



WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

A Meeting of the **EXECUTIVE** will be held in David Hicks 1 - Civic Offices, Shute End, Wokingham RG40 1BN on **THURSDAY 28 SEPTEMBER 2023 AT 7.00 PM**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Susan Parsonage', with a long, sweeping tail.

Susan Parsonage
Chief Executive
Published on 20 September 2023

Note: Members of the public are welcome to attend the meeting or participate in the meeting virtually, in accordance with the Council's Constitution. If you wish to participate either in person or virtually via Microsoft Teams please contact Democratic Services. Democratic.services@wokingham.gov.uk

The meeting can also be watched live using the following link:
<https://youtube.com/live/r93DJkuu-pc?feature=share>

This meeting will be filmed for inclusion on the Council's website. Please note that other people may film, record, tweet or blog from this meeting. The use of these images or recordings is not under the Council's control.

Our Vision
<i>A great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business</i>
Enriching Lives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Champion excellent education and enable our children and young people to achieve their full potential, regardless of their background. • Support our residents to lead happy, healthy lives and provide access to good leisure facilities to enable healthy choices for everyone. • Engage and empower our communities through arts and culture and create a sense of identity for the Borough which people feel part of. • Support growth in our local economy and help to build business.
Providing Safe and Strong Communities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect and safeguard our children, young and vulnerable people. • Offer quality care and support, at the right time, to reduce the need for long term care. • Nurture our communities: enabling them to thrive and families to flourish. • Ensure our Borough and communities remain safe for all.
Enjoying a Clean and Green Borough
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play as full a role as possible to achieve a carbon neutral Borough, sustainable for the future. • Protect our Borough, keep it clean and enhance our green areas for people to enjoy. • Reduce our waste, promote re-use, increase recycling and improve biodiversity. • Connect our parks and open spaces with green cycleways.
Delivering the Right Homes in the Right Places
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer quality, affordable, sustainable homes fit for the future. • Ensure the right infrastructure is in place, early, to support and enable our Borough to grow. • Protect our unique places and preserve our natural environment. • Help with your housing needs and support people, where it is needed most, to live independently in their own homes.
Keeping the Borough Moving
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain and improve our roads, footpaths and cycleways. • Tackle traffic congestion and minimise delays and disruptions. • Enable safe and sustainable travel around the Borough with good transport infrastructure. • Promote healthy alternative travel options and support our partners in offering affordable, accessible public transport with good transport links.
Changing the Way We Work for You
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be relentlessly customer focussed. • Work with our partners to provide efficient, effective, joined up services which are focussed around our customers. • Communicate better with customers, owning issues, updating on progress and responding appropriately as well as promoting what is happening in our Borough. • Drive innovative, digital ways of working that will connect our communities, businesses and customers to our services in a way that suits their needs.
Be the Best We Can Be
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be an organisation that values and invests in all our colleagues and is seen as an employer of choice. • Embed a culture that supports ambition, promotes empowerment and develops new ways of working. • Use our governance and scrutiny structures to support a learning and continuous improvement approach to the way we do business. • Be a commercial council that is innovative, whilst being inclusive, in its approach with a clear focus on being financially resilient. • Maximise opportunities to secure funding and investment for the Borough. • Establish a renewed vision for the Borough with clear aspirations.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE EXECUTIVE

Stephen Conway	Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Housing
Prue Bray	Deputy Leader and Children's Services
Rachel Bishop-Firth	Equalities, Inclusion and Fighting Poverty
Lindsay Ferris	Planning and Local Plan
Paul Fishwick	Active Travel, Transport and Highways
David Hare	Health and Wellbeing and Adult Services
Sarah Kerr	Climate Emergency and Resident Services
Clive Jones	Business and Economic Development
Ian Shenton	Environment, Sport and Leisure
Imogen Shepherd-DuBey	Finance

ITEM NO.	WARD	SUBJECT	PAGE NO.
41.		APOLOGIES To receive any apologies for absence.	
42.		MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING To confirm the Minutes of the Executive meeting held on 27 July 2023 and the extraordinary Executive meeting on 24 August 2023.	9 - 32
43.		DECLARATION OF INTERESTS To receive any declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests, other registrable interests and any non-registrable interests relevant to any matters to be considered at the meeting.	
44.		STATEMENT FROM THE LEADER	
45.		PUBLIC QUESTION TIME To answer any public questions. A period of 30 minutes will be allowed for members of the public to ask questions submitted under notice. The Council welcomes questions from members of the public about the work of the Executive. Subject to meeting certain timescales, questions can relate to general issues concerned with the work of the Council or an item which is on the Agenda for this meeting. For full details of the procedure for submitting questions please contact the Democratic Services Section on the numbers given below or go to www.wokingham.gov.uk/publicquestions	
45.1	None Specific	Colin Watts has asked the Executive Member for Planning and the Local Plan the following question:	

Question:

The Executive Member for Planning and the Local Plan has repeatedly outlined a strategy as regards the Local Plan Update that is based on the housing target for Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) being reduced as a result of government changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), specifically a reduction to the housing target to take into account historic over provision of housing in Wokingham. No changes to the NPPF have yet been published by the government, yet now WBC has stated that it will publish a Proposed Submission Plan in November.

Given the absence of changes to the NPPF, should we therefore assume that the revised plan to be published in November will be based on the existing housing target of 768 dwellings per annum?

45.2 None Specific

Peter White has asked the Executive Member for Environment, Sport, and Leisure the following question:

Question:

Biodiversity net gain legislation is soon to be introduced. Can Wokingham Borough Council confirm that this legislation and the need for developers to make good on their destruction of local habitats for profit are at the forefront of the new Local Plan, and remediation will be local to the area of development, not “offsite” to an already more biodiverse area of the borough.

45.3 None Specific

Gregor Murray has asked the Executive Member for Environment, Sport, and Leisure the following question:

Question:

You have launched a consultation on the future of St Crispin’s Leisure centre. Given that your Exec member for Finance said on social media that Finance was not the issue please can you explain what the problem is?

