

**BUDGET STATEMENT BY COUNCILLOR R I JACKSON
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

Mister Mayor, honoured guests, fellow councillors, ladies and gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure to present to you tonight the final budget of this Conservative administration. In preparing it I have been ably assisted and supported by Cllr Paul Simpson, the Chair of the Finance and Resources Committee and the interim Deputy Chief Executive along with fellow councillors on the Conservative group, to whom I express my thanks from the start, and the other members of the Finance and Resources Committee and the Policy and Performance Committee who are, of course, drawn from across the political spectrum.

I want to start by sharing with members, the latest position regarding our funding position. Members will recall that the Council accepted a four year settlement, ending in 2019/20, which identified the decline in Revenue Support Grant to nil in 2019/20. Going forward Council services will be reliant on income from Council Tax, Business Rates, and Fees and Charges for its funding. We have made prudent estimates of income from business rates, and assumed that any increase will be in line with current data about the operation of the Business Rates Pool and allowed for marginal growth in future years. Unfortunately, our levels New Homes Bonus will be lower than 2018/19, but we will receive £146,750 in 2019/20. Despite these funding challenges, during our administration, we have consistently developed robust and sustainable plans to deliver a balanced budget, protect front-line service delivery, and provide significant capital investment. I am proposing tonight a budget which continues to deliver economies, increasing efficiency, and strong income generation, enabling us to be self-sufficient while retaining a sound financial base. Mister Mayor, importantly this is a budget which all members should be able to support, as it doesn't ask our hard pressed Council Tax payers for any increase in Council Tax and it doesn't reduce services to our residents, and makes key capital investments in our services.

This administration has not only delivered on a commitment not to increase Council Tax during the first two years of our administration, but we are now proposing our

fourth consecutive Council Tax freeze for 2019/20. Residents are facing increases of 3.99% on the County Council element of their Council Tax bills due to the ever-increasing demand for Social Care. Members will note from this year's Budget Consultation, that our services received a high level of resident satisfaction. 74% of people are 'satisfied' or very 'satisfied' with the area in which they live, while 59% are 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the way that the Council delivers services.

I am pleased that we have maintained our levels of grants to charitable organisations. Also, our Better Care Fund allocation will be able to commit £747,300 to improving facilities for the disabled, which is maintained at the same high levels as 2018/19. Furthermore, we are taking the opportunity to utilise this funding, to build two new dementia-friendly homes on the site of the old Beeston market.

The 1% reduction in housing rental income has not had the detrimental impact on the Housing Revenue Account, as originally feared. The balance on the HRA remains very healthy and we have sufficient capital receipts from the sale of council houses and other sources to support our new house-building programme agreed at yesterday's Housing Committee.

Importantly, if we are to continue to address the growing funding and service expectations that we face as a Council we will have to continue to find ways of matching our income to our spending plans. Therefore, we will continue to seek opportunities for economies and efficiencies, make difficult decisions when they are needed and seize opportunities for investment to generate more income for the future.

Mister Mayor, I would now like to highlight a couple of very important revenue and capital developments within our 2019/20 budget.

Firstly, I think we all agree that the work of the Mental Health Working Group, has been very well received and has highlighted the importance of mental health both for our communities and for our staff in the work-place. I therefore think it is right we set aside resources of £10,000 to fund future initiatives and developments in this important area.

Secondly, in line with our capital investment priorities, my group is pleased to have set aside investment of £500,000 in parks, play areas and open spaces spread over 2018/19 and 2019/20. We will continue to ensure that our high priority sites are first in the queue for this important investment.

Finally, I am sure that members, will have been delighted to hear the recent press release, regarding the Arc Cinema agreeing to open an 8 screen, 700 seat cinema in Beeston, as part of our exciting Phase 2 re-development. Our capital programme has set aside capital resources of approximately £10.4m over three financial years, to meet these development costs. Given the high profile nature of this significant project, officers have been providing regular reports back to the Policy and Performance committee on progress with the project.

Members will note that our capital investment plans are focused on three important areas. Firstly, as always, improving services to our residents and tenants, through significant investment in Housing, Leisure and Environmental Services. Secondly, enhancing our local democracy with a brand new modern, civic suite, members rooms, and new audio equipment. Finally, with regards to our new ways of working programme, I am pleased that the modernisation of our Council offices will provide a modern, attractive and agile working environment for staff, which will in turn improve productivity and customer services.

I think we all recognise that our leisure facilities provide an exciting range of leisure services to our residents, and that these facilities will require significant capital investment to further develop, sustain and future proof these important services. I therefore expect that any new administration will prioritise the development of our new leisure facilities strategy.

Over the last four years, we have continued to drive out economies and efficiencies and ensure that we operate within our means, whilst minimising the impact on our services. Last October, we presented our refreshed Business Strategy to the Finance and Resources Committee, and the majority of proposals to achieve savings and additional income, have been included within the 2019/20 budget. The only notable

exception, being our participation in Central Government's business rates retention pilot, as unfortunately the Nottinghamshire region was not chosen as a pilot.

Throughout our administration, we have been prepared to make tough decisions but necessary ones if we are to achieve a balanced budget and protect service delivery.

As a result of the challenging funding position and our focused spending plans, we anticipate drawing £350,000 from our general reserves and utilising £174,000 from earmarked reserves which are no longer required. As members will be acutely aware, we will also need to draw down the election reserve of £90,000.

In order to manage unforeseen risks, we are always looking to protect our healthy general reserves, and I am pleased to report that at the 1st April 2018 our general reserve totalled approximately £6m. Utilising our general reserves, is disappointing, but it is still considerably less than a number of other authorities up and down the country. We are determined to remain on track to achieve a balanced budget over the lifetime of the medium term financial strategy, and will retain a prudent level of balances. We are steadfastly committed to that objective and always look at new and better ways of managing the Council's business.

Mister Mayor I would like to take this opportunity for all of us to look forward to a fantastic new development in Beeston enhancing and re-vitalising our town centre, a welcome affordable house-building programme, the continuation of Liberty Leisure providing great leisure services and cultural events for all our communities, and a clean and green environment.

I would like to place on record my sincere thanks to members and officers alike for the constructive way in which they have approached this budget. Matters that we have taken into account within the budget, have been set out for you in reports to the various Committees of the Council. All of the committees have had the opportunity to scrutinise their respective budget papers and review the business plans of their respective departments. This is a forward thinking, robust and sustainable budget and I have no hesitation in proposing that the recommendations of the Finance and Resources Committee be accepted by Council this evening.

Mister Mayor, the council tax resolution is within the Council papers and accordingly I move the resolution as set out at Item 9 on the agenda.