

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 24 February 2025.

PRESENT:

The Mayor

Councillor A R Lloyd

The Deputy Mayor

Councillor P W Whapshott

Councillor R M Currans

Councillor G R Holt

Councillor E H Ben Moussa

Councillor J A Kite, MBE

Councillor M Brown

Councillor E J Lampkin

Councillor S H Brown

Councillor D J Mote

Councillor J Burrell

Councillor J Ozog

Councillor P Cutler

Councillor R S L Perfitt

Councillor M J Davis

Councillor M I Peters

Councillor P M Denman

Councillor D A Povey

Councillor Mrs C M Gale

Councillor C Quaqumey

Councillor B Garden

Councillor A S Sandhu, MBE

Councillor A Gaskin

Councillor C J Shippam

Councillor D A Graham

Councillor D Swinerd

Councillor K J Grehan

Councillor A M Vaduva

Councillor D A Hammock

Councillor R J Wells

Councillor J S Hawkes

ABSENT:

Councillor V Akintomide-Akinwamide

Councillor R Anne

Councillor L A Canham

Councillor L H K Edie

Councillor R A S Jones

Councillor D T Nicklen

Councillor T Oliver

Councillor C Pearce

Councillor D J Reynolds

Councillor K Stealey

Councillor Mrs P A Thurlow

ALSO PRESENT:

Sarah Martin, Chief Officer & Director of Corporate Services

Peter Dosad, Director of Housing & Public Protection

Butta Singh, Head of Legal Services & Monitoring Officer

Tim Sams, Head of Finance

Alan Twyman, Democratic Services Manager

CHAIRMAN'S
INITIALS

100. PRAYERS: REVEREND CHARLIE LLOYD-EVANS

The Mayor's Chaplain led the Council in prayer.

101. 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 7, Revenue and Capital Budgets 2025/26.

The Chief Officer & Director of Corporate Services in the exercise of her delegated authority, in consultation with the Monitoring Officer, granted a dispensation to all Councillors to speak and vote on Agenda item 7, Revenue and Capital Budgets 2025/26, 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 8).

Members declared the following interests:

Councillor R M Currans declared a prejudicial interest in Agenda item 7 as she is a trustee of the Dartford Almshouse charity which receive grants/funding from the Council.

Councillor C A Gale declared a prejudicial interest in Agenda item 7 as she is a trustee of Citizens Advice North & West Kent and as a director of Ingress Park (Greenhithe) Management Limited.

Councillor J A Kite MBE declared a prejudicial interest in Agenda item 7 as he is a director of Dartford Football Club which receives grant funding from the Council.

Councillor D J Mote declared a prejudicial interest in Agenda item 7 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 the Ebbsfleet Garden City Trust;
- as a trustee of MCK Kent;
- 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.

CHAIRMAN'S
INITIALS

CHAIRMAN'S INITIALS

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL (BUDGET)

MONDAY 24 FEBRUARY 2025

He also declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in Appendices H(i),(ii) and (iii) of Agenda item 7 as his wife is an employee of Darenth Parish Council

Councillor E L H Ben Moussa declared a prejudicial interest in Agenda item 7 as she is a trustee of the Dartford Almshouse charity which receive grants/funding from the Council.

Councillor Mrs J A Ozog declared a prejudicial interest in Agenda item 7 as she is a trustee of the Dartford Almshouse charity which receive grants/funding from the Council.

Councillor M I Peters declared a prejudicial interest in Agenda item 7 as she is a trustee of the Dartford Almshouse charity which receive grants/funding from the Council.

Councillor A S Sandhu MBE declared a prejudicial interest in Agenda item 7 as he is a trustee of Kent Cohesion Council, and as a trustee of Dartford Lions Club as they receive grants/funding from the Council.

102. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Akinwamide-Akintomide, Anne, Canham, Edie, Nicklen, Oliver, Pearce, Reynolds, Stealey and Thurlow.

103. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL HELD ON 9 DECEMBER 2024

Members considered the minutes of the meeting of the General Assembly of the Council held on 9 December 2024.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor J A Kite MBE, proposed the adoption of the minutes, which was seconded by the Deputy Leader of the Council, Councillor C J Shippam, and it was ...

