

DARTFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL (BUDGET)

MINUTES of the proceedings of the meeting of the General Assembly of the Council (Budget) held on Monday 27 February 2023.

PRESENT:

The Mayor

Councillor P Cutler

The Deputy Mayor

Councillor R M Currans

Councillor A E D Barham

Councillor J A Kite, MBE

Councillor E H Ben Moussa

Councillor A R Lloyd

Councillor S H Brown

Councillor D J Mote

Councillor S P Butterfill

Councillor T Oliver

Councillor L A Canham

Councillor V Oguntope

Councillor M J Davis

Councillor Mrs J A Ozog

Councillor L H K Edie

Councillor R S L Perfitt

Councillor B Garden

Councillor M I Peters

Councillor A Gaskin

Councillor D J Reynolds

Councillor K J Grehan

Councillor A S Sandhu, MBE

Councillor D A Hammock

Councillor K Stealey

Councillor P M Harman

Councillor Mrs R F Storey

Councillor G R Holt

Councillor D Swinerd

Councillor D E Hunnisett

Councillor Mrs P A Thurlow

Councillor R A S Jones

Councillor R J Wells

ABSENT:

Councillor J Burrell

Councillor D Butler-Ruhle

Councillor R Gosine

Councillor S N Gosine

Councillor M B Kelly

Councillor T A Maddison

Councillor D T Nicklen

Councillor A J Oakley-Dow

Councillor C J Shippam

ALSO PRESENT:

Sarah Martin, Chief Officer & Director of Corporate Services

Peter Dosad, Director of Housing & Public Protection

Caroline Hicks, Director of Growth & Community

Tim Sams, Head of Finance

Alan Twyman, Democratic Services Manager

CHAIRMAN'S
INITIALS

84. PRAYERS: REVEREND KENNETH CLARK

The Mayor's Chaplain led the Council in prayer.

85. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Burrell, Butler-Rhule, R Gosine, Kelly, Maddison, Nicklen and Shippam.

An apology for lateness was submitted on behalf of Councillor Perfitt, who subsequently joined the meeting during consideration of agenda item 10, Revenue and Capital Budgets 2023-24, after the vote on the first amendment.

86. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chief Officer & Director of Corporate Services declared a personal interest on behalf of all Officers present at the meeting in staffing matters referred to in Agenda item 10, Revenue and Capital Budgets 2023/24.

The Chief Officer & Director of Corporate Services in the exercise of her delegated authority, in consultation with the Deputy Monitoring Officer, granted a dispensation to all Councillors to speak and vote on Agenda item 10, Revenue and Capital Budgets 2023/24, in respect of their receipt of Members' Allowances paid by the Council on the ground that, without the dispensation, the number of persons prohibited from participating in the discussion and voting on Members' Allowances would be so great a proportion of the body transacting the business as to impede the transaction of business (see agenda item 10).

Members declared the following interests:

Councillor L A Canham declared a prejudicial interest in Agenda item 10 as she is a trustee of the Mary's Child charity, Greenhithe which receives grants/funding from the Council.

Councillor R M Currans declared a prejudicial interest in Agenda item 10 as she is a trustee of Home-Start and a trustee of the Dartford Almshouse charity which receive grants/funding from the Council.

Councillor D E Hunnisett declared a prejudicial interest in Agenda item 10 as he is a trustee of the Dartford Almshouse charity which receive grants/funding from the Council.

Councillor J A Kite MBE declared a prejudicial interest in Agenda item 10 as he is a director of Dartford Football Club which receives grant funding from the Council.

CHAIRMAN'S INITIALS

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL (BUDGET)

MONDAY 27 FEBRUARY 2023

Councillor D J Mote declared a prejudicial interest in Agenda item 10 in respect of the following:

- as he is a trustee of the Greenhithe Community Association which is a tenant of the Council;
- as a trustee of 'Mary's Child' and of 'We are Beams';
- as Chairman of Stone (Dartford) Scout Group and Treasurer of the Greenhithe branch of the Royal British Legion;

all of which receive grants/funding from the Council; and

- as a member of the Darenth Valley Hospital Charity Management Board.

He also declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in Appendices H(i),(ii) and (iii) of Agenda item 10 as his wife is an employee of Darenth Parish Council

Councillor D J Reynolds declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in Agenda item 10 as his partner is an employee of Dartford Borough Council.

Councillor A S Sandhu MBE declared a prejudicial interest in Agenda item 10 as he is a trustee of the Kent People's Trust and of the Kent Cohesion Council, and as Vice-President of Dartford Valley Rugby Football Club as they receive grants/funding from the Council.

87. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL HELD ON 12 DECEMBER 2022

The General Assembly of the Council (Budget) considered the minutes of the meeting of the General Assembly of the Council held on 12 December 2022.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the General Assembly of the Council which took place on 12 December 2022 be approved as an accurate record.

88. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor made the following announcements:

The Mayor informed Members that he had attended the Dartford Book Festival on Saturday 25th February which had been well supported, and had had a very enjoyable time meeting the children.

He also informed Members that he was due to attend the press launch of 'Bucaneer Bay' in Central Park on Saturday 4th March, before the official opening on 10/11th March. He was also due to attend the Indian HOLI festival

of colours on Sunday 5th March, a festival that is one of the most vibrant and joyous occasions of Indian culture celebrated widely in the UK and which also symbolised the triumph of good over evil.

89. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

90. RESULTS OF THE WILMINGTON, SUTTON-AT-HONE & HAWLEY WARD BY-ELECTION ON 9 FEBRUARY 2023

The General Assembly of the Council (Budget) noted the results of the by-election for Wilmington, Sutton-at-Hone & Hawley ward held on 9 February 2023.

The Leader of the Council congratulated Councillor Lampkin on his election and Councillor Lampkin thanked the Leader for his kind words, and the people of Wilmington, Sutton-at-Hone & Hawley for electing him to serve on the Council once again.

RESOLVED:

That the results of the by-election for Wilmington, Sutton-at-Hone & Hawley ward held on 9 February 2023 and the election of Councillor Eddy Lampkin be noted.

91. APPOINTMENT OF HEAD OF LEGAL SERVICES AND MONITORING OFFICER

The General Assembly of the Council considered a report which updated Members on progress made to recruit a new permanent Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer, to replace Mrs Marie Kelly-Stone who would be retiring on 31 March 2023. Members were advised that it had not been possible to recruit a permanent replacement but were asked to endorse the appointment of Mr Ravinder Johal, on an interim basis, initially for a period of 5 months, commencing 13 March 2023.

The Leader of the Council paid tribute to Mrs Kelly-Stone and thanked her for her astute legal advice and guidance, hard work and dedicated service over many years with the Council. He wished her a long and happy retirement. He also informed Members of the departure of two other long-serving officers, Mark Salisbury, Enforcement and Regulatory Services Manager, who was also retiring, and Jeanette Pegler, Electoral Services Manager, who was moving on to another job in local government, and sent them both his best wishes for the future.

RESOLVED:

That Mr Ravinder Singh Johal, be designated Interim Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer, for a term of five [5] months, commencing 13 March 2023 and ending 13 August 2023, or otherwise for a term as may be agreed between the Head of Paid Service and the interim Monitoring Officer.

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92. REGENERATION & LEVELLING UP BILL - COUNCIL TAX PREMIUMS AND SECOND HOME PREMIUMS

The General Assembly of the Council (Budget) was advised of two important changes to council tax provisions contained in the Regeneration & Levelling Up Bill (the Bill) which was currently passing through Parliament with a view to receiving Royal Assent in Spring 2023. Clauses 72 and 73 of the Bill proposed, amongst other matters, a change in the application of a council tax premium on 'long term empty' properties and the implementation of a council tax premium on 'second homes.'

Currently, if a property had been unoccupied and unfurnished for 2 years but less than 5 years, then a 100% council tax premium could be applied to the property. The Bill was proposing to shorten that 2 year period to 1 year. 'Long term empty' premiums were applied to encourage owners to bring properties back into use so they do not remain empty for extended periods.

For some years local councils had been able to apply a full council tax charge to second homes, defined as properties which are unoccupied but furnished. The Bill proposed that councils should be able to apply a 100% council tax premium on second homes (for Dartford that would mean an owner of a second home in the borough would pay double the normal council tax charge).

Both of these changes would only take effect if the Bill received Royal Assent and, even then, the earliest that both of these changes could take effect, would be 1 April 2024, providing Royal Assent was granted by 31 March 2023. The Bill also provided that approval to introduce the changes must be given by local authorities at least 12 months before the implementation date. The Cabinet had considered this matter on 23 February 2023 and had recommended that the application of the new council tax premiums be approved by the General Assembly of the Council, on the assumption that Royal Assent is received by 1 April 2023.

RESOLVED:

That, subject to the Regeneration & Levelling Up Bill receiving Royal Assent prior to 1 April 2023:

- (a) the council tax premium of 100% be applied to properties unoccupied and unfurnished for 1 year, but less than 5 years, from 1 April 2024; and
- (b) the council tax premium of 100%, be applied to second home properties, from 1 April 2024.

93. REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGETS 2023/24

The General Assembly of the Council (Budget) considered a report on the proposed Revenue and Capital Budgets for 2023-24, including recommendations to the General Assembly of the Council (Budget) on setting the overall level of General Fund and Housing Revenue Account revenue and capital expenditure for Dartford Borough Council for 2023/24, the level of Council Tax for Dartford Borough in its parished and unparished areas for 2023/24 and fees and charges for 2023/24, and approving the Pay Policy Statement and sundry related matters. The Council's determination to provide high quality services and to keep tax low, wherever possible, was reflected in the proposals which included no increase in the Dartford Borough Council element of Council tax, the freezing of rents for Council social housing and for pitches at the Claywood Lane, Caravan Site, Bean for the year and setting fees and charges, many of which it was proposed not to increase. At the same time it was intended to maintain existing levels of service, introduce new initiatives to support local people and invest significantly in the social infrastructure that helps people to meet challenges at various stages of their lives. The financial settlement had been better than expected, as had revenue from business rates, and therefore the Council would be able to add to earmarked reserves. This extra contribution would be focused on creating a fund to support capital expenditure to increase the supply of temporary accommodation. There may be a gap in funding in future years but it would be possible to use reserves to maintain services if needed.

In accordance with Standing Order 16(4), a motion was proposed, seconded and carried, to allow extra time for Leaders of the Political Groups to deliver their speeches on the Budget report.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor J A Kite introduced the budget proposals and said that the budget had been developed against one of the most challenging economic backgrounds in memory as the nation emerged from a pandemic and was facing global pressures arising from the war in Ukraine and higher energy prices which impacted on every other part of the economy as well as having direct impacts on the lives of local people. Whilst these global pressures were very real, local people expected the Council, to respond to local needs. Once again, the Council would be 'bucking' prevailing trends and building upon its strong financial practices to deliver a budget which would not only avoid cuts to services but would actually see some services expand and develop. He said that others had questioned how the Council was able to do this in such a challenging environment and had speculated, wrongly, that this was due to good fortune or revenues from Bluewater, Dartford crossing receipts or housing growth when the real 'secret' was that the Council planned carefully for the future and focussed on residents' wishes, good management and listening to what people wanted. This involved not cutting services, running great events and doing the basics right, such as weekly bin collections, whilst not raising council tax.

He informed Members that for the second year running, and the ninth time in 15 years, there would be no increase in the Dartford element of the council tax. This not only delivered an immediate benefit to local residents but also resulted in a lower tax base for future years. The Council was likely to be one of the few in the country not to increase its council tax. This position was

CHAIRMAN'S INITIALS

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL (BUDGET)

MONDAY 27 FEBRUARY 2023

sustainable and did not rely on draining reserves, which would remain at an appropriate level to ensure future financial security and to safeguard against future challenges that could arise such as a potential Business Rate re-set and the removal of the Government funding guarantee. At the same time, it was not proposed to increase reserves unnecessarily at the expense of current need, and for this reason the budget contained proposals to address homelessness and the costs of temporary accommodation, building upon measures implemented during the pandemic which would be used as a base from which to tackle future pressures and acute homelessness.

The Council would also continue to address the cost of living pressures faced by many local families and would continue to match and supplement the Kent County Council (KCC) school holiday voucher scheme, where again the Council had been an outlier among the district councils as the only council to provide such support, and would continue with the voucher scheme not just in the summer holidays in 2023 but also for the winter and Christmas holidays. The Council had also developed a strong and trusting relationship with local foodbanks and had provided almost £50,000 in direct aid to support them. This work would continue over the coming year when significant proposals would be brought forward to help a number of local charities and voluntary groups.

The Leader of the Council turned to the provision of local services. The future waste collection contract would be based on what residents wanted, rather than telling them what they would receive, and would seek to improve on the excellent service already provided where 99.5% of collections were made on time. He announced the launch of the Big Bin Vote 4, which would consult residents on service options, including options to enhance waste recycling via a 'sideways waste' approach, which would significantly increase the opportunities for residents to recycle as part of their weekly bin collection, alongside an opportunity to have a food canister for food waste. The Council's playspace programme would also continue, beyond the opening of new playspaces at Buccaneer Bay and Hesketh Park, two of the council's largest playspaces, to deliver a programme of modern, progressive, assessable and inclusive playspaces across the borough. He announced the launch of the second tranche of this programme which would see new playspaces at Almond Road (Stone), Cedar Road, Hill Rise, Humber Road, Kenwyn Road, Willow Walk, Wilmot Road and Joyce Green Lane. There would also be further measures to tackle the scourge of litter, with a 'Dartford Litter Blitz' as part of the wider 'Keep Dartford Tidy' campaign, building upon the recent dispersal of street cleansing teams beyond the town centre and strong community support and voluntary litter picks throughout the year. The Council would also continue to tackle fly-tipping and anti-social behaviours and to build upon the groundswell of support for green initiatives and the success of Planet Dartford, which had been introduced two years ago, and would seek to advance these initiatives through community groups moving forward. Finally, he thanked the Chief Officer & Director of Corporate Services, the Head of Finance, and their team, and the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Finance, for their continuing astute financial management and for developing the budget, which he commended to Members for approval.

The motion was seconded by Councillor A L Lloyd, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Finance, who reserved his right to speak later in the debate.

