

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

HELD ON 22 NOVEMBER 2018 FROM 7.00 PM TO 11.00 PM

Members Present

Councillors: John Kaiser (Mayor), Bill Soane (Deputy Mayor), Keith Baker, Parry Bath, Laura Blumenthal, Chris Bowring, Prue Bray, Rachel Burgess, Jenny Cheng, David Chopping, UllaKarin Clark, Gary Cowan, Andy Croy, Richard Dolinski, Carl Doran, Lindsay Ferris, Kate Haines, Mike Haines, Charlotte Haitham Taylor, John Halsall, David Hare, Pauline Helliard-Symons, Emma Hobbs, Tim Holton, Philip Houldsworth, Graham Howe, John Jarvis, Clive Jones, Norman Jorgensen, Pauline Jorgensen, Dianne King, Abdul Loyes, Julian McGhee-Sumner, Philip Mirfin, Stuart Munro, Barrie Patman, Ian Pittock, Anthony Pollock, Malcolm Richards, Angus Ross, Daniel Sargeant, Imogen Shepherd-DuBey, Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey, David Sleight, Wayne Smith, Simon Weeks and Shahid Younis

54. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Alistair Auty, Guy Grandison, Charles Margetts, Ken Miall, Helen Power and Oliver Whittle.

55. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 20 September 2018 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

56. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor John Kaiser declared a Personal Interest in Item 59 Petition Debate on the grounds that he had signed the petition and that as Barkham was a one Member ward he wished to support his residents who had raised the petition. He therefore advised of his intent to stand down as Mayor for that item in order to participate in the debate.

57. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor presented awards to three recipients of the Mayor's Roll of Honour.

The first recipient was Steve Bowers, who was Chairman of the Tenant and Landlord Improvement Group and the Gorse Ride Regeneration Project Steering Group. He was involved in many local community groups and an active advocate of community housing. Last year he had carried out 450 hours of volunteer work despite being visually impaired.

The second recipient was Wallis Ferne who volunteered for the Me2Club and many other local organisations such as the Thumbs Up Club. Wallis had used her experience of autism and coordination disorder to help others. She had enabled a 6 year old with autism to attend a gymnastics club.

The third recipient was Tony Lack. A Wokingham Town Councillor, Tony represented the Town Council with the Armed Forces and Cadets and worked with a local school to educate children about graffiti. He also removed graffiti in his spare time.

The Mayor reminded Members to purchase a copy of the Christmas Picture Quiz at a cost of at least £2, the proceeds from which would be donated to the Mayor's Charity the Me2 Club.

58. STATEMENT FROM COUNCILLOR HAITHAM TAYLOR

The Mayor provided Councillor Haitham Taylor with the opportunity to make a personal statement.

Charlotte Haitham Taylor:

Thank you for acquiescing to my request to make a personal statement to Council. Last week the Conservative Group met to discuss the issues that have been raised by some of our Members in recent weeks. This is not an unusual occurrence for any political group, but on this occasion certain Members wanted to challenge my position in order to promote their particular narrative. While the debate that ensued was not as long as the matters in question deserved, it was clear that on this occasion that I would not convince all of those present that I had the right approach, and when tested with a vote, the alternative narrative prevailed by a narrow margin. As a result the Conservative Group now has a new Leader and in due course this person, Councillor McGhee-Sumner, will need to be nominated for the leadership of Wokingham Borough Council. In the next few minutes I want to do three things; highlight the achievements under my leadership; put on record the key issues that concern me for this Council in the coming months; and thank those who have supported me since I became Leader in May 2017.

In the last 18 months I have achieved much more than I have at times felt was possible. I challenged some of the myths held by my Group especially that the Finance brief was insurmountably complex. Indeed, the more important achievement is that we are on course to deliver a balanced budget. So I am leaving a sound financial position for the next Leader, despite all of the unhelpful rumours to the contrary. Let me be clear, we are not the next Northamptonshire, as some would have it. We know the difference between the capital and the revenue spend for a start. We have furthermore launched a successful Investment Strategy, which is now bringing in income to support our bottom line and to fund vital Council services. Who could have dreamt that I would be part of a team that would bring back a bookshop into the Wokingham Town Centre? I will have many happy memories going there with my daughter.

My heart has sunk at the pain of the regeneration for the existing shopkeepers and business owners, who have suffered, and this I very much regret. I do believe that in the coming months, as each stage of the regeneration is complete, our vision to revive Wokingham Town Centre will be fully vindicated. Without our actions, the demise of the Market Square would have been inevitable and permanent.

Yes, we are still collecting the bins every week. We are winning the argument over the revenue support grant. We have opened new schools, sport centres, leisure centres, new parks, new playgrounds, and constructed many more affordable homes, many more than some would have expected.

My administration had sought to strengthen our top team of Officers, in particular we have a great line up of candidates to be interviewed on 5 December for the position of Chief Executive. In this, I believe we were right to hold out for a stronger field of candidates than we were able to compile last year, even though it meant continuing with a temporary Chief Executive for longer than I would have liked. Our Borough deserves the very best Head of Paid Service and I hope colleagues will take this opportunity to select someone with a fresh new energy that is needed to drive this Council forward, through the challenging years ahead.

But what of my concerns. As a key objective I have aimed to raise the levels of transparency in the decision making of this Council. It was disappointing that for some in my Group this has not been seen as a priority and for a few it still appears not to be. We need to distance ourselves from the old boy's network style of the past and ensure that like all other public bodies we operate to the highest level of public accountability and probity. This is the "Me Too" age and it is no longer acceptable to turn a blind eye.

Strategically under previous leadership I felt that we plodded along a path of just muddling through. We sometimes lacked clarity in decision making and did not always benefit from the professional acumen of some of our most senior Officers or Executive Members. I have looked to establish a more long term view with a clear political vision of what Wokingham Borough should be as a Council under a Conservative administration. This has meant that some of my Executive has been challenged to work harder and give clearer leadership in their areas of responsibility. Tough decisions were needed in some cases and these were not always welcomed by all. Regardless, under the new Leader, we cannot slide back into the old ways. No political leadership, local or national, can duck out of the tough decisions any more.

As Leader I have worked hard to build healthy relationships with the Conservatives' opposition too. I have tried to be more constructive, recognising that we are all here to serve our complete community. I brought a vision to the Council through the Borough Plan and everybody has been able to have a voice in shaping this. I took the vision out to as many residents as I could with roadshows, and now a future workshop is planned where we will be taking it out to our partners to collect their views and ideas. Even with the change of leadership, I hope this will still be achieved in the new year. The resultant Borough Plan will be aligned for the first time with the budget and the key performance indicators and this transparent model should be for us, a measure of our progress, and it should be open and transparent. Here again, I fear that there are some that do not share these aspirations.

The decision to go back for further consultation with the Local Plan Update was also controversial. However, I believe that our residents must contribute to the debate on where our Borough future homes will go. Unless Government housing building targets change after Brexit, we will have some tough decisions ahead and we cannot fudge them.

Improving governance is the one thing that I have started, but unlike in Mastermind, I will not get to finish. History will not be a kind judge to Leaders who turn a blind eye to plausible complaints and whistleblowing. It is my sincere hope, and in this respect, as in others, that this Council will not slip back.

Fear not Mr Mayor I am wrapping up soon and it is the very last line that you are waiting all to hear. Making the most of opportunities is what Conservatives have always been about, but not all of the answers to the questions can be found in this Chamber, and we have to realise that Wokingham Borough is not the best at everything. We need to be a learning council with a new and more inquisitive culture. We have to be open minded and be prepared to change our minds when the facts change. We the Members are not always the target demographic for our policies and sometimes we need to walk in other people's shoes to see what they see. I am striving for politics where the majority understand and respect our aims, where the resident is at the heart of what we do, and where the citizen feels empowered not disenfranchised from their dealings with us.

I would like to thank the many residents who have got in touch with me since last week. I have been totally overwhelmed by their support and the response had been completely amazing. So thank you very much to everyone that got in touch. I also want to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to those people who have supported me in my time as Leader. My incredibly supportive and very able Deputy, Pauline Jorgensen, thank you for everything you have done. I also want to say thank you to my Executive Members and my many fellow Conservative Members who have supported me. I also must say thank you to my Opposition Members across the Chamber for all of their help and support as well. I want to especially applaud those of you who have backed my vision of good governance and transparency when others have dismissed my concerns as unfounded or indeed exaggerated. I also wanted to offer my thanks to our talented team of Officers who have helped me with my role over the last 18 months'. I have been challenging, not always intentionally, and I have learnt that we have not always given you the political leadership that you deserve, but you have tried throughout to promote the best possible services to our residents with what you have been given.

I have had the privilege to lead this Council. I have made mistakes and learnt much about those around me and about myself in the course of my term. I have worked selfishly in pursuit of those things that matter to our residents and in that my successor will seek to follow me. I must humbly tender to this Council, and ask all of you to formally accept, my resignation as Leader with immediate effect.

Pauline Jorgensen, Deputy Leader:

I would like to thank Charlotte for all her work on behalf of the residents of Wokingham Borough. Being Leader is not an easy job as I have found out over the last couple of days, with the amount of emails. Charlotte has been tireless lobbying Government to improve both funding for Council services and local schools, championing our Looked After Children, driving forwards our local housing companies to deliver much needed affordable housing, and of course ensuring our residents get an excellent service from the Council.

I would really also like to thank Charlotte for her energy and dedication. I have really enjoyed working with her and admire her grit and determination and her passion for helping our most disadvantaged residents. I hope you will join me in wishing her well for the future.

Lindsay Ferris, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group:

Charlotte and I have worked together on a number of issues, where in the past it was often not possible to get any sort of agreement. The issues where we have worked together this year includes lobbying our respective political parties with a jointly produced document covering the five year land supply, where some developers have been abusing the planning system; support for the recent new Highways Contract due to start on 1 April 2019; and even tonight we have a Motion on sprinklers in schools, which is supported across both Groups. I wish her well in whatever future role she plays in the Council.

59. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

In accordance with the agreed procedure the Mayor invited members of the public to submit questions to the appropriate Members.

59.1 Stephen Ollerhead asked the Executive Member for Business, Economic Development and Strategic Planning the following question:

What measures do Wokingham Borough Council have in place to use or develop Brownfield sites across the Borough (e.g. empty houses left by the MOD in Arborfield) on a

large portion of land and building owned by Wokingham Borough Council to help meet the Borough's housing target?

Answer:

Wokingham Housing Limited has already brought forward a number of affordable housing developments on brownfield Council-owned sites. These include former garage sites, a derelict print works and a former residential care home.

More generally, the Council will publish a brownfield register annually to help encourage the development of brownfield land, which has been found suitable for new housing. This allows anyone interested in developing a brownfield site to see where opportunities are. Most sites on the existing register already have planning permission for new housing.

Through the Local Plan Update, the Council will put in place an extended strategy for managing development in the period to 2036. In doing this, the clear process and requirements set out in legislation and government policy must be followed. This includes assessing all sites promoted by landowners and developers, and consulting on potential approaches towards managing development.

