

COUNCIL - WEDNESDAY, 26 FEBRUARY 2025

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD HYBRID IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND, CF31 4WB ON WEDNESDAY, 26 FEBRUARY 2025 AT 16:00

Present

Councillor H Griffiths – Mayor and Chairperson

A R Berrow
RJ Collins
N Farr
S J Griffiths
M R John
J Llewellyn-Hopkins
G Walter
I Williams

S J Bletsoe
HJ David
J Gebbie
GH Haines
M Jones
J E Pratt
A Wathan
E D Winstanley

JPD Blundell
P Davies
W R Goode
M L Hughes
W J Kendall
JC Spanswick
AJ Williams
T Wood

E L P Caparros
M J Evans
RM Granville
D M Hughes
M Lewis
JH Tildesley MBE
HM Williams

Present Virtually

H T Bennett
D T Harrison
I M Spiller

N Clarke
RM James
T Thomas

C L C Davies
P W Jenkins
MJ Williams

P Ford
R Penhale-Thomas
R Williams

Officers:

Jackie Davies
Mark Galvin
Laura Griffiths
Lindsay Harvey
Rachel Keepins
Carys Lord
Janine Nightingale
Michael Pitman
Mark Shephard

Head of Adult Social Care
Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Principal Solicitor
Corporate Director - Education, Early Years & Young People
Democratic Services Manager
Chief Officer - Finance, Housing & Change
Corporate Director - Communities
Technical Support Officer – Democratic Services
Chief Executive

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Kelly Watson

Chief Officer - Legal & Regulatory Services, HR & Corporate Policy

103. Apologies for absence

Decision Made	Apologies for absence were received from the following members:- Councillor M Kearn Councillor Alex Williams Councillor F Bletsoe Councillor R Smith
Date Decision Made	26 February 2025

104. Declarations of Interest

Decision Made	The following declarations of personal interest were made by Members:- Councillor R Williams – Agenda items 3 and 5, as a member of Pencoed Town Council, due to the Town and Community Council Fund being referenced to in the report. Councillor Amanda Williams – Agenda items 3 and 5, as a Community Governor at Coety Primary School Councillor E Winstanley - Agenda items 3 and 5, as an employee of Awen Cultural Trust and a school governor at Afon y Felin Primary School and Ysgol y Ferch o'r Sger Councillor I Williams – Agenda items 3 and 5, as a school governor at Brynteg Comprehensive and Oldcastle Primary Schools and as a member of Bridgend Town Council. Councillor M John – Agenda item 3, as a school governor at Bryncethin Junior School Councillor J Gebbie Agenda items 3 and 5, as a school governor at Mynydd Cynffig Primary School Councillor M Evans – Agenda items 3 and 5, as a member of Pencoed Town Council
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Date Decision Made	26 February 2025

105. Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025-26 to 2028-29

Decision Made	The Chief Officer – Finance, Housing and Change presented a report, on the proposed Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) which set out the spending priorities for the Council for the next 4 years alongside a detailed budget for 2025-26. The report outlined:- • The financial, legislative and policy context within which the draft budget has been prepared alongside more detailed information on the services to be provided by the Council over the period of the MTFS. • That the proposed MTFS is driven by the Council's 13 MTFS principles, along with additional budget principles requested by Cabinet for the forthcoming financial year and, has been developed by Cabinet and Corporate Management Board, taking into account discussions with, and the recommendations of, the Budget Research and Evaluation Panel, the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees and the School Budget Forum. The public had also been invited to take part in the consultation • That Welsh Government announced its draft budget on 10 December 2024 before the announcement of the provisional local government settlement on 11 December 2024. • In terms of the provisional local government settlement, the all-Wales increase in Aggregate External Funding (AEF) was 4.3%. The increase for Bridgend is 3.9%. • That no information was provided on future years' funding although indications are it will still be extremely challenging. • That there were a number of transfers of specific grants into and out of the settlement. • That the proposed budget for 2025-26 is £383.338 million, and this includes anticipated pay and price pressures of £13.3 million, service budget pressures of £14.454 million, budget reductions of £8.379 million and a council tax increase of 4.5%. The breakdown of the budget for 2025-26 is set out in Table 10.
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	• The MTFS set out a most likely savings target of £39.516 million over the next 4 financial years. • The Council's general capital funding had increased by £602,000 to £8.582 million. • That the Section 151 officer has a statutory duty to set a balanced and robust budget. • That the final settlement is not due to be announced until the end of February. As a result this budget is being proposed on the basis of the provisional settlement received in December 2024. Changes in the Final Settlement, such as the transfer in of specific grants, and additional funding, will be reported to Council in due course, but it is not envisaged that this will impact upon council tax. The Mayor announced that an amended MTFS had been submitted by the Bridgend County Independent (BCI) Group in line with a provision of the Council's Constitution and this had been accepted by the Chief Officer – Finance, Housing and Change. This had been sent to all members and the Corporate Management Board (CMB) in advance of the meeting. The Mayor invited the Group Leader of the BCI's to outline the main principals of the alternative budget. The Group Leader, BCI group stated that the alternative proposal protected schools and the counselling service and reduced this cut from 1% as shown in the MTFS to 0.5% from the Schools delegated budget. She explained that this reduction would support the educational and mental health and wellbeing needs of pupils as well as giving increased support to teaching staff. This would in turn reduce cases of CAHMS. There were two main areas to protect, namely the school counselling services in full due to the emerging mental health crisis facing young people and a reduction in cuts from £1.186m to £593k. This would come from cuts to other Council services as detailed in the alternative proposals. The alternative budget, also proposed methods by which BCBC could generate additional funding through other means. The Group Leader BCI's suggested that regardless of which budget was agreed to today, that the BREP, CCMB and opposition groups/members meet very early in the new financial year, in order to look at the local authorities finances and that these are regularly and continually monitored at the earliest opportunity in order to best prepare for the finalising of MTFS proposals for 2026-27 (moving forward). A member asked what would arise if some small schools were to be closed as a result of the above reductions, as was referenced to in the alternative budget. The Corporate Director – Education, Early Years and Young People advised that as Welsh Government
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	guidance protects small and rural schools, a formal Options Appraisal would have to be undertaken if the Council were to agree to such closures. This would mean if agreed to, that the earliest these schools could close would be around September 2027. Therefore, no savings from the proposal would be made in the coming year's MTFS. Also, if agreed to, there would be further costs generated from transport costs and making other schools larger to accommodate pupils from the schools that would be subject to closing. Therefore, he considered that the savings suggested (as referred to in EV1 of the report) amounting to £239k would not be achieved. A member felt that the proposals so made would also have an impact longer term on the level of the Council's reserves, which had already been expressed to be lower than that which was considered desirable. The Chief Officer – Finance, Housing and Change concurred with the above, not so much for the coming year of 2025-26, but as was stated in future years. She stated this as though Welsh Government settlements beyond the coming year were not yet known, analysts had already predicted that these were expecting to be challenging. The Group Leader, Llynfi Independents suggested that the Constitution possibly be reviewed in terms of the budget setting process, to better enable any alternative proposals from opposition members to be considered at an earlier stage than has been the case this year, with the alternative budget. A member asked in respect of the budget cut proposed of £50k to close the Civic offices one day a week throughout the year, how this had been calculated and did it include capital costs, a response to which confirmed that this included capital but not revenue costs, as the MASH team would still be coming into the building full time to occupy Floor Level 4. The Corporate Director – Communities estimated that utility costs to accommodate this would outweigh any proposed savings. A member asked what the total amount of funding was that had been cut from the Education budget since May 2022, to which the Cabinet member for Education replied that he did not know this but would find out and come back to the member outside of the meeting. The Cabinet member for Education added however, that 39% of the Council's total budget was being committed to schools. As the amended budget had been proposed and seconded, the Mayor at this point in proceedings suggested that a vote take place on this, the result of which was as follows:- <u>For (the amended budget)</u> <u>Against</u> <u>Abstain</u>
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	12	32	1
	The amended budget therefore was not agreed. The Mayor then invited any statements or questions on the substantive budget that was included in the agenda pack. The Cabinet member – Finance and Performance thanked the Finance team for all the hard work they had committed to the MTFS. He felt that this last year had seen an improvement in process whereby the Budget book had been available to all members. A considerable amount of effort had been committed by members and officers to settling a balance budget, with all statutory and non-statutory services having being looked at in terms of where essential cuts could be best made. A considerable number of budget recommendations made through the scrutiny process had also been accepted by Cabinet. He added further that moving forward, there would be a Cross-Party group set-up supported by Officers and teaching staff to further analyse school funding in the future, a proposal initiated by Welsh Government. The Leader also added his support to the budget with the proposed rise in Council Tax being one of the lowest, if not the lowest in Wales. He stated that authority during its consideration of all proposals had attempted to protect community facing services as best it could, whilst protecting its most vulnerable in society. A member was concerned with the cuts to the schools budget and welcomed in future more meaningful budget engagement with the residents of the County Borough, as that received from those that actively participated and gave feedback, was not that positive, at least in his particular Ward. He felt that a push should be made for a) longer term budget settlements, if possible b) a review of the Barnett formula, so Wales obtains a fair proportion of UK funding, and c) A reformation of welsh local authorities. A member pointed that the cut proposed to counselling services would compromise the support to children at school at a time when there was an alarmingly high rate of self-harming by young people. A member noted that there was no mention in the report where the budget allocation had been found to reinstate the proposed cut to the music service (total cost 726k), as he noted in the draft Cabinet budget report considered in January 2025, no 'spare' monies had been mentioned for this purpose. The Chief Officer – Finance, Housing and Change stated that in paragraph 3.6.3 of the Cabinet report it was mentioned that we had not allocated all the budget funding at that time, although it was not mentioned specifically how much that would be, in order to provide some flexibility for the final MTFS determination.		