46.

MEMBER QUESTION TIME

To answer any Member questions.

A period of 20 minutes is permitted for Members to ask questions submitted under Notice.

Any questions not dealt with within the allotted time will be provided with a written reply.

46.1 Arborfield

Councillor Gary Cowan has asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

Question:

Cllr Clive Jones as Leader of the Lib Dems publicly campaigned with local residents against the proposed Conservative supported development of 4500 houses at Hall Farm.

Fighting the Hall Farm 4500 houses in public worked to very good effect as the recent election results shows enabling the Dems to take control of the Council after over 20 years of past Conservative Control.

The Conservative's plan is to build 2300 houses in the next 15 years as part of the Governments Housing requirements. The site is in the countryside on the side of the Loddon river which floods and in a climate emergency environment.

In addition to that the Conservative plan is for another 2200 houses to be built on Hall Farm from 2040 to 2055. These 2200 extra houses are not required in the governments mandatory and legally binding housing numbers.

When the Lib Dems took control, they could have easily removed the 2200 houses but they just sat on the fence and did nothing.

The Lib Dem leader fought the Hall Farm housing development in public but when the opportunity came their way to do something he did nothing.

46.2 None Specific

Was this this just a cynical ploy to get votes?

Councillor Charles Margetts has asked the Executive Member for Finance the following question:

Question:

The council owns significant amounts of offices and retail space in Wokingham which are either empty or let at minimal / zero rent to charities. What plans does the council have to get maximum value for the taxpayer from these assets?

46.3 Arborfield

Councillor Rebecca Margetts has asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

Question:

The previous administration had been in discussion with local groups about the running of the community centre in the new Arborfield Green village centre.

I have not heard any progress with these discussions or if the groups previously interested are still involved.

Please can you give me an update on when the full community centre will open.

46.4 None Specific

Councillor Alison Swaddle has asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question:

Question:

The Liberal Democrat led administration seems determined to deter drivers from visiting our towns.

Local business owners already fear for the future as customers choose to go elsewhere to avoid paying the highly increased car park charges in our towns. Several are close to shutting and some already have citing lack of foot fall brought about by the large parking charge increases as a major contributor to their demise.

We understand that Liberal Democrat councillors are well advanced in putting together proposals to implement on street parking charges in Wokingham town centre, including identifying sites for the kerbside payment machines.

Will you carry out a full consultation with residents before you make a decision on such proposals?

46.5 None Specific

Councillor Graham Howe has asked the Executive Member for Planning and the Local Plan the following question:

Question:

Following the vast amount of rhetoric the ruling administration has made in the local press and their campaigning publications, and the promise of an invitation to a round table discussion, would the Executive member stop sitting on the fence, and would he now explain in clear concrete terms what we can convey to Wokingham's residents as to exactly what will be in their Draft Local Plan and when will it be published for consultation?

Matters for Consideration

47.	None Specific	RISK MANAGEMENT POLICY AND GUIDANCE	33 - 68
48.	None Specific	TREASURY MANAGEMENT REPORT	69 - 78

49.	None Specific	RESIDENTIAL LEASEHOLD INSURANCE RENEWAL	79 - 84
50.	None Specific	ENHANCED PARTNERSHIP	85 - 166
51.	None Specific	WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL FUTURE OFFICE PROVISION	167 - 180
52.	None Specific	VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN & GIRLS STRATEGY 2023-26	181 - 204
53.	None Specific	BOHUNT WOKINGHAM SCHOOL 6TH FORM: OPTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	205 - 214
54.	None Specific	PROMOTION OF WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL ASSETS	215 - 228

EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Executive may exclude the press and public in order to discuss the Part 2 sheets of Agenda Item 54 above and to do so it must pass a resolution in the following terms:

That under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act (as amended) as appropriate.

A decision sheet will be available for inspection at the Council's offices (in Democratic Services and the General Office) and on the web site no later than two working days after the meeting.

CONTACT OFFICER

Priya Patel	Head of Democratic and Electoral Services
Email	priya.patel@wokingham.gov.uk
Postal Address	Civic Offices, Shute End, Wokingham, RG40 1BN

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**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE EXECUTIVE
HELD ON 27 JULY 2023 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.03 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Stephen Conway (Chair), Prue Bray (Vice-Chair), Rachel Bishop-Firth, Lindsay Ferris, Paul Fishwick, David Hare, Clive Jones and Imogen Shepherd-DuBey

19. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillor Sarah Kerr.

20. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 29 June 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

21. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

The following declarations of personal interest were made by Executive Members in relation to agenda item 31: Shareholders Report. These Members did not participate or vote on this item.

- Councillor Prue Bray as a Chair and a Non-Executive Director of Berry Brook Homes, a Non-Executive Director at WBC Holdings Ltd and Chair of Wokingham Homes Limited.
- Councillor Stephen Conway as Chair and a Non-Executive Director of Loddon Homes and Chair of WBC Holdings Ltd
- Councillor David Hare as Chair and a Non-Executive Director of Optalis Ltd.

22. STATEMENT FROM THE LEADER

“Given that some doubt has been cast on the need to make savings, I should like to take this opportunity to remind everyone of the gravity of the situation we face. High inflation, combined with increasing demand for statutory provision, especially in Children’s Services, is creating enormous pressure on the Council’s finances. It’s made worse by the rise in interest rates, which has added to the cost of servicing our borrowing for capital projects.

Wokingham as I think many people are now aware, receives less core funding from government per head of population that any other unitary authority in England.

The headline inflation figure nationally has fallen slightly in recent weeks but the inflation in our costs continues to pose a significant challenge and when combined with growth in demand for statutory services, requires us to find a staggering £11.8m worth of efficiencies and income generation this year, more than anyone can remember before.

I would welcome Opposition councillors constructive engagement with the savings process. Our residents expect all councillors to behave responsibly in the circumstances in which we find ourselves. If we receive no help from the Opposition, we will not be deterred from doing our duty to protect the Council’s finances.