The motion was opened for debate.

The Shadow Leader of the Council, Councillor K J Grehan, moved the following amendment:

‘That the Council supports the ring fencing of £10,000 of the Communications Budget for year 2023/24 for the sole use of a campaign on cutting litter and fly-tipping.

This will be managed in partnership by the Waste and Communication Departments.’

The amendment was seconded by Councillor V Oguntope and opened for debate.

The Leader of the Council sought clarification over the amendment as he believed that debate should be confined to the overall budget envelope rather than dealing with individual budget lines. The Communications budget was set for expenditure across the year on a variety of projects. He also felt that the ring-fencing of £10,000 for this purpose was likely to be insufficient to deliver the intended results and could actually reduce activity to deal with the very real problem of litter and fly-tipping. He felt that had the Opposition raised this earlier in the budget making process it would have been possible to have developed a more meaningful proposal for inclusion in the budget.

The Chief Officer & Director of Corporate Services confirmed that matters relating to the budget envelope were within the purview of the GAC and that matters relating to individual budget entries were more relevant to the Cabinet.

The Shadow Leader of the Council said that the figure of £10,000 had been originated from the Waste & Recycling Department.

The amendment was put to the vote and Members voted as follows:

FOR	AGAINST
Councillor E H Ben Moussa	Councillor A E D Barham
Councillor A Gaskin	Councillor S H Brown
Councillor K J Grehan	Councillor S P Butterfill
Councillor R A S Jones	Councillor L A Canham
Councillor V Oguntope	Councillor M J Davis
	Councillor L H K Edie
	Councillor B Garden
	Councillor D A Hammock
	Councillor P M Harman
	Councillor G R Holt
	Councillor D E Hunnisett
	Councillor J A Kite
	Councillor E J Lampkin

CHAIRMAN'S
INITIALS

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL (BUDGET)

MONDAY 27 FEBRUARY 2023

	Councillor A R Lloyd Councillor D J Mote Councillor T Oliver Councillor Mrs J A Ozog Councillor M I Peters Councillor D J Reynolds Councillor A S Sandhu Councillor K Stealey Councillor Mrs R F Storey Councillor D Swinerd Councillor Mrs P A Thurlow Councillor R J Wells The Deputy Mayor, Councillor Mrs R M Currans The Mayor, Councillor P Cutler
TOTAL: 5	TOTAL: 27

The amendment was lost by 5 votes for to 27 against.

The Shadow Leader of the Council, Councillor K J Grehan, moved a further amendment as follows:

‘That this Council will abolish the Community Grants Fund and replace it with £2,300 grant fund to be allocated to each councillor for projects within their ward including

- Local events and activities
- Purchase or repair of equipment and furniture
- Small-scale projects
- Community safety schemes
- Sports projects
- Mentoring schemes.’

The Shadow Leader of the Council said that she had expressed concerns in the past about the paucity of meetings of the Community Grants Panel and transparency in awarding community grants and felt that it would be better to pass this budget to councillors to distribute to worthy projects in their local communities as they were best placed to know the local area and the needs of their residents.

The amendment was seconded by Councillor R Jones and opened for debate.

The Leader of the Council sought clarification as to how this proposal would be funded and from which budget. He was advised that this would come from the projected Community Projects/Grants spend in the Identified Initiatives Reserve and from the Dartford Community Grants budget.

The Leader of the Council said that, in effect, this would remove funding of nearly £100,000 from the existing recipients of community grants, including a

total of £78,000 from the grant the Council provided to the local Citizens Advice Bureau, and 'Club Together' funding. He also thought that it was unsustainable to allow a large number of small grants and feared that the funding would be heavily diluted by the cost of putting service level agreements in place and other administrative costs which would marginalise the benefit of the funding. The funding would be better directed centrally, but with the benefit of meaningful input from local Members, which he had been trying to encourage.

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Finance said that he strongly opposed the threat that this proposal posed to the funding for the CAB, whose services were particularly important for vulnerable residents and those struggling in the current economic climate. Another Member expressed similar support for the funding for the CAB.

A Member expressed concern about delegating the allocation of the funding to 42 Members and the dilution of the benefit to projects as a result of this delivery model.

Another Member said that he favoured the proposal to give greater involvement to individual Members and compared this to a grants scheme which was awarded by individual Members of Kent County Council. A Member said that, whilst she liked the concept, she did not feel that this had been sufficiently developed to be able to support the amendment.

The Shadow Leader of the Council said that the KCC scheme was not the same as the one being proposed, and that some of the KCC projects were actually significant projects rather than the small grant awards being proposed. She felt that it would be good to have greater involvement by local ward Members in making funding decisions but had not appreciated that the funding for the CAB might be impacted in the way described.