We are currently out to consultation seeking views on a number of key issues which will help us define options for managing development in the future. This includes inviting comments on the role different places might take in providing new homes, for example through the use of higher development densities and more flexibility to building heights in town centres. I would encourage everyone to engage with this and submit their views to us.

Supplementary Question:

Can you confirm that the houses built on brownfield sites will actually reduce the number of houses built on greenfield sites by an equal amount?

Supplementary Answer:

Not necessarily, I cannot say that definitely. Obviously we would prefer to go for the sites that meet the criteria rather than going to greenfields.

59.2 Stewart Richardson asked the Executive Member for Business, Economic Development and Strategic Planning the following question:

Wokingham Borough Council can improve their control of housing delivery, managing the 5 year land supply and passing the housing delivery test by decreasing dependence on the developers who have different agendas. How is WBC planning to use the considerable financial capacity available to it to contract directly with builders to construct a higher proportion of the housing needed?

Answer:

Our last five year housing land supply assessment found a 7.84 year supply of deliverable sites against the Government's standardised methodology for calculating local housing need and the required buffer. This has stood up to the challenge in recent planning appeals.

The Council has engaged with the Government on housing issues, including ways to encourage developers to get on and build once planning permission has been granted. Sir Oliver Letwin MP, the Chairman of the Independent Review of Build Out, met with Councillors and Officers when researching the gap between permissions and completions.

We keenly await the Government's response to his report.

Turning to local building, while the delivery of housing by private developers will always be required, we as an organisation are already undertaking a number of actions to bring forward housing ourselves.

Wokingham Housing Limited (WHL) has already delivered a number of affordable housing developments on Council-owned sites. WHL completed 123 affordable homes last year, with around a further 360 homes in the pipeline, including the Gorse Ride regeneration.

New homes are also being provided through the Wokingham town centre regeneration, with over 230 additional homes being delivered on land owned by the Council.

Supplementary Question:

Is there not already registered providers such as Loddon Homes that can take on this role now?

Supplementary Answer:

Yes indeed and we are looking at potential sites with them.

59.3 Alan Scott asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question:

Policy CP18 of the Core Plan provided for measures to maintain separation between the Arborfield Garrison SDL and surrounding settlements; Policy CP11 made similar provision in more general terms for all of the SDLs. Residents in the surrounding areas relied on those provisions when they acquiesced to these major developments taking place. There are now a number of housing proposals being considered in the area around the Arborfield Garrison SDL and in particular at Barkham Square. Such developments would be in violation of policies CP11 and CP18 of the Core Plan. Would you affirm that CP11 and CP18 are still in force and that it would be perfidious to renege upon them and allow these proposals to go ahead or to be included in the Local Plan Update?

Answer

The Core Strategy sets out the spatial strategy for managing development in the period to 2026. A key element was locating the majority of housing development in the four Strategic Development Locations, an approach that has enabled significant new infrastructure to be delivered to help mitigate impacts and to alleviate pressure on other areas.

The strategy set out in the Core Strategy is working. It is clear from the number of homes built, under construction and already permitted, that homes will be delivered to meet and indeed exceed current government expectations.

With the Core Strategy delivering applications which are contrary to its provisions should be refused, unless there are specific, locally important reasons for flexibility. This will rarely be the case. Robust defence is made of our delivery record at planning appeals, however I am sure we would all agree that some of the decisions by some Government Planning Inspectors to allow developments contrary to our decisions is extremely disappointing and undermines the principle of a plan-led system.

Through the Local Plan Update, the Council will put in place an extended strategy through to the period to 2036. In doing this, the clear process and requirements set out in

legislation and Government policy must be followed. This includes assessing all sites submitted by landowners and developers, and consulting on potential approaches towards managing development.

We are currently consulting on and seeking views on a number of key issues which will help us define options for managing development in the future. This includes inviting comments on all of the land promoted by landowners and developers. I would encourage everyone with an interest to engage with this and to submit their views to us.

In conclusion given the stage of the Local Update, it is not possible for me to comment on what might be the future spatial strategy or the policies associated with this. This is for future debate. I can however confirm that the assessment of promoted land will include the consideration of the important roles that land plays in the separation of settlements.

Supplementary Question:

In her speech on 'Making Housing Fairer' on 5 March 2018, the Prime Minister endorsed the Government's policy saying our 25 year Environment Plan commits us to leaving the natural environment in a better state than when we found it. So we will expect any development, whether in the greenbelt or outside it, to look first at sites which have previously been built on, rather than opting immediately for virgin countryside.

Paragraph 170b of the revised National Planning Policy Framework states that planning policies and decisions should contribute to an enhanced natural and local environment, by recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and the wider benefits of the natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land and of trees and woodland. The promoted development nature site on Barkham Square comprises 144 acres of virgin countryside. Do you agree that approving a development of this site and including the Local Plan Update would not only be seen as a breach of faith by the local electorate, but would also be incompatible with both the Government's explicit policy position articulated by the Prime Minister, and the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework?

Supplementary Answer:

It was a little challenging to identify the question in that, but I think that what I would say is that the Arborfield Strategic Development Location is a classic case of the Council preferring to build on brownfield sites, and at this point in time there are no planning applications for any other sites beyond that in that location.

59.4 Paul Steel asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

The Inspector conducting an Inquiry regarding Woosehill in 1974 ruled that Barkham Road was 'already operating at about its theoretical capacity'. The roads in and out of Barkham have not changed since then, and being locked in by housing, offer little scope for increased capacity.

The population of Barkham directly affects the traffic using those roads. Census data shows that the population of Barkham had increased by over 40% by 2001, after the building of Elizabeth Park, an estate of some 350 houses.

The SDL development of Arborfield Green is adding 3,500 new houses to the area, 10 times as many as on Elizabeth Park. About half of these will fall within Barkham. With only about 15% of the SDL so far completed, the bulk of the impact has yet to be felt.

There are whole series of bottlenecks in and around Barkham, and clearing only some simply releases traffic to worsen the situation at the next.

The Local Transport Plan fails to acknowledge any known congestion spots within Barkham. However, those who use the roads are painfully aware of how serious the problem already is.

If a further 1000 houses were to be allowed at Barkham Square, in the middle of Barkham, how would the Council address the accompanying incremental congestion without destroying the remaining rural ambience?

Answer

The Inspector's decision you refer to is 44 years old and much has changed since 1974 as you allude to in your question. However, as my colleagues have already said, we will evaluate the 280 sites based on current planning policy, which includes traffic congestion issues projected from these developments. I am very aware that the current network is close to capacity and will be making my own representation as Executive Member for Highways, to the Local Plan Update, for alleviation measures to be incorporated into the update of the Local Plan.

Supplementary Question:

Does that mean you will be supportive of another thousand houses injected into Barkham?

Supplementary Answer:

I do not think I can make a comment on what I will or will not be supporting. What I said is that I am very well aware of the congestion issues on all the network south of the M4 and south of A329M and we are going to have to take those into account in the Local Plan Update.

59.5 Pam Stubbs asked the Executive Member for Housing the following question:

Providing affordable housing is understood to be one of the Council's key objectives. So, with the Cap on Council borrowing having now been lifted on the amount local authorities can borrow to fund social housing, how does WBC intend to make maximum use of this initiative aimed at increasing the number of affordable homes within the Borough?

Answer

The Council is already delivering significant numbers of new affordable homes through the planning process and the housing companies. Last year, as Stuart mentioned a minute ago, Wokingham Housing Limited completed over 120 new affordable homes, which were funded through a combination of committed sums, government grants, and on-lending from the Council. The lifting of the HRA borrowing cap provides another option for us to explore in the future.

I can confirm that the Council has engaged financial consultants to work with Officers and stakeholders to develop the new Housing Revenue Account business plan. This will take into consideration opportunities given by the removal of the Housing Revenue Account borrowing cap and inform the development of the Housing Strategy for 2019 onwards.

Supplementary Question:

You have some 1400 people on your waiting list at the moment and you have 35% of the 13,500 houses which should be built around Wokingham, designated as affordable. Is there any reason why the Council cannot reduce this waiting list to zero, unless it is the

determination of developers to build only 4 and 5 bedroom houses, which are obviously going to make them more money, and to pay their way out of affordable housing by handing money over to Wokingham to build affordable housing well away from their development?

Supplementary Answer:

Firstly, I would like to straighten out your points on the waiting list. As you may know there are four bands in the waiting list for housing priority. Band 1 is the highest priority. As of 26 October there were 90 people on that list. That is people who have a statutory overcrowding or have a really serious need for housing. Band 2 has currently got 68 people on the list and again these are people who are in overcrowded housing and really need proper housing. For Band 3 we have got 196 people, and these are in significant health and social welfare need. Band 4 however, can have anyone throughout the country regardless of whether they have got a local link or not, in it. They are already adequately housed, they are in shared accommodation but it is not overcrowded, they are out of the area, or they are deliberately worsening their circumstances. There is 1,086 people on the housing waiting list in that category. So when you look at housing waiting list numbers you need to apply some intelligence and some extra information about how the waiting list is made up.

We are certainly committed to building more affordable housing. We have built a lot of affordable housing through our companies last year. We use money, both borrowings which we can get at relatively low rates, and also money from developers, which we reinvest in housing using our own land. We quite often take commuted sums from developers where otherwise it would be half a house that could be built or one house. Housing Associations are not willing to manage such small pockets of houses in bigger estates but we are looking at the moment at opportunities for our housing companies to manage those on behalf of the developers. I can reassure you that we are very, very keen to provide more affordable housing. We have done a lot to improve the situation in Wokingham but there is a lot more to do. Do not take housing numbers at face value.

59.6 Andrew Mickleburgh asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Recently, a keen motorcyclist living in Earley expressed grave concern that the wooden fence beside the cycle-path on Lower Earley Way is a dangerous hazard to motorcyclists. Organisations I have canvassed since have made observations and raised sufficient issues to suggest that the resident's safety concerns may have substance and need investigation. I have conveyed their written responses to the Executive Member for Highways and Transport. In light of the matters raised in those responses, can the safety of this fence be assessed by Highway engineers, and the full findings and any recommendations reported publicly?

Answer

I confess I am surprised that there is safety issues with this fence since it was added to the cycle scheme specifically to improve safety for cyclists. However, I have asked Officers to review the design and will report back to you and local Members once the review is completed.

Supplementary Question:

Is it possible at this point to give an indication of the timeframe for reporting on this investigation?

Supplementary Answer:

I would have to get the relevant papers out of archive storage and I do not know how long that is going to take. I will try and get an answer by Christmas.