We overcame significant financial challenges last year, by making tough decisions in the public interest. We will continue to put financial sustainability of the Council on which many people of the borough depend for vital services, as our top priority this year.”

23. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

24. DAVID IRELAND HAS ASKED THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT, SPORT AND LEISURE THE FOLLOWING QUESTION:

The Chair advised that he had been informed that this question had been withdrawn. If it transpired that this was not the case, a written response could be provided.

The Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure advised that a written response had already been provided.

25. PETER WHITE HAS ASKED THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND RESIDENT SERVICES THE FOLLOWING QUESTION:

Question:

Peter White asked the Executive Member for Climate Emergency and Resident Services the following question:

(In the absence of the Executive Member for Climate Emergency and Resident Services, the Leader answered the question on her behalf)

My decarbonisation plan:

solar panels, £9000 pounds, generation of 5Mwh of electricity per year. 1 ton CO₂E equivalent, about the same as a medium sized tree. Developer near me cut down two large trees to widen a drive.

Environmental impact survey request for 155 houses in Three Mile Cross. Approximately 15 ktons of CO₂ (mostly Scope 3, so WBC doesn't need to count that !).

Electric Vehicle, £18000. milage 6000 per year, 3 tons of Co₂e equivalent . A development like Hall farm (4500 homes) might have half a million tons of embodied Co₂e. I could drive a gas guzzler for 150000 years to emit that much.

Heating (ongoing): IR panels £6000, or an Air source heat pump £15000 to £20000. These are big numbers again, and I'm wondering is it all worth it ?, will it make a difference? Am I the only person who sees it this way ?.

Does WBC have a coherent, realistic strategy for explaining to residents why they should engage with the Climate Emergency Action Plan, considering the cost of even attempting to become carbon neutral, and that fact that development in WBC wipes out any gains we might make individually ?

Answer

Thank you for your question, Peter. I commend your commitment to invest in these measures to minimise your carbon footprint. As you know, reducing our carbon footprint is important because it mitigates the effects of climate change. The recent weather conditions over the past few weeks in much of the world is evidence enough for the need to take action.

Delivering sustainable communities is important to this agenda. While building new homes does have a carbon impact, those homes, especially affordable homes, are vitally important to meet housing needs. It is important that those homes are delivered to the highest possible environmental standards and that they are well connected to jobs and services via public transport, and safe walking and cycling routes.

We do recognise that current building regulations fall short of what is needed to address the climate emergency. The particular development that you reference at Three Mile Cross was approved in 2016, when the current Building Regulations were applied of that time and this was the limit of what could be asked of developers.

We are now currently progressing a review of our planning policies and the timetable for the new Local Plan is set out on this agenda. Our intention is to include a suite of new policies which reflect best practice by seeking to achieve zero carbon impact from regulated activities.

You have highlighted the cost of some energy efficiency measures, most of which require an upfront investment and you gave some examples. These measures do lead to significant savings in the long term. On this point, I want to mention a Council-led scheme that's currently open for registrations, Solar Together, that aims to facilitate residential installations of solar panels at a competitive price through vetted suppliers.

Residents and organisations have a part to play in the Borough's decarbonisation journey, by shifting to more sustainable behaviours and minimising their carbon footprint and I would encourage people to follow your example where they can.

Supplementary Question:

The Climate Emergency Action Plan on page 5, contains what is basically a mission statement for residents of the borough. I'm sure you've read it. It says in a carbon neutral borough, our community will breathe clean air, clean and green biodiverse spaces. People work, wheel, scoot or bicycle, use accessible public transport and low admission vehicles. Homes, businesses places of leisure will be low carbon and energy efficient. Buy renewables and innovative technologies, that pave the way forward of future generations. Wokingham will be a diverse and inclusive community where everyone plays their part in contributing to a carbon neutral future. Based on the CEAP, the expected new Local Plan, issues of major house building with insufficient supporting infrastructure, and the increasing population of Wokingham Borough, can the Executive at Wokingham Borough Council give a score on a scale of one to ten of how well you think you are in terms of succeeding in our carbon neutral mission for 2023, can you please justify your answer.

Answer:

Thank you, Peter. That is a very detailed and quite probing supplementary. I will have to defer to my Executive Member, Sarah Kerr who holds responsibility for this area and has much of that detailed information that you are seeking. We will provide a written response for you.

26. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

27. COUNCILLOR GARY COWAN HAS ASKED THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL THE FOLLOWING QUESTION:

Question:

At the Planning meeting on the 13th of July 2022 the Council's legal representative present, referenced that the Town and Country Act applied to Part II issues only, which I found surprising. My comments then are recorded in the minutes of that meeting.

The Town and Country act was written to prevent corruption by creating greater transparency. An example of corruption was John Poulson, jailed for five years for corruption after being found guilty of bribing public figures in a web of corruption that encompassed 23 local authorities and 300 individuals.

I make no allegation against the Council but perhaps it explains why the Planning Committee accepted the legal advice and approved the planning application.

My questions to Officers had led to an email from the legal department suggesting I may want to consider declaring an interest and the Chair of the committee asked the same question. I stayed and I immediately resigned from the Planning committee at the end of the discussion.

My question is as it has been reported that the project is to be cancelled as its costs have risen by £6.5 million how much has already been spent including design costs.

Answer:

Last month the Executive agreed to the cessation, not the cancellation, of the construction of a care home as part of the Toutley East strategic masterplan as previously approved, whilst the viability of alternative delivery models for the care home are explored.

Approximately £340,000 was spent on site surveys, feasibility and design work and planning application preparation to secure outline planning consent for the whole of the Toutley East site. Following the granting of planning consent approximately £800,000 has been spent on detailed design and pre-construction works. This spend is within the capital budget for the project, as allocated within the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan. Costs expended to date can be transferred to schemes that come forward on this site and have all contributed to the increasing value of the overall site following the granting of planning consent.

Supplementary Question:

I notice the Planning Committee recommended the demolition of a house in the countryside to be replaced by a 68 acre Care home, contrary to Policy PP11 and also that the Council has purchased a Care home on Barkham Ride. Has there been any information from the Council on costs or business case for the one on Barkham Ride?