The Leader of the Council said that it was important that Members realised that if they supported the amendment this would involve stripping money out of the budget and, as a result, that the CAB and many other organisations would not receive funding. He was concerned that asking 42 councillors to award community funding would result in the benefit being seriously diluted by the costs of putting satisfactory governance arrangements in place and by administrative costs. He felt that this was an inefficient and ineffective way of providing community funding and that it was better to have a central process and to involve Members in this process. He offered to discuss how this could work with the Opposition outside of the meeting.

In view of the discussion, and the offer to discuss this matter outside of the meeting, the Shadow Leader of the Council, with the permission of the seconder of the amendment and the permission of the Council, withdrew the amendment.

The Deputy Shadow Leader of the Council, Councillor A Gaskin, moved the following amendment:

'That the Council will double the CCTV budget from the current allocation of £182,100, to £360,000 by using income from our healthy reserves, in our

CHAIRMAN'S INITIALS

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL (BUDGET)

MONDAY 27 FEBRUARY 2023

commitment to making our community safety safer and cleaner. The increased use of CCTV cameras will contribute towards reducing antisocial behaviour, it will assist the Police and CSU with solving crime, and will help with reducing and prosecuting the fly-tipping. The investment in CCTV will re-pay for itself in reducing the cost of cleaning up fly tipping, the enforcement costs and the repairs of vandalised property. It will also enhance the sense of safety and well-being in the community’.

She stressed that in her opinion, prevention was better than having to take action, and deterrent was better than prosecution.

The amendment was seconded by Councillor R Jones who said that the introduction of cameras in his ward, along Powder Hill Lane in particular, would help to address anti-social behaviour, including fly-tipping and drug use.

The amendment was opened for debate.

The Leader of the Council sought clarification over whether this was a capital or revenue proposal, as the funding of cameras (capital) would be pointless without supervision and enforcement (revenue). A Member also sought clarification on whether the increase of funding was proposed for one year or longer, and was informed that the proposal was for one year only.

Members discussed the merits of the proposal and, whilst commenting upon the effectiveness of CCTV, felt that the proposal was not specific enough. There was also widespread concern about the intention to fund this by depleting reserves, which were there for a good reason.

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Finance commented in more detail upon the reserves held by the Council. He commented that the view of the Council’s external auditor, Grant Thornton, was that the Council’s reserves were ‘adequate’ which was somewhat different from the implication in the amendment that they were ‘healthy’ and an open source of funding. He pointed to the potential pitfalls and challenges ahead, which were reflected in the Council’s Medium Term Financial Plan which highlighted a potential budget gap of £16M in future years. It was therefore prudent to have reserves for such an eventuality. He said that he recognised the usefulness of CCTV but could not support increasing this in an un-costed way and there needed to be a managed proposal, which could have been done if the issue had been discussed earlier in the budget development process. In view of this he could not support the amendment.

Councillor Gaskin said that she accepted that the proposal was not fully costed but felt that the proposals, which were only for the forthcoming financial year, would tackle crime and would be partially off-set by savings from other budgets. As a one-off cost this would not deplete reserves. She felt that safer communities were healthier, happier and better communities and that the Police, Community Safety Unit and residents would welcome the increased use of CCTV.

The Leader of the Council said that there appeared to be a misconception of how CCTV worked. This was a capital proposal to increase the number of cameras but would be ineffective unless there was a commensurate increase in monitoring staff, who were skilled and would need to be trained. The implication of this proposal was that there would be a revenue cost in hiring and training staff, who would then be let go after 12 months as the proposal was only for one year, leaving the remaining staff to try and cover the increased number of cameras. This was impractical and unfair. He noted that the Opposition had put forward a similar amendment in 2020 to increase the number of enforcement staff for one year, which had also been unfunded beyond that year and would have resulted in the redundancy of staff at the end of that period, had it been successful. He said that the Council had successfully increased the use of CCTV but had done so in a considered way and at appropriate locations rather than making un-costed and ill-considered proposals. He pointed to the need to assess where CCTV could be used effectively, and the potential for the displacement of anti-social behaviour where the location and potential effectiveness of CCTV was not properly considered. CCTV was a precision instrument but the current amendment did not reflect this. The Council was committed to dealing with anti-social behaviours and issues such as fly-tipping, and had an excellent record of doing so, but this proposal had not been thought through.