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the General Assembly of the Council held on 9 December 2024 be confirmed as an accurate record.

104. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Former Councillor Bill Cook

The Mayor informed Members of the sad death of former Councillor Bill Cook in December 2024. Bill Cook had also been a former Deputy Leader of the Council. He sent his condolences to Bill's family.

- Iris Gutteridge

The Mayor also informed Members that he had recently attended a presentation to Iris Gutteridge in recognition of her 50 years' service as a Parish Councillor on Darenth Parish Council, and 16 years as the Chairman of the Parish Council. In addition, she had also served on the Parish and Town Council Forum and other Dartford Borough Council bodies.

- Charity Dinner and Dance

The Mayor reminded Members of his forthcoming Charity Dinner and Dance on 25th April and encouraged Members to attend and support this event.

- Engagement of Councillor Jeremy Kite and Maria Berry

The Mayor congratulated the Leader of the Council, Jeremy Kite, on his engagement to Maria on Valentine's Day. He wished them every happiness in their future lives together.

Finally, he reminded Members that they could follow his Mayoral engagements on the Mayor's social media blog.

105. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

106. REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGETS 2025-26

The General Assembly of the Council considered a report and appendices setting out the proposed Revenue and Capital Budgets for 2025-26, including recommendations on setting the overall level of General Fund and Housing Revenue Account revenue and capital expenditure for Dartford Borough Council for 2025/26, the level of Council Tax for Dartford Borough in its parished and unparished areas for 2025/26 and fees and charges for 2025/26, and approving the Pay Policy Statement and sundry related matters. The report also set out the proposed increases for rents relating to the HRA properties and pitches at Claywood Lane caravan site, Bean.

Appendix A to the report set out the Council's approach to budgeting, outlined the Council's current financial position and the immediate and future outlook for resources and expenditure demands, and set out the Council's current approach to managing these within the overall aims and objectives of the Council as set out in the new Corporate Plan. The report also recognised the challenging economic and political conditions, and uncertainties around the Government's plans for the reorganisation of local government. The report also included three versions of the Medium-Term Financial Plan based on different assumptions, a mid-based estimate, an optimistic estimate and a pessimistic estimate. Once again, the Council was proposing only a limited increase of its own element of the Council Tax to maintain existing levels of

CHAIRMAN'S INITIALS

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL (BUDGET)

MONDAY 24 FEBRUARY 2025

service and allow for investment in social infrastructure and would remain the lowest taxing district in Kent.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor J A Kite thanked Members for their sentiments about his engagement. He then thanked the Council's directors and Finance Team for their help in developing the budget proposals. He said that the Council benefitted from having a stable financial position in a world that was fast changing for local government, and not necessarily for the better, with many uncertainties for the future. He said that once again the Council had delivered a budget that would maintain services without cutting them and that whilst there was a proposed increase of 2% in respect of the Dartford Borough Council element of the Council tax this represented the lowest increase in Kent, and he suspected would be one of the lowest in the country. He also thanked the Cabinet Advisory Panel, which had the opportunity to consider the draft budget proposals at its meeting on 17 February, for its endorsement of the proposals. He stressed that the budget was about real people with real lives. He welcomed the ability to award a pay increase of 4% to the Council's staff and to be able to keep the increase in Council tax to 2% whilst still maintaining services, continuing to invest in critical infrastructure and delivering community services and events. He commended the budget proposals to the Council and proposed the recommendations contained in the report.

The motion was seconded by Councillor Shippam and opened for debate.

The Shadow Leader of the Council, Councillor J S Hawkes, said that his Group had not endorsed the budget at the Cabinet Advisory Panel and that there had been no discussion of the budget at that meeting. He supported the 4% pay award to hard working staff but felt that the Administration needed to take ownership of the decision to raise Council Tax. He said that the 2% increase was in addition to the decision taken by Kent County Council to raise their component of Council Tax by the maximum 5% permissible which was not good for taxpayers. He said that the level of Band D Council tax in the borough had increased by 58% over the past 10 years, with the Dartford Borough Council portion of this up by 17%. He said that the budget did nothing to address issues of concern to local people, such as parking enforcement where there had been no significant increase in resource. However, he did note a proposed 32% increase in the Communications budget and said that the increase in Council Tax was being used for self-promotion. He said that these were the wrong priorities for the people of Dartford. He noted the considerable and growing pressure on the temporary accommodation budget and noted that the Renters Rights Bill would end the scourge of no-fault evictions. He said that the only way to resolve homelessness was to build more affordable homes. He said that this was the wrong budget for Dartford, with the wrong priorities and that, once again, he found the budget proposals disappointing.