Supplementary Answer:

There had been Gary, but I don't have those details at hand. We will provide you with a written reply.

28. COUNCILLOR PAULINE JORGENSEN HAS ASKED THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL AND EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HOUSING THE FOLLOWING QUESTION:

Question:

Could the Leader explain what he is doing to prevent council changes to key services, for example caddy liners and litter bin service reduction, being implemented without following due process and proper approval.

Answer:

Thank you for your question, Pauline. To answer it directly: an error was made in progressing savings in the Place and Growth Directorate without due process being followed. That is now being rectified; public consultation and the involvement of the council's overview and scrutiny process will precede a decision being made. I have already apologised, on behalf of the council, for the error. Mistakes happen, as any leader knows, in all organisations. Mistakes were made when your party ran the council, as I recall. None of us want mistakes to occur, and we will do all we can to reduce the risk of them occurring again. We will review procedures and make sure constitutional requirements are better understood throughout the council.

28.1 Councillor Peter Harper has asked the Executive Member for Climate Emergency and Resident Services the following question:**Question:**

In the 2022-23 MTFP the Barkham Solar Farm capital cost is shown as £8m but in the Climate Emergency Progress Report from September 2022 it is shown as £26.8m. Which is the correct figure?

(In the absence of the Executive Member for Climate Emergency and Resident Services, the Leader answered the question on her behalf)

Answer

The cost of the Barkham Solar Farm is currently forecast to be a total cost of round £26.8m; as was reported into Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee in October of last year. That figure is based on the detailed design work undertaken to date and granting of planning consent, with specialist input from industry consultants. It also includes the cost of connection to the Grid. The figures published in the 2022-23 Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP), were the best estimate available at that time when the project was at an early stage and before any detailed design work had been undertaken and before the cost of the Grid connection was known.

Solar farms, as with any other infrastructure project, are subject to location, site specific and capacity requirements. All these factors will affect the cost of the project and are only known once detailed feasibility assessments are completed.

In its decision to approve the Procurement Business Case for the build contractor for the solar farm in June 2022, Executive requested that an up-dated business case reflecting the most recent costs and revenue forecasts be reported back into Executive for review, once the contractor procurement process had been completed. Subject to resolving the current grid connection issue, I expect this up-dated business case will be presented in due course.

Supplementary Question:

I've looked at the latest MTFP, there is no mention of the Solar Farm at Barkham, no capital expenditure catered for. There is some carry forward from last year's budget but it only accounts for £1.4m, at the moment it doesn't look like there is any capital spend

scheduled for this year or for future years for phase 1 of the Solar farm at Barkham, let alone phase 2 which I believe, similarly has no spend set aside. So, where is the budget if its not in the MTFP and how will it be funded?

Supplementary Answer:

I'm confident my colleague Sarah Kerr would be able to provide a very good response to this, I will provide you with a written response.

29. COUNCILLOR CHARLES MARGETTS HAS ASKED THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HEALTH & WELLBEING AND ADULT SERVICES THE FOLLOWING QUESTION:

Question:

In March 2022 the Council had a plan to close Suffolk Lodge and build a new care home at Toutley. I understand the Council is buying the Four Seasons Care Home on Barkham Road and has been looking to purchase other homes. I also understand the council plans to proceed with a reduced scale Toutley Home. Please can you advise the overall plan with the acquisition of care homes. How many homes / beds are you planning to purchase or build and what is the future of Suffolk Lodge?

Answer

As I am sure you know, all the information I can give you must be in the public domain. The number of older people who are expected to require residential and nursing care provision, funded by the council, is projected to rise. This will probably be from 284 residents in 2020 to 499 residents by 2040.

On the 29th June 2023, the Executive considered a report by the Leader of the Council and the Executive Member for Business and Economic Development on the Toutley East Development and the residential delivery model. This unfortunately identified that the current delivery model for the care home was no longer delivering good value for money to the Council and its residents. The Executive was therefore requested to agree a pause to the delivery of the care home at the Toutley East site, whilst alternative models of delivery for the care home are considered. This altered scheme, if it progresses, will still give an excellent dementia care home.

Suffolk Lodge is a well-loved care home within the community run by Optalis providing a good standard of care. There are no plans to change this whilst we explore the delivery method and delivery of a new care home.

On 14th July, the administration was delighted to announce the acquisition of the Berkshire Care Home. Wokingham Borough Council has now exchanged contracts with Four Seasons Health Care on the purchase of the home on Barkham Road, Wokingham. Information regarding this purchase is in the public domain, we are not however, able to give further information until the purchase is completed, due to our contractual obligation. Like Suffolk Lodge this 50 bed care home, that will be run by Optalis, is well loved by residents even though it might not have the cutting edge technology of a new home. To manage demand for local authority funded care, we are looking to increase our portfolio of care homes in the borough. We will continue to work with the market to ensure sufficiency but our offer will include a mixture of new developments and acquisitions. .

Supplementary Question:

I understand that the acquisition was funded by the Property portfolio investment group. Which was set up 3-4 years ago, to buy assets for commercial return. Can you confirm if that is the case? Also are you able to send me a copy of the business plan.

Answer:

I can send you the business plan. I haven't heard what you have set out in terms of funding, I am happy to send you a written response.

30. COUNCILLOR SHAHID YOUNIS HAS ASKED THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT, SPORT AND LEISURE THE FOLLOWING QUESTION:

Question:

There was a recent Council press announcement that the number of rubbish bins in the borough will be reduced, and the remaining bins will be emptied less frequently.

There are already reports of bins being covered with black bags and waste piling up around overflowing bins.

Inevitably, this will result in piling up of litter around the streets, footpaths and children's play areas and risks encouraging vermin. Who will be responsible for clearing up this mess and what extra costs will it incur?

Answer

The Council is currently projecting significant financial pressures both in the current and future financial years and these must be addressed if we are to maintain statutory services and in particular support those in most need.