The amendment was put to the vote and Members voted as follows:

FOR	AGAINST
Councillor E H Ben Moussa	Councillor A E D Barham
Councillor A Gaskin	Councillor S H Brown
Councillor K J Grehan	Councillor S P Butterfill
Councillor R A S Jones	Councillor L A Canham
Councillor V Oguntope	Councillor M J Davis
	Councillor L H K Edie
	Councillor B Garden
	Councillor D A Hammock
	Councillor P M Harman
	Councillor G R Holt
	Councillor D E Hunnisett
	Councillor J A Kite
	Councillor E J Lampkin
	Councillor A R Lloyd
	Councillor D J Mote
	Councillor T Oliver
	Councillor Mrs J A Ozog
	Councillor R S L Perfitt
	Councillor M I Peters
	Councillor D J Reynolds
	Councillor A S Sandhu
	Councillor K Stealey
	Councillor Mrs R F Storey
	Councillor D Swinerd
	Councillor Mrs P A Thurlow
	Councillor R J Wells
	The Deputy Mayor, Councillor Mrs R

CHAIRMAN'S INITIALS

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL (BUDGET)

MONDAY 27 FEBRUARY 2023

	M Currans The Mayor, Councillor P Cutler
TOTAL: 5	TOTAL: 28

The amendment was lost by 5 votes for to 28 against.

Members debated the merits of the original budget proposals.

The Shadow Leader of the Council said that people were living in challenging times, which had not been helped by having three Prime Ministers in the last year plus a disastrous mini-budget with the economic instability that had resulted. She clarified her earlier remarks on the use of 'Play Streets', which she said were more akin to street parties which might take place once a year or on a programmed basis, as opposed to the need for 'play spaces.' She had been pleased to see proposals to improve re-cycling rates in the borough which, she said, were currently among the lowest in the country and also welcomed plans to tackle 'Dirty Dartford' and the Blitz on Litter, but wondered why this hadn't happened earlier. She thanked the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Finance for his assistance when discussing financial issues but said that her Group found much of the proposed budget frustrating and that they had wanted to move more quickly on many of the challenges facing Dartford such as crime, anti-social behaviour and parking.

The Leader of the Alliance Group, Councillor L H K Edie, welcomed the proposal to freeze Dartford's council tax, which she thought was welcome in the current economic climate, and also welcomed endeavours to keep costs down without cutting services.

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Finance informed Members that he was pleased that the Council was doing all that it could to help local residents against a background of higher costs and inflation. This included freezing Dartford's Council Tax and social housing rents, no increase in parking charges and no increases in non-discretionary fees and charges, other than where necessary to recover costs. This had been possible because of the long term approach to financial management adopted by the Council which had enabled it to anticipate and maximise the benefits of local economic growth, increased business rate retention and higher investment income through the shrewd use of resources. He thanked Members and Officers for their endeavours which had made this possible, and in particular Tim Sams, Head of Finance, and Catherine Bailey, Principal Accountant, and their teams for their astute input to the Council's finances and treasury management.

A Member welcomed the Leader of the Council's announcement that the Council would continue to provide school food vouchers during the forthcoming year at the same time as freezing council tax and social housing rents.

The Leader of the Council said that he appreciated that being a councillor was particularly stressful when local elections were approaching, but that he was

sure that all councillors were determined to work in the best interests of their residents, and he hoped that Members would continue to work together both inside and outside the chamber. He drew attention to the contents of the budget and to the Council's achievements in dealing with parking issues. In terms of recycling, he pointed to the absurdity of some of the statistical comparisons made, rather than the actual position in Dartford and the proposals to meet residents' wishes for more opportunity to recycle from the doorstep. He thanked all Members for their contribution to the work of the Council, and invited the Opposition to work more closely in future before budget meetings to bring worked-up proposals for inclusion. He commended the budget proposals to the General Assembly of the Council.

The budget proposals, the original motion, was put to the vote and Members voted as follows:

FOR	AGAINST
Councillor A E D Barham	Councillor E H Ben Moussa
Councillor S H Brown	Councillor A Gaskin
Councillor S P Butterfill	Councillor K J Grehan
Councillor L A Canham	Councillor R A S Jones
Councillor M J Davis	Councillor V Oguntope
Councillor L H K Edie	
Councillor B Garden	
Councillor D A Hammock	
Councillor P M Harman	
Councillor G R Holt	
Councillor D E Hunnisett	
Councillor J A Kite	
Councillor E J Lampkin	
Councillor A R Lloyd	
Councillor D J Mote	
Councillor T Oliver	
Councillor Mrs J A Ozog	
Councillor R S L Perfitt	
Councillor M I Peters	
Councillor D J Reynolds	
Councillor A S Sandhu	
Councillor K Stealey	
Councillor Mrs R F Storey	
Councillor D Swinerd	
Councillor Mrs P A Thurlow	
Councillor R J Wells	
The Deputy Mayor, Councillor Mrs R M Currans	
The Mayor, Councillor P Cutler	
TOTAL: 28	TOTAL: 5

The original motion was carried, 28 votes for and 5 votes against.