The Mayor opened up the debate for wider discussion, including any amendments.

The Shadow Leader of the Council moved the following amendment:

'That the Cabinet be requested to review and amend the level of fixed penalty notices (FPN's) for Fly Tipping – new charge for 2025/26 to be £1,000 instead of £500'

In proposing the amendment he said that, despite a commitment being given at the GAC meeting on 9 December 2024 to review the penalties for fly-tipping the level of FPN set in the budget was £500. He said that this sent the wrong message to fly-tippers when neighbouring boroughs had set their FPN's at the maximum level of £1,000 that could be set in order to deter offenders. He said that Dartford's approach seemed soft in comparison and that this was reflected by the fact that 97% of fly-tipping over the past year was by repeat offenders and that fly-tipping had taken place 26 times in one location over the year.

The amendment was seconded by Councillor Ben-Moussa and opened for debate.

A Member said that she was baffled by the indifference being displayed by Members to this proposal and that keeping the penalty at such a low level sent a message that fly-tipping was not being treated seriously. A Member said that keeping the FPN at such a low level resulted in offenders treating this as a business cost. She said that increasing this would act as a greater deterrent and allow the Council to recoup more of the costs of removing dumped waste.

Other Members said that they felt that £500 was a sufficient deterrent and cited examples of cases where other authorities had said that setting a higher level had no impact on the level of offending. They said that increasing the fine could also be counter intuitive as offenders were likely to pay a £500 fine whereas they were more likely to challenge and appeal a fine of £1,000 which could therefore cost the Council more to collect whilst not acting as a higher deterrent. They said that a better way to deter fly-tipping was to increase awareness of the issue by way of education and communication. A Member said that he had also not seen any influx of fly-tipping by way of displacement from the neighbouring areas levying higher fines.

In responding to debate on the amendment the Shadow Leader of the Council said that the £1,000 fine would be an additional deterrent to be used to combat fly-tipping, along with other measures. Fly-tipping was a scourge on the community and costly to clean up. Increasing the FPN to the maximum permitted level would send the strongest possible message to offenders.

The Leader of the Council cited the experience of other areas where the level of the FPN had shown itself not to be an effective deterrent. He also quoted examples of fly-tipping cases pursued by the Council through the Magistrates Court, which had imposed much higher fines (than the £500 proposed) and had even led to imprisonment of the offender, to show that the Council treated fly-tipping with the upmost seriousness and that officers took robust enforcement measures. However there needed to be a range of deterrents to deal with the different levels of fly-tipping from the almost industrial offenders

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GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL (BUDGET)

MONDAY 24 FEBRUARY 2025

to one-off behaviours. Stopping fly-tipping would always be a serious issue for the Council which would seek to address it robustly and effectively.

The amendment was put to the vote as follows:

FOR	AGAINST	ABSTAIN
Councillor E L H Ben Moussa Councillor A Gaskin Councillor D A Graham Councillor K J Grehan Councillor J S Hawkes Councillor D A Povey Councillor A M Vaduva	Councillor M Brown Councillor S H Brown Councillor J Burrell Councillor R M Currans Councillor P Cutler Councillor M J Davis Councillor P M Denman Councillor C M Gale Councillor B Garden Councillor D A Hammock Councillor G R Holt Councillor J A Kite MBE Councillor E J Lampkin Councillor A R Lloyd Councillor D J Mote Councillor J A Ozog Councillor R S L Perfitt Councillor M I Peters Councillor C Quaqumey Councillor A S Sandhu MBE Councillor C J Shippam Councillor D Swinerd Councillor R J Wells Councillor P W Whapshott	
TOTALS: 7	24	0

The amendment was lost.