The Council has worked hard to find a way forward with its contractors and began to implement its budget and service changes which included the taping over of some bins. Given the impact of these changes it is recognised that the Council began this work without the appropriate approvals and necessary supportive work in place.

Investigations and efforts by the Council have begun to remedy or mitigate the changes in service and a consultation will be held in due course that will consider frequency and prioritisations of street cleaning activities to address the very issue raised In the question, whilst remaining within the funding available, a recent media release has been recently issued that provides more detail and context pending the completion of a review. We are working to minimise the cost of additional clearance where possible and to complete the review as quickly as possible.

Supplementary Question:

I believe there was a list of bins which are to be taken out, when will that list be made public? Will you be sticking with this list following the review or will there be a new one?

Answer:

I'm asking that the list be part of the consultation and that list will be subject to input from both Ward councillors and from members of the public. I'm not sure that the bins that were selected, were the correct ones and we want to make sure that those going forward will be the correct ones.

31. COUNCILLOR GRAHAM HOWE HAS ASKED THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES THE FOLLOWING QUESTION:

Question:

The Bohunt school expansion was unanimously agreed by Full Council in March 2022, including Sixth Form, SEND provision and extra year 7 places.

The budget was £4.5 million.

Following the Liberal Democratic/Labour Coalition last year, costs were forecast at £6.5 million. The increase was partly change in specification for the extra provisions and material cost increases due to COVID.

We then learned that there were delays with contracts.

Councillors Shenton and Cornish said, presumably informed by the Executive Member, that the Bohunt facilities would open September 2023 but then published a public apology saying it was not going to happen. The Wokingham Paper stated from Liberal Democratic sources that the Bohunt Trust was not going ahead with the project. This was not the truth. The Bohunt Trust were considering what extra contribution they could make to the project, not to abandon it.

We now learn that costs are nearer £10.5 million, an extraordinary 2 1/2 times the original estimate.

Can the Executive Member put an end to opaque, changing stories so that residents of Bohunt community can be informed but also other Wokingham schools impacted, and can she give a clear explanation of the provision, the costs, and timelines?

Answer

Before I give my response, I would like to exonerate Councillor Ian Shenton from the above, he did not make any comment.

In March 2022, the Council's Executive approved the proposal to part fund a scheme to create a new sixth form, create additional Year 7 places and enhance inclusion at the Bohunt Wokingham School. At the time, the project was intended to provide a 300 place sixth form, opening in the near future with costs split between the council (£3.7m) and the Bohunt Education Trust (BET) (£2m). The cost was estimated by BET in its business case submitted to the Council.

However, the original financial budget, as indicated in BET business case for the sixth form accommodation, is significantly underestimated for delivering a new build expansion to the school. This follows more detailed design work and costings of the initially proposed scheme taking into account the government's school building standards and significant inflation costs. The current estimated cost of the proposed new build expansion is £10.5m.

Working with BET, officers are working on options available to bring sixth form education to Bohunt and a further report on the timescales and costs will be reported back to me in Autumn.

While the options are being explored, the school has informed the Department of Education (DFE) that it has not been possible to secure the commencement of a 6th form offer from September 2023 as originally proposed. The council are working to provide information to assist the students affected by this to find alternative sixth form places

available in the Wokingham area. Other schools in Wokingham, including Forest School have sufficient available places to admit students from Bohunt.

Supplementary Question:

First of all I apologise to Councillor Shenton, I have misquoted. It was another councillor who made that social media statement alongside Councillor Cornish. I know that it is difficult to get these sorts of project through. There is a vast change here, now in the spirit of collaboration and getting things done for the community that Bohunt would service, what is it that you need from your co-councillors to make this happen?

Answer:

I would suggest that there are councillors in the area around the school perhaps not of my own political party, who might like to get their facts accurately evidenced, when they are making statements on social media and that would be a great assistance in getting this project sorted out. There is a report on the agenda this evening, I'm quite happy to receive questions from any Member, we are expecting to bring a report back in the autumn and we are working with the school. I would rather people come and asked me about things rather than putting misleading statements on social media.

32. DELIVERY OF WELLINGTON ROAD AFFORDABLE HOUSING SCHEME

The Leader reported that this Scheme would make a welcome contribution to the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) properties, catering particularly to two groups in particular need of affordable housing, care leavers and key workers. He thanked Housing officers for working hard to bring this Scheme before the Executive for decision.

The Executive Member for Equalities, Inclusion and Fighting Poverty stated that she was also pleased to see this scheme before the Executive. It was an area with good transport links, providing opportunities for travel to education and work. The Cost of Living had pushed many into a very precarious position, this Scheme would help to alleviate some of the pressures. The Scheme was also very sustainable.

RESOLVED: that Executive approved:

- (1) the expenditure budget of the total costs of the scheme of up to £6,600,000 be funded through a combination of borrowing, capital receipts, developer contributions and Homes England funding. To note: budget approval would be dependent on Homes England grant being awarded;
- (2) the release of up to £3m commuted sums (developer contributions for affordable housing) to be used in conjunction with borrowing via the Housing Revenue Account ("HRA") and Homes England grant as per the proposed funding model;
- (3) that the scheme goes into the Housing Revenue Account ("HRA").

33. CAPITAL MONITORING 2023/24 - QUARTER 1

The Executive Member for Finance advised that this report presented the position in terms of capital spend at the end of quarter one. The report showed the additional cost of Winnersh Park and Ride of an additional £600,000. Other savings had been identified to compensate for this overspend in part.

The Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport & Highways reported that the Scheme had now been completed but that the delays had led to the developer submitting compensation costs.

It was noted that the initial spend for the Berkshire Records office was agreed at full Council in July 2021, since then costs had risen considerably, all councils had subsequently been asked to increase funding to address the increased costs. This was an unavoidable cost.

RESOLVED: that the Executive:

- 1) noted the position of the capital programme at the end of Quarter 1 (to 30 June 2023) as summarised in the report and set out in detail in Appendix A to the report;
- 2) approved and noted the proposed carry forwards in the capital programme as set out in Appendix B; and
- 3) approved a supplementary estimate of £222,000 for Wokingham's share of the Berkshire Archives Extension project.

34. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2023-24 QUARTER 1

The Executive Member for Finance reported that this quarter one report highlighted the serious situation that the Council finds itself in. Significant challenges were presented in this quarter, as a result of rising inflation. Revenue overspend was currently approximately £2.9m this year. This could potentially be exacerbated by other pressures such as the annual staff pay awards. If inflation continued to rise, the problems would worsen.

The graph in the agenda papers showed the effect that inflation was having on the Council, which was adding an unprecedented shortfall of over £11m in the year 2022-23, progressing into this financial year. This was the reason that significant changes to services were needed, such as the increase to car parking charges and changes to litter bin provision. Unprecedented inflation had forced the Council into this difficult situation.

It was noted that councils were not allowed to go bankrupt, the government was required to step in if this was likely to happen. Councils such as Slough, Thurrock and Woking had all been required to accept government intervention. Others such as Southampton, Guildford, Birmingham, Kent and Hastings amongst others had expressed they were in financial difficulty and faced an unsustainable future. Government intervention would lead to very little choice and minimal service delivery, Slough had been required to significantly increase council tax.

If Wokingham could not claw back from its overspend, similar problems would be faced as the Councils already mentioned. It was critical that the council continued to support low income families and made significant savings to protect the borough's most vulnerable residents. Wokingham received the lowest grant from government and was therefore left with no other option than to make savings to ensure the solvency of the council.

The Executive Member for Environment, Sport & Leisure reported that statutory duties continued to grow year on year, yet funding continued to fall, the net result was that the council was forced to continue to cut in non-statutory areas.

The Executive Member for Children's Services reported that Children's Services continued to contribute to the majority of the predicted overspend, the council was battling hard to prevent costs from escalating. Two particular aspects where costs were being reviewed were, home to school transport and cost of placements of children with complex needs.

RESOLVED that the Executive:

- 1) noted the overall forecast of the current position of the General Fund revenue budget, Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) illustrated in the Executive Summary and appendices attached to the report.
- 2) noted the proposed consultation and timeline on grass cutting, public bin collections and street cleaning as set out in the report.

35. SHAREHOLDERS REPORT

The Executive Member for Finance reported that this report was produced in the interests of transparency and set out the performance of each company.

RESOLVED that the Executive noted:

- 1) the Housing companies' budget and operational position for 2022/23 financial year and
- 2) the Optalis budget and operational position for 2022/23 financial year.

36. BOHUNT WOKINGHAM SCHOOL SIXTH FORM: UPDATE AND BUDGET

The Executive Member for Children's Services reported that a twin track approach was being taken to this work to develop the new build/existing build.

RESOLVED that the Executive:

- 1) noted the progress made on the Bohunt Wokingham School to date, and
- 2) requested that the options to bring 6th form education to Bohunt and a further report on the timescales and costs be reported back to the Executive in Autumn.

37. LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME 2023

The Executive Member for Planning and the Local Plan reported that the report set out the next stage for the Local Plan and provided an opportunity for residents to comment. The Leader expressed his thanks to the Executive Member for all his work on this, including the immensely complex set of calculations.

RESOLVED that the Executive adopts the Local Development Scheme 2023, attached as Enclosure 1 of the agenda papers.

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**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE EXECUTIVE
HELD ON 24 AUGUST 2023 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.13 PM**

Members Present

Councillors: Stephen Conway (Chair), Prue Bray (Vice-Chair), Rachel Bishop-Firth, Lindsay Ferris, Paul Fishwick, David Hare, Clive Jones, Ian Shenton and Imogen Shepherd-DuBey

Apologies:

Councillor Sarah Kerr

38. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

39. STATEMENT FROM THE LEADER

The Leader advised that he did not propose to give a statement, but to move expediently to the substantive item on the agenda.

40. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

40.1 Chris Roberts asked the Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Question:

Many families, such as my own have profoundly disabled, children. The respite of specialist college placements, such as Newbury allow us to remain together as a family unit. If the Executive force through this short-sighted proposal, then it will become a Pyrrhic victory of monumental proportions.

Many young people will no longer be able to attend their college courses and will remain at home with their family carers 24/7, the sheer pressure will lead to family breakdowns and considerable additional work for your social worker teams.

From a financial perspective the weekly residential care costs for a young person with complex and profound needs ranges from £5,000 to over £8,500 per week. You may save £500,000+ on your transport budget, but your adult social care budget would have increased exponentially, through social worker and emergency placement costs, whilst your residential care costs will go up by millions more.

Please listen to the parents, who continue to care for our disabled young people at home. The only result of this policy will be to break-up families, cause heartbreak and confusion for the disabled, whilst costing the Council millions more in residential placement costs. Is this something you really want to do?

Answer:

We appreciate that many families will be concerned about changes to home to school transport policies. It would not make sense for us to make changes which resulted in huge

additional costs elsewhere, and we wish to reassure you and other potential service users that we will assess each case on its merit, in the best interest of the young person and the Council. There is no change to our existing approach that we will continue to make an appropriate alternative arrangement to meet children and young people's needs, where exceptional situations justify it.

Supplementary Question:

As a SEND (special educational needs & disability) parent, who chose a college place for my profoundly disabled son, I had to choose a place in Newbury and the distance wasn't through choice, it was because there was nothing suitable in the immediate surroundings. My young son has got a condition called 'Road blindness' which means he just runs out into the road and it was deemed unsafe for him to attend either Reading College or Bracknell & Wokingham College. Newbury College sits in a field and was deemed to be a safe place.

In terms of young people and families with special needs who do have further placements this is not a decision which is taken lightly. They have been placed at these establishments which are further from their homes purely based on health and safety needs.

Answer:

I understand exactly what you are saying and you are not alone in your concerns on this. We will be placing children in accordance with their needs and not trying to make them go to the nearest establishment if it is not suitable. We have no intention of trying to change things where need is there. You highlighted that we do not have enough in-borough provision. This is something we are looking at, as we recognise it is a gap in our provision.