CHAIRMAN'S INITIALS

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL (BUDGET)

MONDAY 27 FEBRUARY 2023

RESOLVED:

1. That the probable outturn and overall financial position for 2022/23, as set out in Section 6 of the report, be noted;
2. That, in the light of the probable outturn of the General Fund for 2022/23, the estimated General Fund balance of £3m at 31 March 2023 be noted, as set out in paragraph 7.6.1 of the report;
3. That the main changes to the General Fund Budget, as set out in Appendix A (ii) to the report, be noted;
4. That the Council Tax requirement of £7,306,296 for 2023/24 as set out in Appendix B (i) to the report, be approved;
5. That the Pay Policy Statement, at Appendix L to the report, be approved;
6. That an increase of 5% be applied to all salary levels and associated allowances excluding protected pay;
7. That a 5% increase be applied to Member and Mayoral allowances and other relevant allowances for 2023/24;
8. That the level of Mayoral allowances be based on a standard rate income tax payer, and this be adjusted to reflect individual tax circumstances, as required;
9. That it be noted that the Chief Officer and Director of Corporate Services has delegated authority to agree fees payable for elections, as outlined in the Pay Policy Statement at Appendix L to the report;
10. That the fees and charges as set out in Appendix B (ii) to the report, be noted with effect from 1 April 2023;
11. That it be noted that the Head of Finance has delegated authority to determine individual sums to be met from the Identified Initiative Reserve in accordance with the agreed general purpose for which it was established;
12. That it be noted that the Head of Finance has delegated authority, to determine individual expenditure from the relevant Reserve in accordance with the general purpose for which the Reserve was established, subject to an expenditure limit of £500k. He may also in consultation with the Leader, determine any expenditure funded from the relevant Reserve, where the expenditure exceeds £500k;
13. That the Community Grants budget, as set out in Appendix B (iii) to the report, be noted;

14. That the overall Housing Revenue Account Budget, at Appendix C (ii) to the report, be approved;
15. That it be noted that the rent charges relating to Housing Revenue Account properties will be kept at the 2022/23 levels for the 2023/24 year;
16. That the fees and charges relating to Housing Revenue Account properties, as set out in Appendix C (iii) to the report, be noted;
17. That it be noted that the rent charges relating to rents for pitches at Claywood Lane Caravan Site Bean are to be kept at the 2022/23 levels for the 2023/24 year rent;
18. That the Corporate Property Maintenance and Improvement Programme be noted, as set out in Appendix E to the report;
19. That the overall Capital Programme and budget be agreed and the detail noted as set out in Appendices D (i) and D (ii) to the report;
20. That the Medium Term Financial Plan shown at Appendix B (iv) to the report be noted;
21. That the Capital Strategy shown at Appendix D (iii), Treasury Management Strategy Statement shown at Appendix D (v), and the Investment Strategy at Appendix D(iv), to the report , be approved, and that the Head of Finance (Section 151 Officer) be granted delegated authority to borrow for capital investment purposes, in accordance with the Treasury Management Strategy, should it be in the interest of the Council to do so;
22. That it be noted that the Head of Finance is authorised to charge such sums which are currently anticipated to be met from revenue, balances or reserves, or capital accounts, to other accounts, as is deemed to be in the interest of the authority;
23. That the budget amendment rules for 2023/24, as set out in Appendix F to the report, be agreed;
24. That the special expense General Fund budget (parish precepts) as set out in Appendix H(ii) to the report, totalling £1,287,305 be noted;
25. That the requirement of major preceptors, as detailed in Appendix H(i) to the report, be noted;
26. That the financial threshold for the definition of a key decision, in accordance with Article 13.03(b) of the Constitution, be set at £500,000;
27. That it be noted that, at its meeting on 12 December 2022, the General Assembly of the Council calculated the following amounts as its Council Tax Base for the year 2023/24 in accordance with regulations made under Section 31 B(3) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 as amended:

CHAIRMAN'S INITIALS

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL (BUDGET)

MONDAY 27 FEBRUARY 2023

(a) 40,288.37 being the Council Tax Base, for the whole Council area.

and

(b) the aggregate of the amounts for dwellings in those parts of its area to which a Parish precept relates, as follows:

Bean Parish	547.17
Darenth Parish	1,293.63
Longfield and New Barn Parish	2,494.93
Southfleet Parish	649.94
Stone Parish	4,255.88
Sutton-at-Hone and Hawley Parish	1,468.06
Swanscombe and Greenhithe Town	4,581.23
Wilmington Parish	3,022.21

29. That the following amounts now be calculated by the Council for the year 2023/24 in accordance with Sections 31 to 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, as amended:-

(a) £53,571,349 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the amounts set out in Section 31 A(2) of the 1992 Act, taking into account all precepts issued to it by Parish Councils.

(b) £44,977,748 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in section 31 A(3) of the 1992 Act.

(c) £8,593,601 being the amount by which the aggregate at (a) above exceeds the aggregate at (b) above, calculated by the Council in accordance with sections 31 A(4) of the 1992 Act as its Council Tax requirement for the year.

(d) £213.30 being the amount at (c) above, divided by 27 (a) above, calculated by the Council in accordance with section 31 B(1) of the 1992 Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year (including parish precepts).