The Shadow Leader of the Council proposed a second amendment:

‘That £83,500 be transferred from the Communications budget to the CCTV budget to fund an additional two CCTV operators.’

In introducing the amendment the Shadow Leader of the Council said that crime and disorder and anti-social behaviour (ASB) were major concerns for local residents, with 68% of residents citing ASB as their main concern in a recent survey. The amendment sought to transfer money from the Communications budget to fund two additional CCTV operators to enable the Borough’s CCTV cameras to be monitored more often and to provide additional support to the police in detecting and dealing with criminal activity. He felt certain that the public would like to prioritise public safety over Council self-promotion.

The amendment was seconded by Councillor Grehan and opened for debate.

A Member said that wishing to have good communications with the public was not self-promotion but about promoting awareness of council services and events, and to promote community and understanding. He asked what would happen to the new CCTV posts after funding for the year ended and whether the posts would then be made redundant. This was echoed by another Member who said that it was important to have good communications in a fast-changing world and to ensure that the public were aware of Council services and events. Good communications could also be used to support efforts to tackle crime and disorder and to ensure that people were aware that the Council would not tolerate ASB. Another Member noted that the Council was already increasing the amount of money spent on CCTV by £124,000 and felt that an additional increase was unjustified.

Councillor Grehan said that it was important to de-personalise some of the comments made during the debate. She said that almost every day she had contact with residents who wanted an increase in the number of CCTV cameras as their presence made them feel more protected and secure and that this was a way to deter crime and improve detection. She felt that good communications could be delivered without the increase in the Communications budget.

The Shadow Leader of the Council said that he was amazed that it had taken the Administration 22 years to realise the importance of good communication with residents. He said that the proposal to move funds from one General Fund budget to another was not for one year as this is not what happened within the budget setting process so the money would continue to sit within the CCTV budget in future years. The amendment would provide additional resource for the CCTV team and additional assistance to work with the police to prevent crime and ASB.

The Leader of the Council said that the current number of CCTV operators was sufficient to monitor the existing CCTV cameras. The Council's spending on CCTV had doubled in recent years, however there were difficulties around recruiting and retaining skilled CCTV staff. The key for effective CCTV operation was around having the most appropriate systems and skilled staff in place. Communications was a vital service in the digital age and the Council had been doing more work than ever on delivering digital channels and improving the accessibility and content of the Council's web site. Previously this had been delivered by officers from each department who were not communications experts and the decision had been taken to move this work back to a central Communications team who could deliver a more professional approach and improve web provision. Communications promoted awareness of all the Council's services across communities and on broad matters such as health and well-being and it was not a case of political self-promotion as was being implied.

CHAIRMAN'S INITIALS

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL (BUDGET)

MONDAY 24 FEBRUARY 2025

The amendment was put to the vote as follows:

FOR	AGAINST	ABSTAIN
Councillor E L H Ben Moussa Councillor A Gaskin Councillor D A Graham Councillor K J Grehan Councillor J S Hawkes Councillor D A Povey Councillor A M Vaduva	Councillor M Brown Councillor S H Brown Councillor J Burrell Councillor R M Currans Councillor P Cutler Councillor M J Davis Councillor P M Denman Councillor C M Gale Councillor B Garden Councillor D A Hammock Councillor G R Holt Councillor J A Kite MBE Councillor E J Lampkin Councillor A R Lloyd Councillor D J Mote Councillor J A Ozog Councillor M I Peters Councillor C Quaqumey Councillor A S Sandhu MBE Councillor C J Shippam Councillor D Swinerd Councillor R J Wells Councillor P W Whapshott	
TOTALS: 7	23	0

The amendment was lost.

The Shadow Leader of the Council proposed a third amendment:

‘That the Cabinet be asked to review and amend the fee for charity events at the Dartford Outdoor Theatre – new charge for 2025/26 to read £75 instead of £250, and to review and amend the fee for charity events in Central Park – new charge for 2025/26 to read FREE instead of £250.’