59.7 Peter Dennis asked the Executive Member for Business, Economic Development and Strategic Planning the following question:

Wokingham has grown massively in prosperity and size in the last 25 years, due mainly to its highly convenient location next to J10/11 of the M4 corridor which is the artery providing easy access to Heathrow, the M25 and London for the ever-expanding IT, science, biotech and engineering industries which have made the Thames Valley their home. Considering the Council is going to be short of £7,000,000 in government grant next year plus will no longer have access to EU funding, what steps has the Council taken to counter the threat of these large and small companies relocating their European headquarters into the EU, along with the other huge multinational conglomerates who have settled in the Thames Valley who may also relocate or splinter, or have indeed already done so or are in the process of planning to do so, if they lost their current passporting facility of goods, services, capital and staff into the EU after Brexit?

Answer

The Council is increasing the frequency with which we monitor the economy and will be working with partners, including the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership, which I sit on the forum of, to plan for the range of outcomes that might impact the local economy as a result of Brexit. We are also in the process of developing a Brexit Impact Assessment in readiness for when the final details of the Withdrawal Agreement are confirmed.

According to local businesses, Wokingham Borough remains a competitive location despite Brexit, because businesses have access to local talent, close proximity to London and good communication networks.

Brexit is unlikely to have a major impact on Council finances as the Council currently only receives a relatively small amount of EU funding. The UK Government is however planning to implement a 'Shared Prosperity Fund' to replace the European Structural and Investment Funds, which the Council will have the opportunity to apply for in the future.

Supplementary Question:

When will the Brexit Impact Assessment be available for us, bearing in mind that local businesses over the last 2 years have received £5million worth of EU funding, so that funding is going to disappear and that will have an impact on jobs and so forth, so when are you going to be looking at delivering that?

Supplementary Answer:

Hoping to have that available in the new year.

59.8 Vanessa Rogers asked the Executive Member for Adult Social Care, Health and Wellbeing the following question which was answered by the Deputy Executive Member for Adult Social Care, Health and Wellbeing:

The Borough relies heavily on EU migrant labour in the health and manual labour markets, as well as on the highly skilled sectors of its local industries. Has the Borough recognised and prepared for the impact of a labour shortage in all these sectors and especially the care/NHS sectors, in view of the fact that EU migrants are leaving the UK and the area en masse and the numbers are not being replaced by EU migration?

Answer

Recruitment and retention of workers within the NHS and social care is well established as a priority and it is only right that we the public, and users of the services also care about this issue, so thank you for raising it tonight.

To answer your question, we have to relook at the data so 5% of NHS staff are EU nationals. NHS figures published this year shows currently there are more EU nationals joining the NHS than leaving. 8% of social care staff are EU nationals. If we look locally at Optalis, at social care, and this applies to a number of our residents locally, as well as social care staff employed directly by this Council, both have a lower staff turnover than the national average. It is also worth highlighting that as part of the Local Integrated Care System, we have a dedicated Workforce Strategy Group. That is made up of representatives from the local care companies and one of their focuses is the recruitment and retention of social workers. When I asked the CEO of Optalis, Martin Farrow, about your question he said that there had been no adverse recruitment and retention issues linked to Brexit, but of course we can only go on the current evidence that we have and if this changes then we will adapt. I want to assure you that recruitment and retention of the staff will be a priority whatever the eventuality.

Supplementary Question:

Yesterday the Prime Minister proudly announced an end to freedom of movement and that EU nationals would not be able to jump the queue but be in line with other multi nationals who would be considered for immigration based on their skills and talents. Britain faces a nursing shortage of 20,000 permanent staff this year from the EU. The number registering dropped by 87% compared with 2016/17 figures (Christie and Co Consultations) and considering the UK has put a cap on skills levels, plus veto on migrant staff coming into the UK at less than Band 7 or higher in the NHS, has the Borough put in place any training scheme or enterprise awards which could be offered to young, unemployed, eligible people in the area to entice them to fill this gap?

Supplementary Answer:

It might be worth if we both get in touch with the Workforce Strategy Group that I mentioned as well as the CEO of Optalis. So after the Public Question Time I will give you my card and if you want to get in contact with me, we will see what they are up to and what they have planned in light of the announcement.

59.9 Paul Fishwick asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

The central island traffic signal pole on the King Street Lane approach to the Sainsbury's junction was damaged in an accident during March 2018 and was repaired by Wokingham Borough Council during May 2018. However, a torn plastic bag covering a circular hole still 'flaps around in the breeze' on the lower part of the secondary signal. How long will it be before Wokingham Borough Council either replaces the torn plastic bag or installs a more meaningful sign for drivers?

Answer

Speaking with Officers about this matter, my understanding is that it has been dealt with.

Supplementary Question:

Firstly thank you for getting the temporary plastic bag replaced with a standard traffic sign to comply with the traffic signs and general directions.

However, I do wonder what processes the Borough Council has got in place to track incomplete works such as this, and from your answer, it appears none. Therefore it would appear that if it was not for my question to the Executive Member tonight, how long would it have taken the Borough Council to finish these works at such an important junction?

Supplementary Answer:

I am afraid I was trying to be brief as Mr Mayor has asked us to be brief in our answers. We were well aware of the issue with this lightbulb. The reason for the temporary fix was so that the traffic lights could be put back into operation very quickly on, as you rightly say, a very important junction. Officers were well aware of it and fixed it as soon as they could.

59.10 Lisa Kelly asked the Leader of the Council the following question which was answered by the Executive Member for Business, Economic Development and Strategic Planning:

Because of its location and its rural market town charm, Wokingham has attracted a huge influx of highly qualified and highly paid residential owner occupiers and the attendant manual labour to service them, prompting massive residential and infrastructure development and redevelopment in recent years with the town's population expanding exponentially. What contingency plans or risk assessments have the council undertaken to assess the impact of an economic slump on its finances and services after Brexit, both commercial and residential, and especially in light of the current ambitious and very expensive and extensive town centre schemes whose development is financed by loans?

Answer

As explained in response to Mr Dennis earlier, the Council is in the process of developing a Brexit Impact Assessment in readiness for when the final details of the Withdrawal Agreement are known. We are also increasing the frequency with which we monitor the economy and will be working with the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership, as I explained earlier, and other partners to plan how we can signpost businesses to a range of support should there be an 'economic slump' resulting from Brexit. Nobody knows that yet.

Council finances or services are not reliant on EU funding as the Council currently receives a very small amount of EU funding. The UK Government is however, as I mentioned earlier, planning to implement a 'Shared Prosperity Fund' to replace the European Structural and Investment Funds, which the Council will have the opportunity to apply for in the future.

59.11 Carl Hammond asked the Executive Member for Environment, Leisure and Libraries the following question. Due to his inability to attend a written answer was provided:

Regarding littering, there is more or less zero enforcement of littering around town, while Car Parking enforcement is very actively and efficiently managed with plenty of fines and wardens around town. It's a shame to see endless littering of the new town centre, especially cigarette butts, which are everywhere. Would you please consider employing environmental enforcement officers to issue fixed penalty notices for littering?

Answer

The introduction of Civil Parking Enforcement within the Borough last year brought the responsibility and enforcement of parking restrictions in line with practices across the Thames Valley region. This has made the Council's enforcement practices more visible to

those who live within and visit the Borough.

The Council regularly cleans the town centre so any litter is recent. It is a great shame that some people litter our streets and parks. It makes the place feel untidy. Why can't they take it home or put it in a bin?

We will continue to monitor the situation with regards to littering within Wokingham town centre and elsewhere and where possible mitigate its impact through a range of deterrents and other methods.

As with a lot of issues faced by the Council we need to find a balance between competing priorities, and whilst we do not want our public spaces to be made untidy through excessive littering, we also do not want to deter people from visiting because of overly rigid enforcement practices.

59.12 Peter Humphreys asked the Executive Member for Environment, Leisure and Libraries the following question:

There is a history of lack of foresight within the council such as installing new LED lights on London Road a few months before the road was widened leaving the lampposts stranded in the middle of the inside lane rather than on the pavement.

Likewise, a large number of trees have been planted in the past couple of decades and subsequently uprooted or scheduled for felling even though it was known at the time of planting that those trees were in the way of planned developments. Would you please inform me how many trees, and at what cost, have been planted during this period only to be scheduled for demolition relatively shortly afterwards.

Answer

The Council's street lighting replacement project was planned prior to the Coppid Beech part of the Northern Distributor Road being agreed by the developer. Had the two schemes been contemporary they would have joined up via our collaborative planning process and abortive works prevented. The timing in this case did not allow for this and we are therefore making sure that all the materials are reused, that is the lamp columns, light heads and the controllers, and any damage will be replaced at the developer's expense.

When highway works are done, the Council requires that appropriate landscaping is carried out. Where new works become desirable it is regrettable that original landscaping may need to be removed, however we ensure appropriate new landscaping is installed as part of this process. Any trees cut down can be used.

We do not retain records which itemise the detail and cost of works in the form that you have requested.

Supplementary Question:

I would like an answer to the first question really because it is specifically about the trees. I will give you an actual couple of examples which might well change your answer. Planning permission for the Plough Lane housing development required that a SANG was built and that meant several hundred trees were planted in the line of the new North Wokingham Development routes. The Council were clearly aware that the road was going to be built at the time. It is on this Council map which I can show you afterwards. I did point it out to several Officers at the time, and likewise at the western end of said road, the

Millennium Wood is going to be destroyed by the same road and that was also known about at the time because this route has been long planned. I have clearly stated that this proposed route was known before these trees were planted, thousands of them in fact. What I want to know is why the Council do not plan ahead, wasting public money planting these trees when they knew they were going to uproot them not that long afterwards, and are there any more examples? I know of these two and there are probably several others.

Supplementary Answer:

You cannot just sit around for any developments and not do anything else. I think also trees, we grow trees, we crop them and we use them for other things, so it is not a disaster when that sort of thing happens. So I think trees get planted and trees get cut down.

59.13 Motion to extend Public Question Time

At this point in the meeting 7.51pm, it was moved by Prue Bray and seconded by Pauline Jorgensen that, in accordance with Procedure Rule 4.2.12n), Procedure Rule 4.2.9.1 be suspended to allow Public Question Time to be extended to enable all Public questions to be asked.

Upon being put to the vote, the Motion was carried.

59.14 John Booth asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

East Reading Park and Ride: This site by the Thames riverbank at the north end of the A3290, just to the east of Kennet Mouth, has been purchased by Wokingham. Planning permission has been given for a 258-place Park and Ride site primarily to address demand from regular weekday morning peak-hour traffic into Reading. It was projected to cost £3.6 million with operational costs of £45,000 per year. The site has been cleared of trees and scrub but if left the vegetation will revert to 'green' landscape and wildlife habitat. I am concerned that: The operational and maintenance costs may have been underestimated and the revenues from such a small site overestimated; In use, especially with lighting, it will adversely affect landscape and amenity and wildlife habitat; To address cost, congestion, clean air and climate change it would be better if commuters used public transport or shared vehicles for the greater part of their journeys rather than taking cars so close to Reading; In particular it will increase traffic in the area around Suttons roundabout increasing congestion suffered by peak hour traffic to and from Reading. I think the Council should put this project on hold and re-assess it before spending more public money on it and causing long-term environmental loss. Priority should be given to getting more residents to use bus or train for most of the distance from their homes to Reading. If the Council is still convinced that Park and Ride in the proposed area is a good idea it should run a trial scheme using the vacant car parks in Thames Valley Park to test viability. What are the current plans, timescales and cost projections for this proposed Park and Ride?