40.2 Sarah Clarke asked the Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Sarah Clarke was not in attendance but the Executive Member for Children's Services stated that she wished for the question to be read out in any event and given a response.

Question:

Please can it be explained how the transport policy change to Independent Travel and Personal Budgets for those with SEND is going to reduce the transport budget when there is no cost analysis of the current costs for post 16 or what the cost of the proposed changes potentially will be. No information, on numbers travelling, distances currently being travelled and whether or not person budgets will cover those costs or be overpaying for that travel. What will be the potential cost of travel training and personal budgets vs current transport costs and how can the committee make an informed decision without this information?

Answer

The proposed change to the Post-16 transport offer to Independent Travel Training and a Personal Budget as the default options is part of the overall package which is aimed at ensuring we have a sustainable home to school transport service for the long term, rather than immediately reducing spend. In particular, with this particular change, we want to do better and prepare our young people for adulthood and future employment. We aim to provide our young people with the skill and resources they need to become more independent.

Personal budgets will empower young people and their families by giving them the flexibility to make their own choices, which suit their own circumstances and individual needs and they are already in use in other local authority areas

We cannot predict what proportion of young people will have Personal Transport Budgets or Travel training, or exactly where young people will be studying or how far they will have to travel. Or indeed, how many young people will qualify for travel assistance in total in future years. This makes it nigh on impossible to provide a meaningful cost comparison between the current spend and future spend on post-16 transport, which is why we have not provided one.

But to give you some idea of what the impact may be, in the 22/23 academic year there were 62 Post-16 students receiving travel assistance from the Council. Two-thirds of Post-16 students were travelling to Post-16 education in Wokingham borough, to Reading or Bracknell & Wokingham Colleges or to Berkshire College of Agriculture. There are public transport networks or a bespoke college coach network in place to aid travel to these destinations.

Looking at what would happen if we were to pay mileage instead of having a Personal Transport Budget, in 65% of cases a mileage payment would be less, removing the flexibility for a young person to make their own choices about how they travel. Where mileage payments could be more, in most cases there are travel options which can be achieved within the personal budget. For cases where there are no suitable travel options the proposed Post-16 policy includes an appeals process, which allows cases to be reviewed on an individual, case-by-case basis. This means that if it turns out that, for example, Council Operated Transport is the right option for a particular student, that option will still be available.

40.3 Terri Walsh asked the Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Terri Walsh was unable to attend the meeting but the Executive Member stated that she wished to read out the question in any event and give a response.

Question:

Please can the "nearest suitable learning provider is the closest school or college to the home address able to offer a suitable level of Study" be clarified to make it clear that in line with the post-16 Transport & Travel to support Education statutory guidance Jan 2019, the Local Authority "29: must have regard to b) The need to ensure that young people have reasonable opportunities to choose between different establishments at which education is provided" and that a young person will be able to choose the post-16 course they wish e.g. electrician over catering as opposed to level of training course, which may mean attending a closer college, but not doing the course/qualification they want to do in order to qualify for travel assistance.

Wokingham Borough Council need to ensure a SEND young person has the same right to study a course of their choosing as their peers and they shouldn't be forced into a course not of their choosing due to just meeting a "level" of education.

Answer:

The Council would not want to disadvantage any young person from making a reasonable choice for their future education. The Post-16 Travel Assistance policy is applicable to all

post-16 students, including those young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

Travel assistance will be considered to the nearest setting that indicates they can deliver the provision that a young person with additional needs/disabilities requires to meet their needs, as well as offering an appropriate accompanying course.

An appropriate course is one that enables the young person to meet their learning and/or employment objectives or is specifically designed to meet the student's special educational needs. For young people with SEND, preferred courses should be discussed at their annual review and their views and aspirations will be considered along with how their choice of course will meet their learning objectives. Subsequently their Educational Health Care Plan and any course named within the plan for post-16 education would be considered as a reasonable choice, for transport purposes.

You will have noticed that I have used the word “reasonable” several times. That is a word which appears in the legislation. There are bound to be cases where reasonableness is disputed – for example, if the choice is between an NVQ Level 2 in Carpentry at a nearby provider and NVQ Level 2 in Joinery at one further away. But each case will be looked at on an individual case-by-case basis, to ensure that we meet the needs of the young person as well as we can.

Finally, there was no intention to change this aspect of the policy but it seems our rewording for clarity did not work, as it resulted in a lot of discussion at the Children’s Services Overview & Scrutiny meeting, and you have asked this question. To give you some reassurance, we have revisited this and reworded it, and I repeat that that the situation with regard to choice of course remains as it was before.

40.4 Matthew Lawlor asked the Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Question:

Given that unlike parents, the council transport planning team has the technical expertise to evaluate transport provider bids and suitability (including enhanced criminal record checks etc for safeguarding), a combined transport demand which enables price competition, the legal clout of the council/ legal team to enforce contracts and the ability to combine multiple passengers into shared journeys which is more efficient on resources and for the environment and congestion, can the travel policy specify for 16-19s the continued provision for council-organised and funded transport for vulnerable and SEND young people where they are not able to travel independently to their nearest suitable school, college or supported internship.

Answer:

The Council’s Post-16 transport policy is aimed at preparing our young people for adulthood and future employment. We aim to provide our young people with the skill and resources they need to become more independent.

Personal budgets will empower young people and their families to make their own choices, which suit their own circumstances and individual needs. Where additional support for families is needed to help identify travel options, the Council can look at the best way this support can be provided.

If a young person's needs are such that they cannot travel independently to their nearest suitable school, college or supported internship, the Post-16 policy includes an appeals process which allows for cases to be looked at on an individual basis.

To put all that a different way, we want to do what we can to help prepare SEND young people for adulthood. Giving options for travel to their post-16 education is part of promoting the idea of independence, which is something that will help equip them for the future. We know that this is not realistic for everyone and that some young people will still need council operated transport, and that option will still be available for those who are assessed as needing it.