In introducing the amendment the Shadow Leader of the Council said that he had been shocked and amazed to see such a large increase being proposed for the hire charge for events at the Outdoor Theatre and in Central Park by charities. He noted the current financial pressures being faced by many charities and felt that these increases were unfair and unjustified, and went against the Council’s claims to be community focussed.

The amendment was seconded by Councillor Vaduva who said that the community thrived on the goodwill of charities, who brought people together and were the backbone of Dartford. The proposed fee increases would present a significant financial barrier for many smaller charities, such as those supported by the current Mayor’s charity appeal, and that they needed the

Council's help and backing. Supporting the amendment and reducing the charges as proposed would send a clear message of support and encourage their work. The increased charges for using public spaces were unjustified.

The amendment was opened for debate.

The Shadow Leader of the Council noted that nobody wished to speak further on the amendment and that there was no budgeted income line for these fees and charges in the budget papers. He urged Members to support the amendment.

The Leader of the Council said that there was no intention of adversely impacting the work of small charities and that the budget sought to put a fee structure in place for a whole range of charities and events. The fees would cover some part of the cost to the Council of hiring out these venues. There was no income line as this was not about income generation and the hire fees would not be applied in every case. He felt that there might be some confusion on this point and said that he was prepared to provide further clarity around this, with the Shadow Leader of the Council, to ensure that there was greater understanding on this. It was not intended to disadvantage any local charities, and this would not be the case, but it was important that charities also recognised their responsibilities when holding events and the charges were designed to offset some of the costs incurred by the Council in hiring-out these facilities. He was happy to put something together to provide support and advice to charitable organisations over whether the charges would apply to their events.

The amendment was put to the vote as follows:

FOR	AGAINST	ABSTAIN
Councillor E L H Ben Moussa Councillor M Brown Councillor A Gaskin Councillor D A Graham Councillor K J Grehan Councillor J S Hawkes Councillor D A Povey Councillor A M Vaduva	Councillor S H Brown Councillor J Burrell Councillor R M Currans Councillor P Cutler Councillor M J Davis Councillor P M Denman Councillor C M Gale Councillor B Garden Councillor D A Hammock Councillor G R Holt Councillor J A Kite MBE Councillor E J Lampkin Councillor A R Lloyd Councillor D J Mote Councillor J A Ozog Councillor R S L Perfitt Councillor M I Peters Councillor C Quaqumey Councillor A S Sandhu MBE Councillor C J Shippam Councillor D Swinerd Councillor R J Wells Councillor P W Whapshott	
TOTALS: 8	23	0

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL (BUDGET)

MONDAY 24 FEBRUARY 2025

The amendment was lost.

There was no further debate on the original budget motion.

The Leader of the Council of the Council responded to the debate on the budget proposals and noted the many challenges being faced by authorities across the country, some of whom were facing bankruptcy. In contrast Dartford was in a strong financial position. This enabled it to propose only a modest 2% increase in Council Tax, following many years of 0% increases, and despite facing external pressures such as the increase in employer NI contributions. Once again Dartford was proposing the lowest increase in its Council Tax in Kent, and among the lowest in the country, and was able to do this without reducing services. He felt that some of the amendments proposed had been misguided rather than ill-intended and that it was important for all Members to work together for the benefit of Dartford and to support the budget, which was the envelope within which operational services are delivered. He noted that the Cabinet Advisory Panel had had the opportunity to consider the budget proposals in advance and that no comments had been made at that meeting but that if Members did not feel that this opportunity was beneficial this could be revisited for the future.

The original motion was put to the vote as follows:

FOR	AGAINST	ABSTAIN
Councillor S H Brown	Councillor E L H Ben	
Councillor J Burrell	Moussa	
Councillor R M Currans	Councillor M Brown	
Councillor P Cutler	Councillor A Gaskin	
Councillor M J Davis	Councillor D A Graham	
Councillor P M Denman	Councillor K J Grehan	
Councillor C M Gale	Councillor J S Hawkes	
Councillor B Garden	Councillor D A Povey	
Councillor D A Hammock	Councillor A M Vaduva	
Councillor G R Holt		
Councillor J A Kite MBE		
Councillor E J Lampkin		
Councillor A R Lloyd		
Councillor D J Mote		
Councillor J A Ozog		
Councillor R S L Perfitt		
Councillor M I Peters		
Councillor C Quaumeey		
Councillor A S Sandhu		
MBE		
Councillor C J Shippam		
Councillor D Swinerd		
Councillor R J Wells		
Councillor P W Whapshott		
TOTALS: 23	8	0

The budget motion was carried.