Answer

The Thames Valley Park and Ride is funded through the Local Enterprise Partnership and has been subject to rigorous analysis by the Department of Transport's WebTAG evaluation system. Therefore the costs and the revenues and the viability have been assessed and reassessed because it is, as you rightly say, public money, and it is Government public money that we are using. Therefore, I think there is no doubt that we have the costs and the revenues on the viability and the need of this scheme. We have considered it and it has passed the test. Therefore we will continue to proceed with it and aspects you talked about in respect of public transport. That is really why we are building

this scheme, because people want to get close to this scheme before they use the buses. They do not want to take buses from long distance and we believe that this will have a positive impact on congestion within Reading and climate change and all the other environmental aspects that, that will bring to Reading itself.

Supplementary Question:

I asked particularly about timescales for actually starting the next phase of the development work on this site. Can you enlighten me a bit more about the Council's thinking on this?

Supplementary Answer:

I am going to have to give you a written answer as I cannot remember the exact dates, but I will let you know.

59.15 James Box asked the Executive Member for Business, Economic Development and Strategic Planning the following question:

The announcement of plans to close Wokingham's Crown Post Office and move the service to WH Smith has caused a lot of concern amongst people in Wokingham as they feel this will have a negative impact on the town centre. While the Council is not responsible for the Post Office, what is the Council doing to support efforts to save this valued service in our community?

Answer:

As you quite rightly point out Post Office Counters Ltd is a commercial organisation that has a national strategy to move Post Office Counters into WH Smith stores nationwide. That is my understanding. This has already happened in places such as Slough and Camberley. The move is part of a new 10 year agreement to relocate more Post Office branches into the retailer's stores.

My colleague Councillor Philip Mirfin will be writing to Post Office Counters Ltd to ask that they reconsider their position of moving the Wokingham Post Office into the WH Smith store in light of the investment that has been made in the town centre regeneration programme.

With the town centre regeneration work creating a vibrant and successful town centre demand for town centre facilities, such as post office services, are likely to increase, particularly with the housing growth, that is taking place in and around Wokingham.

Supplementary Question:

Will the Council be asking John Redwood to lobby to save the Post Office?

Supplementary Answer:

Yes.

60. PETITIONS

There were no petitions submitted.

61. PETITION DEBATE

(John Kaiser stepped down as Mayor and Chairman of the meeting for the petition debate. He participated in the debate. Bill Soane, Deputy Mayor chaired the petition debate item).

Bill Soane reminded Members that the petition sought a debate on impending plans for development of housing on Barkham Square and any other sites that may be considered in the future. The rules in the Council's Constitution around petitions did not allow for debate on any planning decision, or any current or proposed planning application. Members were therefore unable to debate the details of the allocated Sustainable Development Locations, or other specific planning applications. The petition envisaged debate about traffic matters, loss of countryside and other implications for Barkham and the surrounding areas as a result of housing generally.

The following members of public presented a petition in relation to the matter indicated.

61.1 Petition submitted by Chris Heyliger and Graeme Dexter

The Deputy Mayor announced that a petition containing in excess of 1,500 signatures, the threshold to trigger a debate at Council, had been received at the Council meeting on 20 September 2018:

Chris Heyliger and Laurence Heath, petition organisers, presented the petition the wording of which was:

"Please sign our petition to generate a debate at Wokingham Borough Council and help defeat any impending plans for development of housing on Barkham Square and any other unsuitable sites that may be considered in the future. We the undersigned urge Council Members to hold a debate addressing proposals for 1,000+ houses which are in addition to the 3,500 houses already with planning permission. This is not only contrary to the adopted current Council planning policy but will have serious traffic and other implications for Barkham and surrounding parishes.

The main site proposed is Barkham Square. Residents accepted the development of the former Arborfield Garrison site as it involved largely regeneration of brownfield land but now the wider area is being exposed to potential development creep, meaning encroachment upon the much valued countryside and on our overstretched roads within Barkham, Arborfield and Finchampstead. This goes against current Council planning policies (such as CP11) which were designed to protect the separate identity of settlements."

Mr Heyliger addressed the meeting and set out the background to the petition. He stated that over 4,000 residents had shown concern over redevelopment in Barkham and the surrounding area by signing the petition. It was the largest petition submitted to Council. It was time for the Council to listen to residents and demonstrate its commitment by taking action to address residents' concerns.

Mr Heyliger commented that enough was enough with regards to development in Barkham. With regards to traffic, Mr Heyliger stated that Barkham was a rural parish with narrow roads that could not be easily widened. The Strategic Development Location would more than double the area's size and if an additional thousand homes were built in Barkham Square, it would more than triple in size. With less than 15% of development built so far, he believed that intolerable pressure would be placed on the surrounding roads. He highlighted that 86% of local residents currently travelled to work by car. Planned road improvements at Nine Mile Ride Extension and the Arborfield Relief Road would not alleviate traffic issues within Barkham.

With regards to the countryside, Mr Heyliger stated that a neighbourhood survey

highlighted the importance of the countryside to many residents. The Strategic Development Location had been sold as a separate community within a separate separation boundary. However, this would not be the case if Barkham Square and surrounding areas were built upon and the separation distances would be filled in. Mr Heyliger felt that Planning Policy CP18, which intended to maintain separation between the Strategic Development Location and the surrounding settlements, would be contravened. The importance of the separation gap had been recognised.

Mr Heyliger went on to state that Barkham Square was not a sustainable location. It was poorly served by roads and there were no shops. 1800 additional houses within the Strategic Development Location had been accepted by Barkham so Barkham was not opposed to development overall.

Members discussed the petition. John Kaiser stated that it did not matter whether there were many more housing applications agreed, it was down to the ability of the developers to deliver the housing, something which the Council had no control over. Development of the area he felt would place a blight on existing residents' homes, destroy the countryside and have an impact on the local way of life. John Kaiser went on to state that the levels of traffic congestion in Barkham and the surrounding area would increase and create problems. In Wokingham less than 20% of the houses approved had been built and there were already traffic congestion problems. He was of the view that two other potential sites identified were unlikely to proceed so Barkham Square was an easy target.

Andy Croy commented that the concerns raised were shared by residents in other areas in the Borough.

Ian Pittock stated that the site allocated for 3,500 houses in the Arborfield Strategic Development Locations had been largely a brownfield site. He believed therefore that the Arborfield, Finchampstead and Barkham areas had done their bit with regards to development across the Borough and that other areas could do more. There should not be any creep in development around the edges of the Strategic Development Locations. He felt that traffic issues in Finchampstead South would be exacerbated by development in Barkham and went on to state that new residents would be expected to make use of the already busy Finchampstead and Swallowfield surgeries.

Stuart Munro emphasised that the petition was premature in the process, in that the consultation on the Local Plan Update had only begun that week. All sites would be subject to comprehensive assessment and engagement before the Council approved its preferred strategy and allocations through the statutory Local Plan process. The Council would then advocate these to the Independent Local Plan Inspector and resist the alternative options being promoted, taking account of the specific circumstances in each case.

Carl Doran stated that the Government had created a climate which was favourable to developers.

David Chopping emphasised that there was a requirement for affordable and local new homes across the Borough but only where local need and appropriate available sites were identified. Decisions should be driven by local need and sustainability. Before building could take place planning for appropriate infrastructure and facilities was vital. He went on to emphasise that the Council's decisions were sometimes overruled by the Planning Inspectorate.

Lindsay Ferris commented that the Objectively Assessed Housing Need number (OAN) for the Borough was at least 200 higher than that of neighbouring authorities. The increase in homes represented a 30% growth in properties over an 18 year period. He felt that a lower OAN, in line with that of neighbouring authorities, needed to be achieved.

Gary Cowan stated that a development in this location was unsustainable and unachievable.

Wayne Smith emphasised that Barkham Square was one of over 300 possible sites identified and that all would be assessed comprehensively. He encouraged residents to come to one of eight consultation events across the Borough to give their views.

In summing up Laurence Heath stated that the Local Plan Update had supposedly been well under way at the time the petition had been circulated but consultation had only recently been announced. He felt that Wokingham was the victim of unrealistic housing targets and that developing Barkham Square would create an urban sprawl to the east and west. He encouraged the Council to lobby central Government with regards to planning policy and to explain why the housing targets were unrealistic.

The following Motion was proposed by Stuart Munro and seconded by Wayne Smith:

‘All sites will be subject to comprehensive assessment and engagement before the Council approves its preferred strategy and site allocations through the statutory Local Plan process. Subsequently, we will advocate these to the Independent Local Plan Inspector and resist the alternative options being promoted taking account of the specific circumstances in each case. The process will only be complete once the plan has been endorsed by the Inspector and adopted by the Council.’

Upon being put to the vote, the Motion was declared by the Deputy Mayor to be carried.

RESOLVED: That all sites will be subject to comprehensive assessment and engagement before the Council approves its preferred strategy and site allocations through the statutory Local Plan process. Subsequently, we will advocate these to the Independent Local Plan Inspector and resist the alternative options being promoted taking account of the specific circumstances in each case. The process will only be complete once the plan has been endorsed by the Inspector and adopted by the Council.

62. IRP REVIEW OF MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES

(John Kaiser resumed his position as Mayor and that of Chairman)

The Council considered the report of the Independent Review Panel (IRP), set out at Agenda pages 55 to 74, following their annual review of the Members' Allowances Scheme.

The IRP Chairman, Tom Berman, addressed the Council and thanked his colleagues Nick Oxborough and David George for their contribution. He also thanked Democratic Services, and in particular Callum Wernham, for their support to the Panel.

In presenting the report Mr Berman highlighted the following points:

- The Panel was independent and their recommendations were based purely on: evidence and whether it was affordable; similar to that of other local authorities; and whether residents would consider the recommendation fair. There had been accusations that the Panel was politically motivated but this was not the case.
- The Panel had looked at the issue of Special Responsibility Allowances (SRA). In doing this, the Panel had looked at the job descriptions for the different posts rather than the individual post holders and had also visited committee meetings to see work first-hand.
- The Panel had recommended a revision to the SRA for the Leader of the Council, which had last been increased 9 years ago. Mr Berman stated that the levels of responsibility of the Leader were similar to that of a Chairman within a high powered company. Conversely the Leader of the Opposition did not have accountability in the decision making process, although it was appreciated that having a strong Opposition was important.
- The Council was unusual in awarding SRAs to Deputy Executive Members. The Panel recommended that the budgeted cost covering SRAs for Executive Members and Deputy Executive Members be capped at the current level of £100,000.
- The Panel's most valuable source of information had been the Members themselves. Mr Berman expressed disappointment that less than half the Members had been to see the Panel to give their views over the last 2 years.
- The remuneration of Non-Executive Directors and Outside Body representatives was outside of the Panel's remit.

