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COUNCIL

6 MARCH 2024

(7.18 pm - 10.18 pm)

PRESENT (in the Chair), Councillor Gill Manly,
Councillor Martin Whelton,
Councillor Agatha Mary Akyigyina,
Councillor Stephen Alambritis, Councillor Laxmi Attawar,
Councillor Thomas Barlow, Councillor Hina Bokhari,
Councillor Michael Brunt, Councillor Billy Christie,
Councillor Caroline Cooper-Marbiah,
Councillor Anthony Fairclough, Councillor Edward Foley,
Councillor Brenda Fraser, Councillor Jenifer Gould,
Councillor Joan Henry, Councillor Daniel Holden,
Councillor Andrew Howard, Councillor Natasha Irons, Councillor
Sally Kenny, Councillor Linda Kirby, Councillor Paul Kohler,
Councillor Edith Macauley, Councillor Peter McCabe,
Councillor Simon McGrath, Councillor Nick McLean,
Councillor Aidan Mundy, Councillor Dennis Pearce,
Councillor Marsie Skeete, Councillor Eleanor Stringer,
Councillor Martin Whelton, Councillor Helena Dollimore,
Councillor James Williscroft, Councillor Sheri-Ann Bhim,
Councillor John Braithwaite, Councillor Michael Butcher,
Councillor Caroline Charles, Councillor Eleanor Cox,
Councillor Klaar Dresselaers, Councillor Chessie Flack,
Councillor Kirsten Galea, Councillor Ross Garrod,
Councillor Jil Hall, Councillor Billy Hayes, Councillor Susie Hicks,
Councillor Dan Johnston, Councillor Andrew Judge,
Councillor Usaama Kaweesa, Councillor Samantha MacArthur,
Councillor Stephen Mercer, Councillor Stuart Neaverson,
Councillor John Oliver, Councillor Robert Page,
Councillor Michael Paterson, Councillor Tony Reiss,
Councillor Slawek Szczepanski, Councillor Matthew Willis,
Councillor Max Austin and Councillor Victoria Wilson

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

There were no apologies for absence.

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

Councillors Alambritis, Bokhari and Hall declared pecuniary interests in Item 5 and declared they would leave the room during that item.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 February 2024 are agreed as an accurate record.

4 BUSINESS PLAN 2024-28 (Agenda Item 4)

The Mayor opened the meeting and spoke outlined the procedure for the Budget section of the meeting. They also reminded the Council that all budget related decisions, including proposed amendments were required to be recorded within the minutes with a list of the names of those who voted for or against the decision or who abstained from voting and a roll call vote would be taken for the substantive budget motion and any amendments to it.

At the invitation of the Mayor, the Executive Director Finance and Digital presented the Business Plan 2024-28. The Executive Director then responded to questions from Councillors Neaverson, Hicks, Akyigyina, Paterson, Skeete, Bokhari, Pearce, Austin, Henry, MacArthur and Kaweesa.

The Leader of the Council presented the Business Plan 2024-28 and moved the recommendations in the report whilst making his budget speech to Council, a copy of which is appended to the minutes as Appendix A. Councillor Christie formally seconded the recommendations and reserved his right to speak. The Mayor then invited the opposition group leaders in turn to respond to the Budget proposal and the Business Plan. The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, Councillor Fairclough addressed the meeting and their speech is attached to the minutes as Appendix B. The Leader of the Conservative Group, Councillor McLean addressed the meeting and his speech is attached to the minutes as Appendix C. The Leader of the Merton Park Ward Independent Residents Group, Councillor Foley addressed the meeting and his speech is attached to the minutes as Appendix D.

The following members of the Cabinet addressed the meeting: Councillors Cooper-Marbiah, Judge, Irons, McCabe, Stringer, Fraser, Alambritis and Kenny.

The Mayor then invited members to move proposed amendments to the Business Plan. Councillor Fairclough formally moved the four Liberal Democrat amendments which were formally seconded by Councillor Braithwaite. Councillor McLean formally moved the Conservative amendment and this was formally seconded by Councillor Paterson. Councillor Charles formally moved their amendment submitted as an Independent Member. This was seconded by Councillor Mercer.

The Mayor then opened up the general debate on the proposed amendments and on the proposed substantive Business Plan. The following members spoke in the debate: Councillors Johnston, Flack, Macauley, Cox, Szczepanski, Oliver, Kirby, Holden, Willisroft, McGrath, Dollimore, Charles, Butcher, Hall, Mundy, Barlow, Attawar, Wilson, Hayes, Brunt, Reiss, Akyigyina, Neaverson, Page, Kaweesa, Kohler, Bhim and Christie.