	This is where however, the extra funding had come from to save the cut originally proposed to the music service. It was then moved, seconded and agreed that a vote take place on the report’s recommendations, the result of which was as follows:- <table><tr><td><u>For (the recommendation)</u></td><td><u>Against</u></td><td><u>Abstain</u></td></tr><tr><td>27</td><td>16</td><td>0</td></tr></table> Therefore, it was <u>RESOLVED:</u> That the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2025-26 to 2028-29, including the 2025-26 revenue budget and the Capital Programme 2024-25 to 2034-35, with particular reference to the following, be approved:- • The MTFS 2025-26 to 2028-29 (Annex 3 of the report). • The Net Budget Requirement of £383,338,259 in 2025-26. • A Band D Council Tax for Bridgend County Borough Council of £1,916.96 for 2025-26 (Table 17 of the MTFS). • The 2025-26 budgets as allocated in accordance with Table 10 in paragraph 4.1.3 of the MTFS. • The budget pressures outlined in Appendix C for 2025-26 to 2028-29. • The budget reductions outlined in Appendix D for 2025-26 to 2028-29. • The Capital Programme 2024-25 to 2034-35, attached at Appendix G of the MTFS.	<u>For (the recommendation)</u>	<u>Against</u>	<u>Abstain</u>	27	16	0
<u>For (the recommendation)</u>	<u>Against</u>	<u>Abstain</u>					
27	16	0					
Date Decision Made	26 February 2025						

106. Council Tax 2025-26

Decision Made	The Chief Officer – Finance, Housing and Change presented a report, the purpose of which, was to
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	provide Council with details of the council tax requirement for the County Borough Council, following Council having approved the Medium-Term Financial Strategy on 26 February 2025, together with the requirements of the Police and Crime Commissioner for South Wales and Town and Community Councils, and to ask the Council to note the aggregate charge for each Community Council area for each council tax band for 2025-26. She explained that Paragraph 3.1.2 (g) of the Financial Procedure Rules (FPRs) requires her to recommend the level of Council Tax to be levied for the forthcoming year. The Council as the local authority for the area, also has to fulfil its requirement under Section 33 and 34 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992. The following were key points that should be noted from the report:- • Total Council Tax requirement is £131,226,134. • The total Council Tax requirement for Bridgend County Borough Council is £106,698,377. • The Police and Crime Commissioner for South Wales precept is £21,076,848. • The total Council Tax requirement from Town and Community Councils is £3,450,909. • The Bridgend County Borough Council Band D equivalent is £1,916.96. • The Police and Crime Commissioner for South Wales Band D equivalent is £378.67. • The average Community/Town Council precept is £62.00. • The increases in council tax are: - o Bridgend County Borough Council 4.5% - o Police and Crime Commissioner for South Wales 7.37% - o Average Town and Community Council 7.88% The Cabinet Member – Finance and Performance advised the public and reminded members, that the Council Tax also covered a number of levies, that included the South Wales Central Coroner Services, the South Wales Fire and Rescue Authority and Margam Crematorium Service amongst others. <u>RESOLVED:</u> As Council earlier in the meeting approved the proposed net budget requirement for Bridgend County Borough Council of £106,698,377 for 2025-26 and a Band D Council Tax for Bridgend County Borough Council of £1,916.96 for 2025-26, Council further agreed to: • note the level of the precept from the Police and Crime Commissioner for South Wales, as set out in
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	Table 3 of the report. • note the total Council Tax charges for Band D properties for 2025-26 for each of the Community Council areas as outlined in Table 6 and the aggregate charge for each Community Council area for each council tax band as outlined in Appendix A (to the report).
Date Decision Made	26 February 2025