A number of Members thanked the Panel for their hard work and time.

Several Members felt that it was the wrong time to increase the Members Allowances and that this would send a negative message to residents. It was suggested that there be a cross party review of the Independent Remuneration Panel's remit.

A number of Members were of the view that the Childcare and Dependents Allowance should be increased.

Pauline Jorgensen commented that it was important to have a properly resourced Opposition. Prue Bray also emphasised the role of the Opposition, particularly given that there were now three parties.

It was clarified that the Panel's report was required to be published prior to the meeting at which the report would be considered.

It was proposed by Pauline Jorgensen and seconded by Julian McGhee-Sumner that the report be considered. It was agreed that each of the Panel's recommendations would be voted on individually.

Upon being put to the vote it was:

RESOLVED: That

- 1) Recommendation 1, *(that the time contributed component of the Basic Allowance be increased by 2% in line with the 2018/19 increase in Officer pay, and backdated to 1 April 2018)*, not be supported;

- 2) The £500 component of the Basic Allowance for the provision of IT should continue to be claimed only by those Members who provide facilities which allow constituents and Officers to communicate with them by e-mail and the self-certification process be continued;
- 3) The out of pocket expenses component of the Basic Allowance be reduced by £40 to allow for the mass registration of Members to the Information Commissioners Office by Wokingham Borough Council, from April 2019;
- 4) Recommendation 4 (*that the Leader of the Council's SRA be increased to 4.5 x SRA = £22,500, from April 2019*), not be supported;
- 5) Recommendation 5 (*that the Leader of the Opposition SRA be restructured via a new formula whereby all opposition group leaders with a membership of more than 2 receive an SRA based in part on a figure of £100 per group member. In addition, if the lead opposition group has four or more members more than the next largest group, its leader should receive a further £5,000; but if the lead over the next largest group was less than 4 members the addition to the Leader of the Opposition's SRA should be reduced to £4,000. In the event that there were two or three leading opposition groups, each with the same number of members, then £5000 should be distributed equally between them as well as the £100 per group member*

A condition of this formula should be that the gross cost of the SRA to all Groups should not exceed £8,000 (compared to the £7,500 now), and that in the event of any excess over £8,000 occurring, that excess should be deducted from the SRA granted to the Opposition Group leader with the fewest Members. These changes are recommended to be implemented from April 2019.) not be supported;

- 6) Recommendation 6 (*that the budgeted cost covering SRAs for Executive Members and Deputy Executive Members be capped at the current level of £100,000*), not be supported;
- 7) Recommendation 7 (*that the Chairman of the Planning Committee's SRA be increased to 1.2 x SRA = £6,000, and the SRA for Members of the Planning Committee SRA be increased to 0.3 x SRA = £1,500, from April 2019. A condition be agreed whereby there be a maximum budget of £18,000 for Chairman and Members of the Planning Committee*) not be supported;
- 8) Recommendation 8 (*that the Members Subsistence Allowance and Overnight Accommodation Allowance be amended as follows:*

(i) Overnight approved absence (from normal place of residence):

Bed and Breakfast as charged by no higher than a 3 star hotel (with the exception that, if an approved conference takes place in a 4 star hotel with the expectation that attendees will stay at the same hotel, 4 star bed and breakfast is allowed).

(ii) Daily subsistence (for more than four hours away from normal place of residence covering any meals or refreshments) up to a maximum of £25 receipted expenditure) not be supported;

- 9) The publication of Members' remuneration on the WBC website be reviewed with the intention that a single document be created and be accessible via an easy to find

hyperlink, which would show for each Councillor all WBC related remunerations (Basic Allowance, SRA, NED remuneration and Outside Body (namely the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority) remuneration) received by that Member;

- 10) The Mayoral and Deputy Mayoral Allowances be included within the IRP's remit, from April 2019;
- 11) No changes be made to the current Childcare and Dependant Carers Allowance;
- 12) Apart from the above recommendations, no further adjustments to Members' Remuneration are necessary until the next review by the Independent Remuneration Panel.

63. APPOINTMENT OF INTERIM CHIEF EXECUTIVE

It was proposed by Stuart Munro and seconded by Pauline Jorgensen that the recommendation be agreed.

Upon being put to the vote it was:

RESOLVED: That Heather Thwaites be appointed Interim Chief Executive, and carry out the functions of Head of Paid Service, until such time as a permanent Chief Executive is appointed and commences employment.

64. WOKINGHAM'S HEALTH AND WELLBEING STRATEGY

The Council considered Wokingham's Health and Wellbeing Strategy, set out at Agenda pages 75 to 130.

Pauline Helliard-Symons and David Hare commented that the document highlighted the positive work that the Board was undertaking.

Keith Baker requested that any future documents refer to 'Wokingham Borough' as opposed to 'Wokingham.'

Angus Ross commented that the document highlighted the Wellbeing Board's increased focus on wellbeing and the importance of the prevention agenda.

Andy Croy stated that he felt that the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee should have had an opportunity to comment on the Strategy prior to its presentation to Council. He was also of the view that there should be greater reference to the causes of particular health problems and the impact of austerity on health and wellbeing in the Borough.

It was proposed by Pauline Helliard-Symons and seconded by David Hare that the recommendation be agreed.

Upon being put to the vote it was:

RESOLVED: That the revised Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy and accompanying focused Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) chapters be approved to allow for implementation of the engagement plan and creation of an action plan.

65. CHANGES TO THE CONSTITUTION

The Council considered a report regarding proposed changes to the Constitution as recommended by the Constitution Review Working Group, as set out on Agenda pages 131 to 170.

Chris Bowring highlighted the recommendation that those asking a supplementary question be given no longer than 1 minute in which to do so.

Clive Jones stated that he would have liked to have seen more wide ranging changes with regards to the Council meeting process and that he believed that question time and the Council meeting should not have a time limit and that written answers should be provided to questions at least 24 hours prior to the meeting to facilitate the formulation of a supplementary question.

Imogen Shepherd-DuBey highlighted the proposed amendment regarding the Procurement and Contracts Rules and Procedures.

It was proposed by Chris Bowring and seconded by Pauline Jorgensen that the recommendations set out in the report be approved.

Upon being put to the vote it was:

RESOLVED: That the following changes to the Constitution as recommended by the Constitution Review Working Group be agreed:

- 1) that Section 3.3 Freedom of Information Policy and Section 3.4 Data Protection Policy be amended as set out in Appendix 1 to the report;
- 2) that Section 3.5 Petition Scheme be amended as set out in Appendix 2 to the report;
- 3) that Sections 4.2.9.3 Notice of Question (Public), 4.2.10.4 Notice of Questions (Members), 5.4.27 Notice of Question (Public – Executive) and 5.4.36 Rules of Procedure for Questions by Members (Members – Executive) be amended as set out in paragraph 3 of the report;
- 4) that Sections 4.2.9.8 Supplementary Question [Public] and 4.2.10.7 Supplementary Question [Member] and Sections 5.4.32 Supplementary Question [Public - Executive] and 5.4.39 Supplementary Questions [Members – Executive] be amended as set out in paragraph 4 of the report;
- 5) that Section 4.4.23 Membership [Health and Wellbeing Board] be amended as set out in paragraph 5 of the report;
- 6) that Section 8.1 Planning Committee Terms of Reference be amended as set out within paragraph 6 of the report;
- 7) that Section 8.2.7 Speaking by Members other than [Planning] Committee members be amended as set out within paragraph 7 of the report;
- 8) that Section 11.3 Scheme of Delegation to Officers be amended as set out in Appendix 3 to the report;

- 9) that Section 13 Procurement and Contracts Rules and Procedures and Section 5.5.1 List of Items Delegated to Individual Executive Members be amended as set out in paragraph 9 of the report;
- 10) minor amendments as set out in Appendix 4 to the report.

66. APPROVAL OF A PERIOD OF ABSENCE FROM MEETINGS BY COUNCILLOR OLIVER WHITTLE

The Council considered a report proposing the approval of a period of absence from meetings by Councillor Oliver Whittle, as set out on Agenda pages 171 to 172.

Lindsay Ferris and Andy Croy asked that their best wishes be passed on to Councillor Whittle.

It was proposed by Pauline Jorgensen and seconded by Julian McGhee-Sumner that the recommendations set out in the report be approved.

Upon being put to the vote it was:

RESOLVED: That:

- 1) it be noted that Councillor Oliver Whittle has not been able to attend meetings of the Council due to ill-health since his attendance at Council on 19 July 2018;
- 2) Council extend its sympathy to Councillor Whittle and wish him a speedy recovery;
- 3) Councillor Oliver Whittle's non-attendance at meetings of the Council due to ill-health up to 22 May 2019 be approved.

67. STATEMENTS BY THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL, EXECUTIVE MEMBERS, AND DEPUTY EXECUTIVE MEMBERS

Pauline Jorgensen, Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Housing:

I have got nothing to say as Deputy Leader at the moment. I just wanted to give a quick update on housing to point out that the Council remains committed to delivering much needed affordable housing in the Borough, helping people get on the first rung of the housing ladder through shared ownership and providing more affordable rented accommodation. Current development programmes suggest that there will be 386 affordable housing completions in the Borough this year, made up of 188 social rent, 166 shared ownership and 32 intermediate affordable rent.

We will also open Broadway House in January next year, providing an extra 10 units of temporary accommodation to reduce our use of Bed and Breakfast, which is obviously better for the people concerned and also saves us money, so it benefits us both ways.

I am also pleased to be able to confirm that we are progressing the Wheatsheaf Close self-build project, which was discussed recently at the Affordable Housing Implementation Group.

Norman Jorgensen, Executive Member for Environment, Leisure and Libraries:

I have three things that I would just like quickly to bring to your attention tonight. Firstly, as you are aware, Re3 over the last year have been running a campaign to increase the

amount of glass we recycle called 'Lot of Bottle'. A number of events have even named the new glass collection trucks to get more and more publicity. That has resulted in a more than 4% increase in glass recycling during this year, so that has been a great success. There were 49 groups engaged in that process, around 30 of those were schools and young people's groups, for example Wokingham Brownies got involved in the process. There was a competition for that and the prizes are going to be awarded very soon.

The second item is just to update you on the introduction of food waste collection from April next year. The preparations for that are well under way and all the containers and instructions and what to do will be getting rolled out in February and March next year. The blue bags will be distributed earlier than in the previous year to get them out of the way before all of the food waste items are delivered. The blue bags are on order now and will be going out early in the new year. So just to remind everyone, there is no change in weekly collections, same number of blue bags and the food waste will get added.

The third item I would like to bring up is that the site for the new build of Bulmershe Leisure Centre has now been officially handed over to the construction company. The demolition site clearance has finished and the construction company took over earlier this week. They are doing all the preparatory work and setting up on site. You will begin to see the building coming out of the ground in early Spring, still on schedule to open in Summer next year.

