain to keep vital services going, supporting local residents and businesses and battling against the effects of the ongoing pandemic, we've been very conscious to keep the increase in council tax as affordable as possible for local residents.

"In addition to basic council tax, the Government also proposes councils take up to 3% extra for the Adult Social Care Precept - this is the money needed to continue to look after our elderly and vulnerable adults. However despite the pressures in that area, Cabinet felt the time wasn't right and that a lower 2% precept rise was the best course of action. I am always aware that this is Council Taxpayers' money and we need to never take more than is absolutely necessary."

A major change from the original proposals considered by Cabinet is the inclusion of another £4m for investment in drainage.

Martin continued, "It is clear that, with the effects of Climate Change and the heavy rainfall we are increasingly experiencing, we need to do more in this area. We will add extra funding and release money from our reserves to ensure that all our blocked gullies are cleared this year and for some much-needed structural repairs. In total, this will mean £7.7m spent on drainage in 2021/22."

Other changes incorporated into the final proposals include additional contingencies to cover the significant loss of income across service areas and further funding to address pressures in Children's Services.

In total, just over £2m from council reserves is planned to be used to help balance the books and deliver a legal and tested budget.

The recommendations to Council also seek authority for the Cabinet to add up to £100m worth of longer term schemes to the current capital programme, funded through prudential borrowing and with each proposal subject to a robust business case being approved.

Martin added: "As I said back in January, and with the further adjustments we've since made, this is a budget that helps manage our current pressures in the best way possible.

"Whilst other councils around the country are struggling with potential bankruptcy, despite big Council Tax increases, here in Buckinghamshire we are a financially robust council due to careful financial management, which means we are still able to respond to our residents' priorities such as the major roads improvement programme and the new blitz on blocked drainage.

"In addition, it's also a budget that paves the way for longer term economic recovery post-Covid, which invests in local infrastructure and which puts us firmly in the starting blocks to help rebuild Buckinghamshire, and importantly jobs for our residents, after this dreadful pandemic ends."

The budget plans cover day-to-day (revenue) spending on services for 2021/22 and longer term (capital) investment spending over a four year period to 2024/25.

The Final Local Government Settlement was announced on 4 February 2021. There were no changes from the figures published in the Provisional Settlement 17 December 2020.