RESOLVED:

1. That the probable outturn and overall financial position for 2024/25, 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 2024/25, the estimated General Fund balance of £3m at 31 March 2025 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) of the report, be noted;
4. That the Council Tax requirement of £7,866,730 for 2025/26 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 4% be applied to all salary levels and associated allowances excluding protected pay;
7. That a 4% increase be applied to Member allowances and other relevant allowances for 2025/26;
8. That a 4% increase be applied to Mayoral allowances and other relevant allowances for 2025/26;
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 2025;
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;

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL (BUDGET)

MONDAY 24 FEBRUARY 2025

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 increased by 2.7% for 2025/26 as set in paragraph 7.3 of the report and in line with the rent policy;
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 increased in line with HRA properties;
18. That the Corporate Property Maintenance and Improvement Programme be noted, as set out in Appendix E;
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) to the report, Treasury Management Strategy Statement shown at Appendix D (v), and the Investment Strategy at Appendix D(iv), 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 2025/26, 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 £1,489,074 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 9 December 2024, the General Assembly of the Council calculated the following amounts as its Council Tax Base for the year 2025/26 in accordance with regulations made under Section 31 B(3) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 as amended:

(a) 41,702.34 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	543.88
Darenth Parish	1,282.44
Longfield and New Barn Parish	2,490.77
Southfleet Parish	645.63
Stone Parish	4,455.31
Sutton-at-Hone and Hawley Parish	1,478.09
Swanscombe and Greenhithe Town	4,743.69
Wilmington Parish	2,998.85

28. That the following amounts now be calculated by the Council for the year 2025/26 in accordance with Sections 31 to 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, as amended:-

(a) £57,450,453 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) £48,094,650 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) £9,355,803 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) £224.35 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) £1,489,074 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) £188.64 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

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GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL (BUDGET)

MONDAY 24 FEBRUARY 2025

(g) Part of the Borough's area:

£254.12	Bean Parish
£257.76	Darenth Parish
£216.44	Longfield and New Barn Parish
£202.97	Southfleet Parish
£318.11	Stone Parish
£266.44	Sutton-at-Hone and Hawley Parish
£287.85	Swanscombe and Greenhithe Town
£229.95	Wilmington Parish

being the amounts given by adding to the amount at 28 (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 28 (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 28 (f) and 28 (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	B̄	C	D	Ē	F̄	Ḡ	H̄
169.41	197.65	225.88	254.12	310.59	367.06	423.53	508.24