Anthony Pollock, Executive Member for Highways and Transport:

In early October I think it was, there was an article in the Wokingham newspaper which said that I had disbanded the Traffic Advisory Group which David Lee had previously set up in the beginning of the year in response to a petition, which was actually untrue. We got our wires crossed because it clashed with the Party Conference. I would like to announce that we will have our first meeting on the 27th of this month, and I am particularly wanting it to focus on congestion, congestion alleviation, both the tactical stuff that we have currently and also, as we have heard tonight, we have got challenges of new housing developments over the next 20 or 30 years. Having done the Highways brief before, and as David Chopping and I well know, the roads we put on the Local Transport Plan in 2006 are only now just being built. If we want roads in 2030 or 2035 we need to have a good idea where they should be going now because it takes 10-15 years for them to come through the process. I am looking forward to that Group and I trust that it will provide an opportunity for particularly some local residents to contribute to our deliberations.

Two Council meetings ago we approved the new Highways Services Contract and Highways Maintenance Contract and I am pleased to tell everyone that the mobilisation and demobilisation of the various contractors is taking place. I would like to thank Rachelle for attending our cross party meetings. We are monitoring this and say that we missed you Lindsay, although I understand that you were otherwise engaged.

The other aspect, links again back to congestion. I was driving into Wokingham a couple of weeks ago and there was an accident on the M4, which meant that there was problems on the M4 and traffic was being diverted. There was a murder in Finchampstead, I must admit I thought Finchampstead was a lot more civilised than that but there we are. Was it Wokingham Without? Then I apologise to Finchampstead for maligning them but there are obviously parts of Wokingham Without that are a little uncivilised. I also discovered later that there were problems on the M3 and the M25. This shows what happens when a few things happen on the wider network. It took me an hour I think to get into Wokingham. I

subsequently came across an app on Google, which Simon sort of looked at me askance and said 'well did you not know about that?' The answer was no I did not. For those of you that do know, you will know it, for those of you that do not, in Google Maps you can switch on a congestion aspect, the more information that I think residents need and have at their disposal to plan their journey as I am very aware of a lot of issues about that in my ward. The second point linked into that is that I have had long discussions with Officers around how we communicate congestion issues and network disruption issues to residents because I am very, very conscious that Officers do a lot of communicating but sometimes residents do not receive it. So with Sarah and her team I have been working on that because I think it is really important that if there is an issue, and I have got an issue which is in my ward and has been going on for a number of months, the more residents and drivers that know that is going to take place, they can either leave half an hour earlier or they can find another route. I think the more information we give people the better.

Pauline Helliard-Symons, Executive Member for Children's Services:

Three things I would like to report on. Given the challenges over the last year or so in Children's Services we were pleased with the outcome of the recent Ofsted inspection, which focused on our front door and on our working with the multi-agency support hub. The challenges are well known. There has been an increasing number of children coming through our front door, coming our way, for child protection, and the impact that, that has had on social workers' caseloads and the number of interims that we have had in our senior staff. Use of agency staff has brought caseloads down to a normal level and we have a Working Group looking at future recruitment and retention issues. The Inspectors liked the plans that we are developing. They also recognise that we now have stability in our senior officer team. We have a permanent Director in place and just today we appointed an excellent new Assistant Director for Education whose name is Paul Doherty, subject to all the usual Occupational Health checks. On Monday we have interviews for an Assistant Director of Social Care. From next week we hope to have a fully permanent senior team. Three things stood out for me in the Ofsted report. Firstly, that we know ourselves well and what needs to be done and we are doing it, that the Inspectors were satisfied that no children were found to be unsafe, and lastly that our staff are making a difference to children's lives. That is particularly pleasing to me.

Secondly, St Dominic Savio Primary School has come in at number 184 in The Times' best Primary Schools list. They are the only Wokingham state primary school in the top 250. I should like publicly to congratulate the Headteacher, the staff and the pupils for their hard work.

Lastly, you will all be getting a letter from me to ask you if you will contribute to a Christmas gift from you as corporate parents, to our children in care. The Officer in charge of children in care has asked that this year we contribute to hampers for the children in care leavers who often live on their own and have few opportunities to spend Christmas with their loved ones. I have already circulated an email asking your view on that before I go back to Anisha Reed, who is in charge of these children. Please could you email me with what you think so I can go back to her with the majority view of what we would like to do? Thanks very much to all of those who have replied and to those who have not could you let me know by the end of this week, being flexible let us say the end of Sunday, rather than the end of tomorrow, but if you could let me know by the end of the weekend then I can start to get that organised.

68. STATEMENT FROM COUNCIL OWNED COMPANIES

Anthony Pollock, Non-Executive Director Optalis Limited:

I would like to draw Members' attention to David Lacey who is our Independent Broker at Optalis and who has been nominated for a Pride of Reading Award, whilst two other members of the Optalis team have been nominated for leadership and teamwork awards at the Great British Care Awards. I am sure you will all join me in wishing them well, but also it is a reflection of the quality of staff that Optalis have and the quality of services that they provide.

Our registered CQC rated services continue to show great progress through a combination of introducing technology and a constant attention to detail from our staff. Today 70% of our estate is rated 'Good,' the opposite position to that of 9 months' ago. The remaining areas are awaiting inspections. I would like to pay tribute to the CEO Martin Farrow because when he was appointed there were rather a large number of services that were rated as 'Requiring Improvement' so I have been very impressed with his turning it around. CQC have asked our Suffolk Lodge service to advise a local provider how to improve their CQC rating. This follows our recent CQC inspection which resulted in a straight 'Good' rating which previously had 'Requires Improvement.' There has been a big turnaround at Suffolk Lodge and again I want to pay tribute to the work that they have done there.

Finally, a slightly humorous note, Optalis press releases in the last month hit a circulation of more than 120,000, which surprises me but all good to them.

David Chopping, Non-Executive Director of Berry Brook Homes Ltd:

Just a brief note from the housing companies. You have heard a number of points about our statistics earlier on this evening, but the housing companies do continue their search for sites to provide more affordable homes across the whole of the Borough. The current cycle sees the completion of a number of small sites with the redevelopment of Gorse Ride North now really gathering pace.

We are also moving towards planning on sites to provide about another 80 houses or so, hopefully during this new financial year. We are equally taking possession of units aimed for essential workers over this winter at Peach Place. What I would like to do at this stage is to caution some Members who tend to put their party politics before the needs of residents in opposing sites they know are appropriate and will eventually be built on. From the housing companies' point of view this is extremely disappointing and is counterproductive and leaves families without the homes that they need.

69. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

In accordance with the agreed procedure the Mayor invited Members to submit questions to the appropriate Members

69.1 Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

We have spoken several times about changing the traffic signals to part time rush hours only on the three roundabouts (not the Loddon Bridge (Showcase) roundabout) next to the A329M in Winnersh Triangle. Is there any progress on this project?

Answer

As you are aware these roundabouts and their signals were designed specifically as a result of the redevelopment of Winnersh Triangle. I think David, you and I remember them going in, in the first place. We were told by Mark Moon at the time that they had to be

done because of the levels of future traffic flow. However, I do share your frustration about traffic lights on roundabouts, particularly when they interfere with natural traffic flows, and particularly outside peak hours. I have used those roundabouts late at night and nobody else is there and yet you have to stop and wait for non-existent traffic to take priority. Previously, and David will remember this, we were told that the Government did not like them and had forbidden them and therefore we could not do them. However, I am and I have sought clarification from our Officers on the Department of Transport guidance on this design, since as I said, I was told that it was forbidden. What I will do is I will keep you informed of what I hear and if we can, make some changes, which I think will help traffic flows outside peak hours. I will do so and I will let you know.

Supplementary Question:

Bracknell already has them and has had them for a long time. I do not know if the 'Storm Troopers' are going to shut down the traffic signals or not or whether the Department of Transport is coming to get them.

Supplementary Answer:

I think I will take some advice from Bracknell then.

69.2 Gary Cowan asked the Executive Member for Environment, Leisure and Libraries the following question:

Looking at the time scale for progressing the Minerals and Waste Plan and the Local Plan can one explain why when minerals are required to build houses that the timing would appear to be back to front. By that I mean you need sand and gravel to build houses so one needs to know the number of houses being planned to determine that amount of sand and gravel needed or are there other reasons?

Answer:

National policy and guidance sets out the importance of the plan-led system to ensure there is certainty and clarity on future development. The existing Berkshire Minerals Plan dates from 2001 and the Waste Plan from 1998. Both plans are therefore in need of review.

Wokingham Borough Council, Bracknell Forest Council, Reading Borough Council and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead are working together to produce a Joint Minerals and Waste Plan. On adoption, this will replace the existing plans, ensuring an up-to-date policy and thereby greater certainty as to where development is directed, and where it is not.

The Joint Minerals and Waste Plan is being prepared at the same time that the Berkshire local authorities are having to update and extend their existing Core Strategy Local Plans due to changes in national planning policy and guidance.

If we are to provide a complete set of up-to-date planning policies, which provide the greatest level of transparency for residents and certainty for decision-making, both the Minerals and Waste Plan and the Local Plan must be updated on overlapping timeframes.

Turning to the link between the plans. Whilst it is desirable that minerals are extracted and used within the same general area, it is generally not possible to achieve this on a very localised scale. Whilst some minerals extracted in the Borough will be used here, minerals will also be used to support development across Reading, Bracknell and Windsor and Maidenhead and probably further afield. Similarly, some minerals extracted elsewhere will

be used for development within the Borough.

Regardless of whether a Local Plan or Minerals and Waste Plan is progressed, sites for housing, mineral extraction and other uses will continue to come forward and will need to be assessed.

Supplementary Question:

The Minerals and Waste, although it has been a long time since there was a plan, the Minerals and Waste existing plan shows minerals as a 7 year surplus, so I thought I did not see any particular rush to get this passed in 2019. It was interesting that the housing and the minerals and waste were both going to public inquiries in 2019, and for reasons best known to themselves, when the housing numbers are pretty much in place, the minerals and waste stays where it is, but the housing has been moved to 2021. I just wondered if that is because it is a fallow year when there is no election?

Supplementary Answer:

Well, the answer is no. They are being progressed. It is early stages with the Minerals and Waste Plan. The first stage of public consultation is being carried out. There will be more consultation. Nothing is certain as yet and there is a lot more to do, so there might be changes to the timescales.

69.3 Imogen Shepherd-DuBey asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

The Woollah Underpass in my ward has been progressively attacked by vandals who persist in scrawling graffiti on the walls. These messages and images are violent, sexually explicit, homophobic and deeply offensive to most. It is visible to all; including children who walk through the tunnel on the way to school and it makes residents feel unsafe when using the tunnel.

I have been advised that this tunnel used to have anti-graffiti rendering, which seems to be working well in nearby locations. I would like to know why this graffiti resistant rendering was not replaced.

Answer

I have received this morning some photographs of the mural, which I have been very impressed with. On the mural itself I cannot see any graffiti on that and I am told by Pete Baveystock that they have cleaned that relevant graffiti off. There is a couple of bits of graffiti on another wall, which I am told will be removed, but I do not think it meets the standard that you are objecting to. I have even looked up Matthew 26:52 and I do not think that was insulting in the way you were referring to the other things. I thank you for bringing it to our attention and if happens again then let Pete Baveystock know so that it can be removed. I will check the rendering and if it needs to be upgraded, I will sort it out.