107. Capital Strategy 2025-26

Decision Made	The Chief Officer – Finance, Housing and Change presented a report on the Capital Strategy 2025-26 to 2034-35 (Appendix A of the report referred), which included the Prudential Indicators against which the Council measures itself during the financial year and the Annual Minimum Revenue Provision Statement 2025-26 (Section 7 of Appendix A), for approval. The report highlighted that:- • Control on capital expenditure is governed by legislation; • The Capital Strategy had been produced in accordance with CIPFA's Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities; • The Capital Strategy sets guiding principles for capital expenditure, and a framework for the management of capital finance; • The Capital Strategy is currently based on financial information as reported in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy. A member noted that there was a spend proposed amounting to £120m for 2025-26. In respect of an allocation of £82m of this towards educational improvements, he asked, for further details where this was being committed to. The Corporate Director – Education, Early Years and Young People, confirmed that this figure was largely for new builds for Band B schools at Heronsbridge for a state of the art special school, a new school at Mynydd Cynnfig, due to the failure of the Infant build there. With regards to the Welsh and Education Strategic Programme, there were also replacement new schools proposed for the Bro Ogwr school at Brackla and at Cornelly, including at Afon – y - Felin Primary school. A member referred to the Public Works Loan Board and the rules restricting what funding can be accessed
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	through loans, including any restriction on borrowing for commercial activities. He stated that presumably that would not preclude any 'spend to save schemes', for example such as on solar energy, which would cut our costs as opposed to external revenue generation. The Chief Officer – Finance, Housing and Change advised that there would be some flexibility in respect of the above, as long as the local authority were not seeking to make any financial gain from any proposal. She added that, BCBC could also borrow to help improve either the financial viability of the Council and/or a valuable service, but not to buy any speculative buildings, such as some local authorities in England had. A member noted that last November Council had considered a report requesting an increased budget allocation for the new Heronsbridge School. Then at Council in January 2025, this scheme was further debated with an added proposal to move Harwood House. She asked why these schemes were not included in the report before members today, included any projected overspends for the projects. The Deputy Head of Finance, Housing and Change confirmed that added funding for Heronsbridge School had been committed, however, the Council were awaiting the finalising of a Business Case which was pending for this scheme, to include a match funding contribution from Welsh Government. In relation to Harwood House, she added that no funding had as of yet been agreed for this project, however, this could be supported through grant funding, which the Deputy Leader then expanded on for the benefit of Council. <u>RESOLVED:</u> That Council approved the Capital Strategy 2025-26 to 2034-35, including the Prudential Indicators 2025-26 to 2034-35 and the Annual Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement 2025-26, at Appendix A of the report.
Date Decision Made	26 February 2025

108. Treasury Management Strategy 2025-26

Decision Made	The Chief Officer – Finance, Housing and Change submitted a report, the purpose of which, was as follows:- To present to Council the Capital Strategy 2025-26 to 2034-35, which includes the Prudential Indicators, and the Annual Minimum Revenue Provision Statement 2025-26.
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- To note that control on capital expenditure is governed by legislation.
- To acknowledge that the Capital Strategy has been produced in accordance with CIPFA's Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities.
- To advise that the Capital Strategy sets guiding principles for capital expenditure, and a framework for the management of capital finance.
- To reinforce to Council, that the Capital Strategy is currently based on financial information as reported in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

She explained that the Council's Financial Procedure Rules (para 3.5.1) required the Chief Finance Officer to prepare a Capital Strategy for submission to the Council for approval prior to the start of the financial year. The Strategy must demonstrate that capital expenditure and investment decisions are in line with service objectives and properly take account of stewardship, value for money, prudence, sustainability and affordability.

The Chief Officer – Finance, Housing and Change, added that Capital Strategy must comply with the requirements of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities.

She then elaborated on some key points contained in the report for the benefit of members, before the Mayor asked them if they had any questions on the issues highlighted within the report.

A member stated that matters of treasury management were looked at periodically through the Overview and Scrutiny process. He noted from page 242 of the report, that there was a list of approved sources that the Authority has business dealings with, which included other local authorities. He further noted that certain English local authorities (LA's) were facing severe financial restraints, some of which had even gone bankrupt. He therefore asked what safeguards BCBC had in place to ensure that if or when we have financial dealings with any English based LA's that any money we invest with them we can either get returned in full or alternatively re-invested.

The Chief Officer – Finance, Housing and Change confirmed that BCBC had a sound track record when it came to managing any risks to our investments and to that end, we had an approved list of regular counterparties that we have agreed that we'll invest with. If this list were to change in any way, then this would require the approval of Council. BCBC also had two other safeguards in place, which was a limit on any investment with another organisation (which was capped), as well as a maximum time limit for the placing of such investment. The Council also received advice from its Treasury Management Advisors on who to invest with or lend to. The above processes in place, therefore ensured that any risks are mitigated as much as they possibly can be.

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	A member also pointed out that with diminishing capital reserves due to the current financial climate, there may be a need for the Authority to borrow more going forward. In conjunction with this, he felt that there should be a requirement for the LA to be as accurate as possible when forecasting and scheduling capital projects in future, ie both in terms of their amount and timing of the works for their completion. <u>RESOLVED:</u> That Council approved the Capital Strategy 2025-26 to 2034-35, including the Prudential Indicators 2025-26 to 2034-35 and the Annual Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement 2025-26, at Appendix A to the report.
Date Decision Made	26 February 2025

109. Urgent Items

Decision Made	There were no urgent items
Date Decision Made	26 February 2025

To observe further debate that took place on the above items, please click this [link](#)

The meeting closed at 18:36.