At the conclusion of the debate, Councillor Garrod exercised his right of reply and the Mayor then called for a roll-call vote on the Liberal Democrat amendments to the Business Plan 2024-28. Voting was as follows:

Liberal Democrat Amendment 1

Votes in Favour: Austin, Barlow, Bokhari, Braithwaite, Charles, Cox, Dresselaers, Fairclough, Flack, Foley, Galea, Gould, Hall, Hicks, Holden, Howard, Kohler, MacArthur, McGrath, McLean, Mercer, Oliver, Page, Paterson, Reiss, Willis and Wilson (27)

Votes Against: Akyigyina, Alambritis, Attawar, Bhim, Brunt, Butcher, Christie, Cooper-Marbiah, Dollimore, Fraser, Garrod, Hayes, Henry, Irons, Johnston, Judge, Kaweesa, Kenny, Kirby, Macauley, McCabe, Mundy, Neaverson, Pearce, Skeete, Stringer, Szczepanski, Willisroft, Deputy Mayor Councillor Whelton and the Mayor Councillor Manly (30)

Not Voting (0)

The Mayor declared the amendment to be lost.

Liberal Democrat Amendment 2

Votes in Favour: Bokhari, Braithwaite, Dresselaers, Fairclough, Flack, Foley, Galea, Gould, Hall, Hicks, Kohler, MacArthur, McGrath, Mercer, Oliver, Page, Reiss, Willis and Wilson (19)

Votes Against: Akyigyina, Alambritis, Attawar, Bhim, Brunt, Butcher, Christie, Cooper-Marbiah, Dollimore, Fraser, Garrod, Hayes, Henry, Irons, Johnston, Judge, Kaweesa, Kenny, Kirby, Macauley, McCabe, Mundy, Neaverson, Pearce, Skeete, Stringer, Szczepanski, Willisroft, Deputy Mayor Councillor Whelton and the Mayor Councillor Manly (30)

Not Voting: Councillors Austin, Barlow, Charles, Cox, Holden, Howard, McLean and Paterson (8)

The Mayor declared the amendment to be lost.

Liberal Democrat Amendment 3

Votes in Favour: Austin, Barlow, Bokhari, Braithwaite, Charles, Cox, Dresselaers, Fairclough, Flack, Foley, Galea, Gould, Hall, Hicks, Holden, Howard, Kohler, MacArthur, McGrath, McLean, Mercer, Oliver, Page, Paterson, Reiss, Willis and Wilson (27)

Votes Against: Akyigyina, Alambritis, Attawar, Bhim, Brunt, Butcher, Christie, Cooper-Marbiah, Dollimore, Fraser, Garrod, Hayes, Henry, Irons, Johnston, Judge, Kaweesa, Kenny, Kirby, Macauley, McCabe, Mundy, Neaverson, Pearce, Skeete, Stringer, Szczepanski, Willisroft, Deputy Mayor Councillor Whelton and the Mayor Councillor Manly (30)

Not Voting (0)

The Mayor declared the amendment to be lost.

The Mayor then called for a roll-call vote on the Conservative Amendment to the Business Plan 2024—28. Voting was as follows:

Votes in Favour: Austin, Barlow, Cox, Holden, Howard, McLean and Paterson (7)

Votes Against: Akyigyina, Alambritis, Attawar, Bhim, Brunt, Butcher, Christie, Cooper-Marbiah, Dollimore, Fraser, Garrod, Hayes, Henry, Irons, Johnston, Judge, Kaweesa, Kenny, Kirby, Macauley, McCabe, Mundy, Neaverson, Pearce, Skeete, Stringer, Szczepanski, Williscroft, Deputy Mayor Councillor Whelton and the Mayor Councillor Manly (30)

Not Voting: Bokhari, Braithwaite, Charles, Dresselaers, Fairclough, Flack, Foley, Galea, Gould, Hall, Hicks, Kohler, MacArthur, McGrath, Mercer, Oliver, Page, Reiss, Willis and Wilson (20)

The Mayor declared the amendment to be lost.

The Mayor then called for a roll-call vote on the Independent Amendment to the Business Plan 2024-28. Voting was as follows:

Votes in Favour: Austin, Barlow, Bokhari, Braithwaite, Charles, Cox, Dresselaers, Fairclough, Flack, Galea, Gould, Hall, Hicks, Holden, Howard, Kohler, MacArthur, McGrath, McLean, Mercer, Oliver, Page, Paterson, Reiss, Willis and Wilson (26)

Votes Against: Akyigyina, Alambritis, Attawar, Bhim, Brunt, Butcher, Christie, Cooper-Marbiah, Dollimore, Fraser, Garrod, Hayes, Henry, Irons, Johnston, Judge, Kaweesa, Kenny, Kirby, Macauley, McCabe, Mundy, Neaverson, Pearce, Skeete, Stringer, Szczepanski, Williscroft, Deputy Mayor Councillor Whelton and the Mayor Councillor Manly (30)

Not Voting: Foley (1)

The Mayor declared the amendment to be lost.