Darenth Parish

A	B̄	C	D	Ē	F̄	Ḡ	H̄
171.84	200.48	229.12	257.76	315.04	372.32	429.60	515.52

Longfield and New Barn Parish

A	B̄	C	D	Ē	F̄	Ḡ	H̄
144.29	168.34	192.39	216.44	264.54	312.64	360.73	432.88

Southfleet Parish

A	B̄	C	D	Ē	F̄	Ḡ	H̄
135.31	157.87	180.42	202.97	248.07	293.18	338.28	405.94

Stone Parish

A	B̄	C	D	Ē	F̄	Ḡ	H̄
212.07	247.42	282.76	318.11	388.80	459.49	530.18	636.22

Sutton-at-Hone and Hawley Parish

A	B̄	C	D	Ē	F̄	Ḡ	H̄
177.63	207.23	236.84	266.44	325.65	384.86	444.07	532.88

Swanscombe and Greenhithe Town

A	B̄	C	D	Ē	F̄	Ḡ	H̄
191.90	223.88	255.87	287.85	351.82	415.78	479.75	575.70

Wilmington Parish

A	B̄	C	D	Ē	F̄	Ḡ	H̄
153.30	178.85	204.40	229.95	281.05	332.15	383.25	459.90

Unparished Parts of the Borough

A	B̄	C	D	Ē	F̄	Ḡ	H̄
125.76	146.72	167.68	188.64	230.56	272.48	314.40	377.28

29. That it be noted that, for the year 2025/26 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

A	B̄	C	D	Ē	F̄	Ḡ	H̄
1,127.46	1,315.37	1,503.28	1,691.19	2,067.01	2,442.83	2,818.65	3,382.38

Kent Police and Crime Commissioner

A	B̄	C	D	Ē	F̄	Ḡ	H̄
180.10	210.12	240.13	270.15	330.18	390.22	450.25	540.30

Kent Fire and Rescue

A	B̄	C	D	Ē	F̄	Ḡ	H̄
63.24	73.78	84.32	94.86	115.94	137.02	158.10	189.72

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GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL (BUDGET)

MONDAY 24 FEBRUARY 2025

30. That, having calculated the aggregate in each case of the amounts at 28(h) and 29 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 2024/25 for each of the categories of dwellings shown below: on the following page.

Bean Parish

A	\bar{B}	C	D	\bar{E}	\bar{F}	\bar{G}	\bar{H}
1,540.21	1,796.92	2,053.61	2,310.32	2,823.72	3,337.13	3,850.53	4,620.64

Darenth Parish

A	\bar{B}	C	D	\bar{E}	\bar{F}	\bar{G}	\bar{H}
1,542.64	1,799.75	2,056.85	2,313.96	2,828.17	3,342.39	3,856.60	4,627.92

Longfield and New Barn Parish

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1,515.09	1,767.61	2,020.12	2,272.64	2,777.67	3,282.71	3,787.73	4,545.28

Southfleet Parish

A	\bar{B}	C	D	\bar{E}	\bar{F}	\bar{G}	\bar{H}
1,506.11	1,757.14	2,008.15	2,259.17	2,761.20	3,263.25	3,765.28	4,518.34

Stone Parish

A	\bar{B}	C	D	\bar{E}	\bar{F}	\bar{G}	\bar{H}
1,582.87	1,846.69	2,110.49	2,374.31	2,901.93	3,429.56	3,957.18	4,748.62

Sutton-at-Hone and Hawley Parish

A	\bar{B}	C	D	\bar{E}	\bar{F}	\bar{G}	\bar{H}
1,548.43	1,806.50	2,064.57	2,322.64	2,838.78	3,354.93	3,871.07	4,645.28

Swanscombe and GreenhitheTown

A	\bar{B}	C	D	\bar{E}	\bar{F}	\bar{G}	\bar{H}
1,562.70	1,823.15	2,083.60	2,344.05	2,864.95	3,385.85	3,906.75	4,688.10

Wilmington Parish

A	\bar{B}	C	D	\bar{E}	\bar{F}	\bar{G}	\bar{H}
1,524.10	1,778.12	2,032.13	2,286.15	2,794.18	3,302.22	3,810.25	4,572.30

Unparished Parts of the Borough

A	\bar{B}	C	D	\bar{E}	\bar{F}	\bar{G}	\bar{H}
1,496.56	1,745.99	1,995.41	2,244.84	2,743.69	3,242.55	3,741.40	4,489.68

CHAIRMAN'S INITIALS

107. ORCHARD THEATRE MAJOR WORKS UPDATE

The General Assembly of the Council considered a report which provided an update on the major works being carried out at the Orchard Theatre since its closure in 2023 for safety reasons which had emerged following a routine inspection of the Reinforced Autoclave Aerated Concrete (RAAC) planks to the Orchard Theatre roof on 4th September 2023. The Structural Consultant who had carried out the Survey recommended immediate closure of the building due to evidence that RAAC planks installed at the time of the theatre's construction had deteriorated, and the area could not remain safe for users. The theatre has been closed since that date.

Access made to other parts of the building, arising from both the original roof works and additional refurbishment proposals, had revealed that significant further works were required to meet modern regulations and current health and safety operating standards. The Council was wholly committed to the retention of a modern, safe and efficient Orchard Theatre and to carrying out these essential works.