(e) £1,287,305 being the aggregate amount of all special items, i.e. the total of the parish and town council precepts, referred to in Section 34(1) of the 1992 Act.

(f) £181.35 being the amount at (d) above, less the result given by dividing the amount at (e) above by the amount at 27(a) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34(2) of the 1992 Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which no special item relates

(g) Part of the Borough's area:

£218.03	Bean Parish
£243.21	Darenth Parish
£209.15	Longfield and New Barn Parish
£195.30	Southfleet Parish
£292.34	Stone Parish
£253.29	Sutton-at-Hone and Hawley Parish
£275.84	Swanscombe and Greenhithe Town
£213.76	Wilmington Parish

being the amounts given by adding to the amount at 29 (f) above to the amounts of the special item or items relating to dwellings in those parts of the Council's area mentioned above, divided in each case by the amount at 27 (b) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34(3) of the 1992 Act, as the basic amounts of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which one or more special items relate.

(h) That the following amounts, given by multiplying the amounts at 29 (f) and 29 (g) above by the number which, in the proportion set out in Section 5(1) of the 1992 Act, is applicable to dwellings listed in a particular valuation band divided by the number which in that proportion is applicable to dwellings listed in valuation band D, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 36(1) of the 1992 Act, be the amounts to be taken into account for the year in respect of categories of dwellings listed in different valuation bands:

Bean Parish

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
145.35	169.58	193.80	218.03	266.48	314.93	363.38	436.06

Darenth Parish

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
162.14	189.16	216.19	243.21	297.26	351.30	405.35	486.42

Longfield and New Barn Parish

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
139.43	162.67	185.91	209.15	255.63	302.11	348.58	418.30

CHAIRMAN'S INITIALS

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL (BUDGET)

MONDAY 27 FEBRUARY 2023

Southfleet Parish

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
130.20	151.90	173.60	195.30	238.70	282.10	325.50	390.60

Stone Parish

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
194.89	227.38	259.86	292.34	357.30	422.27	487.23	584.68

Sutton-at-Hone and Hawley Parish

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
168.86	197.00	225.15	253.29	309.58	365.86	422.15	506.58

Swanscombe and Greenhithe Town

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
183.89	214.54	245.19	275.84	337.14	398.44	459.73	551.68

Wilmington Parish

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
142.51	166.26	190.01	213.76	261.26	308.76	356.27	427.52

Unparished Parts of the Borough

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
120.90	141.05	161.20	181.35	221.65	261.95	302.25	362.70

30. That it be noted that, for the year 2023/24, the major precepting authorities have stated the following amounts in precepts issued to the Council, in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, for each of the categories of dwellings shown below:-

Precepting Authorities

Kent County Council – including social care precept

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1022.82	1193.29	1363.76	1534.23	1875.17	2216.11	2557.05	3068.46

Kent Police and Crime Commissioner

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
162.10	189.12	216.13	243.15	297.18	351.22	405.25	486.30

Kent Fire and Rescue

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
58.20	67.90	77.60	87.30	106.70	126.10	145.50	174.60

31. That, having calculated the aggregate in each case of the amounts at 29(h) and 30 above, the Council, in accordance with Section 30(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, hereby sets the following amounts of Council Tax for the year 2023/24 for each of the categories of dwellings shown below: on the following page.

Bean Parish

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1,388.47	1,619.89	1,851.29	2,082.71	2,545.53	3,008.36	3,471.18	4,165.42

Darenth Parish

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1,405.26	1,639.47	1,873.68	2,107.89	2,576.31	3,044.73	3,513.15	4,215.78

Longfield and New Barn Parish

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1,382.55	1,612.98	1,843.40	2,073.83	2,534.68	2,995.54	3,456.38	4,147.66

Southfleet Parish

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1,373.32	1,602.21	1,831.09	2,059.98	2,517.75	2975.53	3433.30	4,119.96

Stone Parish

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1,438.01	1,677.69	1,917.35	2,157.02	2,636.35	3,115.70	3,595.03	4,314.04

CHAIRMAN'S
INITIALS

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GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL (BUDGET)

MONDAY 27 FEBRUARY 2023

Sutton-at-Hone and Hawley Parish

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1,411.98	1,647.31	1,882.64	2,117.97	2,588.63	3,059.29	3,529.95	4,235.94

Swanscombe and GreenhitheTown

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1,427.01	1,664.85	1,902.68	2,140.52	2,616.19	3,091.87	3,567.53	4,281.04

Wilmington Parish

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1,385.63	1,616.57	1,847.50	2,078.44	2,540.31	3,002.19	3,464.07	4,156.88

Unparished Parts of the Borough

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1,364.02	1,591.36	1,818.69	2,046.03	2,500.70	2,955.38	3,410.05	4,092.06

The meeting closed at 8.43 pm

MAYOR

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