The Mayor then called for a roll-call vote on the substantive motion for the Business Plan 2024-28. The voting was as follows:

Votes In Favour: Akyigyina, Alambritis, Attawar, Bhim, Brunt, Butcher, Charles, Christie, Cooper-Marbiah, Dollimore, Foley, Fraser, Garrod, Hayes, Henry, Irons, Johnston, Judge, Kaweesa, Kenny, Kirby, Macauley, McCabe, Mercer, Mundy, Neaverson, Pearce, Skeete, Stringer, Szczepanski, Williscroft, Deputy Mayor Councillor Whelton and the Mayor Councillor Manly (33)

Votes Against: Austin, Barlow, Bokhari, Braithwaite, Cox, Dresselaers, Fairclough, Flack, Galea, Gould, Hall, Hicks, Holden, Howard, Kohler, MacArthur, McGrath, McLean, Oliver, Page, Paterson, Reiss, Willis and Wilson (24)

Not Voting (0)

RESOLVED:

1. That the Council resolves that, having considered all of the information in this report and noted the positive assurance statement given by the Executive Director, Finance and Digital based on the proposed Council Tax strategy, the maximum Council Tax in 2024/25, equating to a Band D Council Tax of £1,521.98, which is an increase of below 5%, inclusive of 2% Adult Social Care flexibility, be approved
2. That Council resolves that the Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024-28 including the General Fund Budget and Council Tax Strategy for 2024/25, and the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2024-28 as submitted, along with the draft Equality Assessments (EAs), be approved;
3. That the Council resolves that, having considered all of the latest information and the comments from the scrutiny process, the Capital Investment Programme (as detailed in Annex 3 to the Capital Strategy); the Treasury Management Strategy, including the detailed recommendations in that Section, incorporating the Prudential Indicators and the Capital Strategy as submitted and reported upon be approved;
4. That Council resolves that the Council's Strategy for the Flexible Use of Capital Receipts 2022/23, as detailed in page 28-29 of the Capital Strategy be approved.
5. That Council agrees the formal resolutions as set out in Appendix 1 to this report.

5 COUNCIL TAX EMPTY PREMIUM AND SECOND HOMES PREMIUM
(Agenda Item 5)

Councillors Alambritis, Bokhari and Hall left the Chamber for this item.

The report was moved by Councillor Christie and seconded by Councillor Judge. Councillor Fairclough also spoke on the item.

RESOLVED :

A. That Council agrees to implement council tax premiums as follows:

1. For any dwelling within the area of the Council if, on any day, there is no resident of that dwelling and it is substantially unfurnished, the following shall apply:
 - the discount in s11(2)(a) of the Local Government and Finance Act 1992 (LGFA) shall not apply to that dwelling; and

- the amount of council tax payable in respect of that dwelling and that day shall be increased by 100 percent, where the dwelling has been empty for more than 1 year on 1 April 2024.
2. Where a dwelling within the area of the Council, if on any day there is no resident, and it is furnished:
- the discount in s11(2)(a) of the Local Government and Finance Act 1992 (LGFA) shall not apply to that dwelling; and
 - the amount of council tax payable in respect of that dwelling and that day shall be increased by an amount up to 100 percent, with effect from 1 April 2025
- 6 THREE YEARLY REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S CUMULATIVE IMPACT ASSESSMENT AS REQUIRED UNDER THE LICENSING ACT 2003 (Agenda Item 6)

The report was moved by Councillor Macauley and seconded by Councillor Brunt. Councillor Kohler also spoke on the item.

RESOLVED:

A. That Council adopted the Council's Cumulative Impact Assessment 2024-2027 as required under Section 5 of the Licensing Act 2003, as approved by Members of the Licensing Committee on 22nd February 2024.

7 APPOINTMENT OF CHIEF OFFICERS (Agenda Item 7)

The report was moved by Councillor Christie and seconded by Councillor Garrod.

Councillors Charles and Fairclough also spoke on the item.

RESOLVED:

A. That Full Council approved the recommendation from the Appointments Committee that the salary packages for the roles listed in section 2 of the report should be agreed, in accordance with the Council's Pay Policy Statement

8 APPROVAL OF THE PAY POLICY STATEMENT (Agenda Item 8)

The report was moved by Councillor Christie and seconded by Councillor Stringer.

Councillor Willis spoke on the item.

RESOLVED:

1. That Council approved the Pay Policy Statement attached as Appendix A for 2024/25, agrees to its publication on the Council's website and authorises the Monitoring Officer to make any consequential changes to the Constitution

9 MEMBERS ALLOWANCES SCHEME 2024-25 (Agenda Item 9)

The report was moved by Councillor Christie and seconded by Councillor Bhim.

Councillor Willis spoke on the item.

The report was put to the vote and carried: Votes For - 33 , Votes Against – 7
Abstentions - 17.

RESOLVED:

A. That Council approved the Members Allowance scheme attached as Appendix A for 2024/25 and agree that Part 6 of the Council's Constitution be updated accordingly.

B. That Council approved that the basic allowances and Special Responsibility Allowances for 2024/25 will be increased in line with the annual staff pay award and will be applied and backdated to 1 April 2024 once the outcome of the staff pay negotiations are known.