Supplementary Question:

My original question was about the rendering and my supplementary was about what they were going to do to try and stop it happening again.

Supplementary Answer:

I think stopping it happening is beyond my powers but dealing with it is probably within my powers.

69.4 Clive Jones asked the Executive Member for Environment, Leisure and Libraries the following question:

What plans does the Council have to improve Air Quality in the Borough?

Answer

The Council is committed to improving air quality in the Borough. We monitor nitrogen dioxide at over 40 sites in the Borough and have identified two areas, in Wokingham Town Centre and Twyford Crossroads that have nitrogen dioxide levels slightly above the recommended limits. These locations have been declared as Air Quality Management Areas and Air Quality Action Plans have been approved and are being implemented by the Council to address the issues.

Supplementary Question:

It is well known that lower speed limits result in lower emissions. Would this Council support reductions in speed limits on the M4 after the completion of the Smart motorway between Junctions 10 and 12, which pass close by Lower Earley and Emmbrook, Winnersh and Shinfield? A reduction in the maximum speed limit from 70mph to 50mph would significantly improve air quality for thousands of residents and their children, especially those living in Hillside and Hawkedon wards, close to the M4. Please be bold. Commit the Council to this policy of lobbying the Government to take this measure to improve air quality. You have got an opportunity to make a name for yourself Norman.

Supplementary Answer:

As you well know, because I was at the same public meetings that you were at as far as the M4 Smart motorway is concerned. You put forward the proposal of a permanent 50mph speed limit on the M4 and Highways England declined that request. The speed limits on the M4 are a matter for them and the whole idea of the Smart motorway is that they will control speed limits according to the flow of traffic on the motorway. So at times when it is not busy it will be the national speed limit and at times when it is more congested then it will be lower, so that they can smooth out the flow of traffic. It is not necessarily the case that the lower the speed the lower the emissions. It is quite a complicated story but certainly moderate speeds in high gears are probably the best for fuel economy.

69.5 Lindsay Ferris asked the Executive Member for Regeneration the following question which was answered by the Executive Member for Business, Economic Development and Strategic Planning:

According to papers that went to Audit Committee, Wokingham Borough Council has paid £14.5M for three commercial properties in Wokingham including Barclays Bank in Market Place for which the gross annual rental income is forecast to be circa £507k p.a. No information was provided to show

- (a) What responsibilities (including financial) do Wokingham Borough Council have as Landlords (for example repairs etc.).
- (b) What the estimated annual costs are of servicing both the borrowing costs, the costs of repairs and administration of these properties.

With these costs taken into account, the net income could be considerably less than £507k a year.

What figures for costs and income were used in the business case that was made for

purchasing these three properties?

Answer

The Council as a landlord may have different responsibilities at different properties, let me try and explain that, depending on the nature of the property or estate and the terms of the leases in place. As you know we have a very professional team that is running this for many years in large organisations. We are very lucky to have an experienced team to do this.

Generally we are responsible for tenant care, income collection, insurance and the monitoring of tenant's obligations and restrictions under the lease. A lot of due diligence has been done on these properties I can assure you.

The nature of the tenant's obligations depends on whether the tenants are on a Full Repairing and Insuring Lease such as Barclays and Fishponds Road or an Internal Repairing and Insuring Lease, as at Mulberry. They are different depending on what they are.

In the case of FRI leases the tenants are responsible for the property in every way so we just collect the income. This lease model is popular with investors so attracts a lower rate of return as landlord risk and expertise to manage are lower.

In the case of IRI, like we have got at Mulberry, these are usually larger multi-let estates requiring a more professional management at the expense of the occupying tenants. These tend to be larger and more complex. However, the added complexity of risk and rewards are reflected in the rate of return.

Our portfolio is a mix of both types of lease. The income quoted of £507,000 is not the annual income from the assets required but an estimate of the likely gross income from the date of purchase to the end of March 2019. Annual income would be considerably greater.

Net in Year is measured on net rent receivable after any non-recoverable costs but before deductions for any debt costs. That is the basis on which the £507,000 that was reported for this period. It is an estimate of likely rental income before paying out interest on money borrowed.

After allowing for interest on debt and based on the current tenants, leases and income streams at all the properties the actual net income after interest payments for the full year 2019/20 is likely to be just under £600,000 showing a true net return of 3.80% on cost, which is a pretty good rate of return.

Supplementary Question:

Can you advise what interest rate this £14.5million was borrowed at by the Council? My information is that it was at 2.9%. Are you able to confirm this?

Supplementary Answer:

Obviously the rate from the Public Works Loan Board and where the Treasury function uses for using this money varies, but that is my understanding of the average rate.

69.6 Carl Doran asked the Leader of the Council the following question which was answered by the Deputy Leader:

At the Tory party conference, Theresa May said that austerity is over.

Can the Executive member for finance tell us whether the austerity refund cheque for the £35.9 million taken from this council, since 2010, has been received yet?

Answer

I think firstly you have probably misunderstood the basis of austerity. Austerity was called because over the years that Labour were in power they tripled the debt, they increased public sector debt by 125% and they generally spent all the money. As is confirmed by the letter from Liam Byrne that he left for the Chief Secretary. Just to remind you I have brought you a copy.

The Council has not budgeted to receive any such refund because the money has been used to pay back the deficit caused by the Labour Party.

Supplementary Question:

Whatever the figure for the money that we are owed, are you going to ask the Government for our money back?

Supplementary Answer:

As you know we have continually been lobbying the Government as the lowest funded authority in the country and we will continue to do that. We have recently had some good news on roads and also adult social care where we have got some money back. We will obviously continue to ask for more money.

70. MINUTES OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS AND WARD MATTERS

70.1 Tim Holton asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Earlier tonight a member of the public raised a question re the safety of the fence along Lower Earley Way. Can the requested report also make reference to the number of times that the fence has prevented a cyclist wobbling in to the road or a young child from straying into an oncoming car? I appreciate that non-accidents may be difficult to measure, perhaps the local press present could ask their readers?

Answer:

As you say, a difficult question to answer, but if I can and there is evidence that supports your request I will do so.

70.2 Andy Croy asked the Deputy Leader the following question:

A few weeks ago I was campaigning in my ward and I came across this fantastic couple. They were European Union citizens and they were moving back to Ireland because they felt very, very unwelcome. What can you do to reassure them if they are still here, and the hundreds of other European Union citizens in my ward, who have just been told that they are queue jumpers? What can you do to reassure them that this Borough will not treat them as queue jumpers?

Answer:

I would reiterate that all European Union citizens, together with the rest of the citizens from all around the world that we have living in our Borough, are very welcome and are very

productive and contribute greatly to our community. It is not a thing about the EU, it is a thing about everybody who lives here is equally welcome.

70.3 Prue Bray asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

There are two stations in Winnersh. Winnersh Triangle has no disabled access facilities whatsoever and Winnersh itself, according to the National Rail enquiries, has level access to passengers wishing to go to Wokingham or Waterloo but not for passengers wanting to go to Reading. It used to be ok and the platforms have not changed so I do not really understand why it is only on one side, although actually I do have doubts whether there is even access on one side at the moment because they do not seem to carry the ramp at all any more. It is really not good enough. The Vice Chair of the Parish Council has already been actively working on this. Will the Council work with the Parish and the Borough councillors to persuade South Western Railways to improve disabled access to these two stations?

Answer:

I am very happy to work with you and your Parish Council, though as you are aware it is not a function of the Borough Council and given the experiences that Wokingham station had to go through to comply with disability access I do not know what we may be able to achieve. If we can I am very happy to do so.

70.4 Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Since the Winnersh Relief Road was approved by Planning Committee already, what is taking so long to actually start doing things? I will say that I would like to thank the Officers very much for the work they have helped us with to redesign a few small pieces that were necessary. But it is taking a year, it is not even going to start until next winter practically at this point. What are they doing?

Answer:

I do not have that information to hand but I do know that it is being funded through the Local Enterprise Partnership so there may be aspects relating to that but I will get you a written answer.

70.5 Clive Jones asked the Executive Member for Environment, Leisure and Libraries the following question:

Will the Executive Member find the resources from either Earley Town Council or Wokingham Borough Council or both to reinstate the public footpath between numbers 29-31 Kitwood Drive in Hawkedon ward to a longer footpath which runs behind Kitwood Drive and Wickham Road, which is also in need of repair? These paths have fallen into disrepair since they were laid well over 30 years ago. Our residents in Hawkedon deserve better from the Council.

Answer:

You have not brought this up with me previously but if they are Borough Council owned assets, and it sounds as if they are, then we should be doing something about it yes.

70.6 Imogen Shepherd-DuBey asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Several roads around the Joel Park area of Emmbrook North have recently been resurfaced. This excludes Jubilee Avenue which is the main route in and out of the area.

This has multiple potholes and a heavily rutted surface. I find it very odd that this one road has been missed during the resurfacing work and this is probably in the worst condition. Please could you advise when this road is likely to get resurfaced?

Answer:

I do not have details of those roads to hand and I do not have the details of the assessment of the relevant road that you are talking about, but I will get you an answer.

71. CONTINUATION OF THE MEETING

At this point in the meeting, 10.15pm, in accordance with Procedure Rule 4.2.12 (m), the Council considered a Motion to continue the meeting beyond 10.30pm for a maximum of 30 minutes to enable further business on the Agenda to be transacted. This was proposed by Prue Bray and seconded by Pauline Jorgensen.

Upon being put to the meeting, the Motion was declared by the Mayor to be carried.

72. MOTIONS

72.1 Motion 412 submitted by Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey

The Council considered the following Notice of Motion submitted by Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey and seconded by Pauline Helliard-Symons.

‘Wokingham Borough Council requires the correct installation of sprinkler systems in newly built schools and school buildings within Wokingham Borough.

WBC has recognised the importance of sprinklers in schools for many years and a previous motion passed by this Council required a risk assessment to be undertaken, but this opens the way for sprinklers not to be required, and needs to be strengthened.

School fires continue to occur and latest reports suggest they are getting bigger and more costly. The impact of these fires is significant not just in financial terms but also in terms of the devastating effect on the communities they serve, the environment and the disruption to students, teachers and families. The impact on children's education is not confined to lost coursework but often includes longer travelling times, disrupted social groups and poorer facilities. There is an additional effect of interrupting a child's education due to damage to their classrooms which may hinder their learning of essential skills.

There is a misconception that water systems often cause more damage than they prevent, but with modern technology sprinkler fire suppression systems are far smarter and only activate in the areas that require suppression and only for the time that the risk is evident. In respect of Sprinkler Installations Building Regulations, Regulatory Reform orders and insurers are increasingly calling for active fire suppression systems such as sprinklers as part of the design of new schools. DCSF BB100 sets out a risk assessment methodology which dictates the use of sprinklers in the majority of new school build.