Whilst it was originally envisaged that the works to the roof would result in a closure of around 12 months, deeper examination of the building identified the need for further significant works, over and above the renewal of the roof. This had been further exacerbated by the scope, breadth and the technical complexity of the works, and to ensure that the theatre meets all modern regulations and will be, to a significant extent, 'future-proofed' in terms of standards, safety, access and audience experience. This substantial amount of additional and originally unforeseen work has meant that the original timeframe for completion could not be delivered and that it would not be possible to re-open the main theatre until May 2026. As a result of this additional closure the Council was also seeking to extend the operational capacity of the Orchard West temporary theatre up to April 2026.

In 14 months of its operation Orchard West welcomed over 160,000 guests and presented a total of 257 performances, with the most recent pantomime Sleeping Beauty entertaining over 20,000 people across 38 performances. The main reasons for the Council taking action and providing a temporary venue was to safeguard the local economy (The Orchard Theatre generated an economic impact of £4.6 million in the local economy in 2022/23), to safeguard local employment related to the theatre, to continue the cultural offer for Dartford residents and to continue its obligations to Trafalgar Theatres to provide a useable venue from which to operate. These priorities remained unchanged. Although the original contract with Trafalgar Entertainment to operate the temporary theatre ended on 3 February 2025 it was proposed to enter into a new contract with them until April 2026.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor J A Kite MBE, proposed the recommendations contained in the report, which was seconded by the Deputy Leader of the Council, Councillor C J Shippam. The motion was opened for debate.

The Shadow Leader of the Council said that his Group had supported the works to the Orchard Theatre and the provision of a temporary theatre venue since the discovery of the RAAC concrete that forced the theatre to close on safety grounds. His Group continued to support this as the theatre greatly benefitted the town and the night-time economy. However, there were concerns about the degree of confidence about the projected reopening of the theatre in May 2026 and whether this could be delivered. The Council was also being asked to approve additional funding of £10M but there was no guarantee that this would be the final figure. Whilst recognising that it was necessary to provide the additional funding, he felt that at no time in the last two years had Members been provided with a detailed overall scope and costings for the works, or an explanation as to how the property had been maintained over the last decade without these issues being discovered. He had therefore drawn this matter down for consideration at the forthcoming meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.

The Leader of the Council said that when the Orchard Theatre had been built 40 years ago it had been constructed using the latest construction methods and the best possible resources and materials, however it was now known that the use of RAAC concrete was a mistake and it was now necessary to rectify this. The Orchard Theatre had been maintained according to a planned maintenance programme and subjected to regular health and safety and fire safety inspections which it had continued to pass. It was only when the building was opened-up to carry out invasive works that the problem with the RAAC had been discovered and whilst remedial work was being carried out other unforeseen issues had been discovered. Building standards had also changed following the Grenfell Tower fire which necessitated work to bring the building up to meet the higher standards required. The Council was fully alive to the fact that the additional funding was taxpayers' money and for the need to ensure that costs were cost-efficient and reasonable. He cited examples of other publicly owned theatres that had recently carried out refurbishment works at much higher costs than the Orchard project, which reflected the fact that theatres were very complex buildings and works were often specialised. However, at the end of the day it was simply a question of whether Dartford wanted to continue to have a theatre, and public opinion supported this.

RESOLVED:

1. That a capital project budget of £9.8m is agreed to enable further works to the Orchard Theatre to be completed with an additional £1.7m in the 2024/25 budget and an additional £8.1m in 2025/26. The recommended new budget is shown in the budget report papers; and
2. That the additional reserve funded budget be added to the revenue budget in 2025/26.

108. REVIEW OF CONTRACT STANDING ORDERS 2025

The General Assembly of the Council considered a report which detailed proposed changes to the Council's Contract Standing Orders to comply with

CHAIRMAN'S INITIALS

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL (BUDGET)

MONDAY 24 FEBRUARY 2025

changes introduced by the Procurement Act 2023 relating to the way that public authorities purchase goods, services and public works.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor J A Kite MBE, proposed the recommendations contained in the report, which was seconded by the Deputy Leader of the Council, Councillor C J Shippam and it was ...

RESOLVED:

That, having considered a summary of the amendments as set out in para. 4.7 of the report, the Contract Standing Orders at Appendix A to the report, be adopted.

The meeting closed at 8.26 pm

MAYOR

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