WBC believes if sprinklers were considered at the design stage of new builds, costs could be kept to a minimum. Each year more than 1300 schools in the UK suffer fires large enough to be attended by Fire services, and over half are non-accidental.

Sprinklers reduce the impact of fires in schools on children, and the public by reducing the costs of insurance and of rebuilding, and most importantly by reducing the cost to the child's education and future. For all these reasons this Council supports the installation of

sprinklers in all new school buildings and will work cross-party and with Officers to see how this can be best implemented in all new build schools, whoever is the organisation seeking to build a new school.'

Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey and Pauline Helliard-Symons emphasised the importance of having sprinklers in schools and the devastating impact that fires could have on schools and the local communities.

Andy Croy commented that he believed that the Council should also look at ways to work with existing schools.

It was moved by Angus Ross and seconded by Lindsay Ferris that the Motion be amended by inserting the words in Bold as follows:

'Wokingham Borough Council requires the correct installation of sprinkler systems in newly built schools and school buildings within Wokingham Borough.

WBC has recognised the importance of sprinklers in schools for many years and a previous motion passed by this Council required a risk assessment to be undertaken, but this opens the way for sprinklers not to be required, and needs to be strengthened.

School fires continue to occur and latest reports suggest they are getting bigger and more costly. The impact of these fires is significant not just in financial terms but also in terms of the devastating effect on the communities they serve, the environment and the disruption to students, teachers and families. The impact on children's education is not confined to lost coursework but often includes longer travelling times, disrupted social groups and poorer facilities. There is an additional effect of interrupting a child's education due to damage to their classrooms which may hinder their learning of essential skills.

There is a misconception that water systems often cause more damage than they prevent, but with modern technology sprinkler fire suppression systems are far smarter and only activate in the areas that require suppression and only for the time that the risk is evident. In respect of Sprinkler Installations Building Regulations, Regulatory Reform orders and insurers are increasingly calling for active fire suppression systems such as sprinklers as part of the design of new schools. DCSF BB100 sets out a risk assessment methodology which dictates the use of sprinklers in the majority of new school build.

WBC believes if sprinklers were considered at the design stage of new builds, costs could be kept to a minimum. Each year more than 1300 schools in the UK suffer fires large enough to be attended by Fire services, and over half are non-accidental. Sprinklers reduce the impact of fires in schools on children, and the public by reducing the costs of insurance and of rebuilding, and most importantly by reducing the cost to the child's education and future.

For all these reasons this Council supports the installation of sprinklers in all new school buildings, **that is:**

a. Specifically new schools and new large teaching blocks separate from the existing school buildings larger than 150 square metres floor area or more than more storey;

and

b. not on extensions of existing buildings not fitted with sprinklers, nor on temporary new buildings.

This Council will work cross-party and with Officers to ascertain how this can best be implemented, whoever is the organisation seeking to build new school buildings.'

Angus Ross stated that the practicality and cost to retrofit sprinklers was often not financially viable. The Council would aim to encourage private schools and academies within the Borough to fit sprinklers.

Lindsay Ferris commented that the amendment would close a loophole identified in a previously agreed Motion.

The proposer of the original Motion, Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey accepted the proposed amendment to the Motion and it therefore became the substantive Motion.

A number of Members reiterated the importance of the fitting of sprinklers within school buildings.

Following debate the amended (substantive) Motion was then put to the vote and was declared by the Mayor to be carried.

RESOLVED: That Wokingham Borough Council requires the correct installation of sprinkler systems in newly built schools and school buildings within Wokingham Borough.

WBC has recognised the importance of sprinklers in schools for many years and a previous motion passed by this Council required a risk assessment to be undertaken, but this opens the way for sprinklers not to be required, and needs to be strengthened.

School fires continue to occur and latest reports suggest they are getting bigger and more costly. The impact of these fires is significant not just in financial terms but also in terms of the devastating effect on the communities they serve, the environment and the disruption to students, teachers and families. The impact on children's education is not confined to lost coursework but often includes longer travelling times, disrupted social groups and poorer facilities. There is an additional effect of interrupting a child's education due to damage to their classrooms which may hinder their learning of essential skills.

There is a misconception that water systems often cause more damage than they prevent, but with modern technology sprinkler fire suppression systems are far smarter and only activate in the areas that require suppression and only for the time that the risk is evident. In respect of Sprinkler Installations Building Regulations, Regulatory Reform orders and insurers are increasingly calling for active fire suppression systems such as sprinklers as part of the design of new schools. DCSF BB100 sets out a risk assessment methodology which dictates the use of sprinklers in the majority of new school build.

WBC believes if sprinklers were considered at the design stage of new builds, costs could be kept to a minimum. Each year more than 1300 schools in the UK suffer fires large enough to be attended by Fire services, and over half are non-accidental. Sprinklers reduce the impact of fires in schools on children, and the public by reducing the costs of insurance and of rebuilding, and most importantly by reducing the cost to the child's

education and future.

For all these reasons this Council supports the installation of sprinklers in all new school buildings, that is:

a. Specifically new schools and new large teaching blocks separate from the existing school buildings larger than 150 square metres floor area or more than more storey;

and

b. not on extensions of existing buildings not fitted with sprinklers, nor on temporary new buildings.

This Council will work cross-party and with Officers to ascertain how this can best be implemented, whoever is the organisation seeking to build new school buildings.

72.2 Motion 413 submitted by Gary Cowan

The Council considered the following Notice of Motion, submitted by Gary Cowan and seconded by Lindsay Ferris.

‘This Council will evaluate its existing policies on trees to ensure its policies are fully open and transparent. The new policy recognises that many trees may be subject to some tree work and it is not practical to consult on all works undertaken. For example pruning works carried out is unlikely to cause significant public concern, however the felling of any trees can be contentious. Felling trees without prior consultation due to health and safety issues is understood but where the felling involves any loss of TPO or protected tree/s for any other reason whatsoever the public must be formally consulted on the proposed works and the reasons why it is necessary.

The Council must maintain proper records of all TPO trees felled. For trees which are to be felled which are protected by TPOs, green routes or those situated in Conservation Areas, or in association with development proposals and planning permissions this Council will put in place a statutory consultation processes and current council policies will be reviewed to reflect these changes as soon as it practicable.’

Several Members highlighted the importance of protecting trees within the Borough.

Following debate, upon being put to the meeting, the Motion was declared by the Mayor to be carried.

RESOLVED: That this Council will evaluate its existing policies on trees to ensure its policies are fully open and transparent. The new policy recognises that many trees may be subject to some tree work and it is not practical to consult on all works undertaken. For example pruning works carried out is unlikely to cause significant public concern, however the felling of any trees can be contentious. Felling trees without prior consultation due to health and safety issues is understood but where the felling involves any loss of TPO or protected tree/s for any other reason whatsoever the public must be formally consulted on the proposed works and the reasons why it is necessary.

The Council must maintain proper records of all TPO trees felled. For trees which are to be felled which are protected by TPOs, green routes or those situated in Conservation Areas, or in association with development proposals and planning permissions this Council will

put in place a statutory consultation processes and current council policies will be reviewed to reflect these changes as soon as it practicable.

72.3 Motion 414 submitted by Prue Bray

It was agreed that the consideration of Motion 414 would be deferred to the Extraordinary Council meeting scheduled for 14 December 2018 due to Philip Mirfin having to leave the meeting earlier as the result of a family emergency.

72.4 Motion 415 submitted by Rachel Burgess

The Council considered the following Notice of Motion submitted by Rachel Burgess and seconded by Andy Croy.

‘This Council opposes the closure of Wokingham’s Post Office and its franchising to WH Smith.

Wokingham’s Post Office is at the heart of the local community and an important community hub for many residents, particularly the older and more vulnerable. It is part of the historic character of our market town.

This Council is concerned that there was no proper consultation on whether this controversial proposal to franchise the Post Office should take place.

Wokingham’s residents are concerned that WH Smith’s record for quality of service and queuing times is one of the poorest, and many believe that the retailer will provide a reduced service with longer queues and the provision of inferior advice to customers.

This Council notes that WH Smith currently does not have adequate disabled access.

A number of jobs are at risk of being replaced with minimum wage jobs. Public money will be used to seal the deal in the form of compensation payments to remove existing staff.

This Council will write to the Post Office calling for the abandonment of plans to franchise Wokingham’s Post Office to WH Smith and calls on John Redwood MP to write to the Minister for the Post Office to request that this proposal to be abandoned.’

Rachel Burgess and Andy Croy highlighted the importance of the Post Office to the town, the potential impact the proposals would have on staff and the lack of public consultation.

It was moved by Clive Jones and seconded by Prue Bray that the Motion be amended by inserting the words in Bold as follows:

‘This Council **will oppose** the closure of Wokingham’s Post Office and its franchising to WH Smith.

Wokingham’s Post Office is at the heart of the local community and an important community hub for many residents, particularly the older and more vulnerable. It is part of the historic character of our market town.

This Council **acknowledges the consultation on the proposal that is planned for early in the New Year but** is concerned that there was no proper consultation on whether this controversial proposal to franchise the Post Office should take place **at an earlier stage**.

Wokingham's residents are concerned that WH Smith's record for quality of service and queuing times is one of the poorest **locally**, and many believe that the retailer will provide a reduced service with longer queues and the provision of inferior advice to customers.

This Council notes that WH Smith currently does not have adequate disabled access **inside the store**.

A number of jobs are at risk of being replaced with minimum wage jobs. Public money **might** be used to seal the deal in the form of compensation payments to remove existing staff.

Unless the Post Office provides guarantees on disabled access, jobs and the quality and scope of services including the ability to collect parcels currently provided by the Royal Mail in the existing building, this Council will write to the Post Office calling for the abandonment of plans to franchise Wokingham's Post Office to WH Smith and **will call** on John Redwood MP to write to the Minister for the Post Office to request that this proposal to be abandoned.'

The amendment to the Motion was not accepted by the proposer of the original Motion.

Upon being put to the vote it was:

RESOLVED: That the amended Motion become the substantive Motion.

Clive Jones stated that he wanted to see the same level of service currently enjoyed, provided. He believed that there would be a public consultation in January, including a public exhibition.

Some Members questioned what effect the proposals would have on the parcel sorting service.

Following debate and upon being put to the vote, the amended (substantive) Motion was declared by the Mayor to be carried.

RESOLVED: That this Council will oppose the closure of Wokingham's Post Office and its franchising to WH Smith.

Wokingham's Post Office is at the heart of the local community and an important community hub for many residents, particularly the older and more vulnerable. It is part of the historic character of our market town.

This Council acknowledges the consultation on the proposal that is planned for early in the New Year but is concerned that there was no proper consultation on whether this controversial proposal to franchise the Post Office should take place at an earlier stage.

Wokingham's residents are concerned that WH Smith's record for quality of service and queuing times is one of the poorest locally, and many believe that the retailer will provide a reduced service with longer queues and the provision of inferior advice to customers.

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