So, to answer your question directly, yes, the policy does include the possibility of council-operated transport for SEND young people where they are not able to travel independently.

Supplementary Question:

If you can't travel independently, the need to go through another appeal is another battle for SEND families. Can you consider that you could make, centrally organised transport the outcome of an application, rather than needing to go through an appeal process.

Answer:

We wanted to make the Personal Travel Budget the default option which makes it difficult to put the other one in as a first option, but there are undoubtedly children for whom Council operated transport will be the only outcome. We will consider how that will operate. I would also like to add, once a child has got arrangements in place, that will not be changed, unless their circumstances change or they are assessed in a different way. We are not planning to move away from Council operated transport from people who have already been given it, unless there is a change in their circumstances. I hope that provides some reassurance. We will look at point you have made, as I can see your rationale.

40.5 Rachel Lawlor asked the Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Question:

Young people with SEND have limited options for Post-16 education. One option for EHCP (Education & Health Care Plan) learners is a supported internship, a full-time educational programme with work placements.

The national guidance states in section 22 that "arrangements to support learners undertaking apprenticeships and traineeships should also be set out in the transport policy". I can see no information on this in the proposed policy. Will you please confirm that a section on this will be included and that young people with SEND will be supported to travel to such a programme?

Answer:

Section 3 of the Post-16 Transport Policy sets out the eligibility criteria which the Council will use to identify if a young person will be provided with travel assistance. If a full-time educational programme with work placements is provided by:

- a school,
- further education institution,
- Council maintained or assisted institution providing higher or further education
- Establishment funded directly by the Education Skills Funding Agency, or a

- Learning provider delivering accredited programmes of learning, which lead to positive outcomes and are funded by the council, for example, colleges, charities, and private learning providers

Then travel assistance will be assessed to this provider's location. The standard transport offer will be a personal budget. It will be for the young person to determine how to spend their personal budget to access any work placements which form part of their course.

If the young person is not enrolled on a full-time course which is provided by one of the above providers, then they will not meet the eligibility criteria for travel assistance. Section 2 of the Post-16 transport policy provides information about Travel Assistance offered by External Organisations and is applicable to all young people, including those who do not meet any other eligibility criteria.

In all cases where a young person or their family believe they have exceptional circumstances, an appeal for travel assistance may be made in accordance with Section 4 of the policy. This discretionary arrangement has not been changed.

That is all a very technical way of explaining that under the policy if the apprenticeship or traineeship is run by an educational establishment and is full-time, the young person can apply for travel assistance in the same way as for any other post-16 course of study but may have to make special arrangements to get to any work placements involved.

40.6 Michelle Felton asked the Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Question:

The proposed policy acknowledges some SEND pupils post-16 cannot get to school/college via a Personal Travel Budget (PTB), yet they must apply for PTB, wait for the end-of-term PTB decision, then appeal for Council Operated Transport instead. The proposed policy construction and timeframes inevitably will result in summer-born SEND pupils who are unable to use a PTB starting their first term without necessary transport assistance.

Please could the Executive amend this to allow parents to make the case for a need for COT that cannot be met by PTB in the initial application, instead of waiting until after PTB is awarded. This will allow pupils to have transport assistance in place at the start of term, and the council to avoid processing these applications twice.

Answer:

Travel assistance can be applied for at any time.

We would advise that as soon as a young person knows where they will be travelling to for their post-16 education that they submit their application for travel assistance.

Officers will aim to determine initial applications within 10 working days of their receipt, although this maybe slightly longer at busy times (July through to September).

Section 15 of the Post-16 policy provides details of the appeals procedure. If an appeal is required a Stage 1 Appeal will be heard within 20 working of a request being made. Should a case progress to a Stage 2 Appeal then this will be heard within 40 working days

of the request. Officers will always aim to process cases as quickly as possible. Please note that the time limits for appeals are a maximum time, not a minimum.

Supplementary Question:

Council Operated Transport (COT) could you explain the logic behind a child reaching 16, who is assessed as not being able to travel independently, who has had COT throughout childhood. Can you explain the logic of not being able to use a personal transport budget for COT or to have COT as an option.

Answer:

We are trying to change the focus of post 16 travel for children with SEND so that it helps promote their independence, as they move into adulthood and away from Children's Services support. When they become an adult, there is not that wraparound support in the same way. There is support, but not quite as comprehensive and we do want to promote independence where we can.

We do recognise there are children for whom that will never be appropriate. If your child is assessed as needing COT at present and it is quite clear that they will never be able to operate a personal travel budget, the likelihood is that it will just continue seamlessly.

There may need to be an appeals process, but these appeals will need to have a quick turnaround. There are more children than you might think that will be suitable for a personal travel budget or training for independent travel. The reason this is being promoted is for the young person's benefit and not the Council.

This doesn't come in until September 2024, and we will continue to look at the detail.

41. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

There were no questions submitted on this occasion.

42. HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT - REVISED POLICY

The Executive were advised that there were a number of supplementary papers relating to this item, one of which summarised the recommendations of the Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee which met on 15 August 2023.

It was noted that the Executive had also received the full set of minutes from this meeting.

A set of revised recommendations had been tabled which took into account what was discussed at the Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 15 August and what had emerged from the consultation exercise.

The Leader extended a welcome to the Chair of the Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee who would be addressing the Executive. He invited the Executive Member for Children's Services to introduce the report.

The Executive Member for Children's Services made the following statement:

'What I am bringing you tonight is a complete overhaul of the Council's Home to School Transport policies.

We have held a public consultation on our proposed changes, and the outcome of that went to the Children's Service Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 15 August, and in a moment, we will hear from Andrew, the chair, about the committee's views. I would like to thank all the members of the committee for their constructive and thorough engagement on the policies. I would also like to thank everyone who responded to the consultation and I note that many of the proposals we made won support.

Home to school transport can be quite an emotive issue if you have a school-age child. That is particularly true for parents of children with special educational needs and disabilities. I do understand how the idea of change can cause anxiety and concern for those parents and children. I also understand that people may not have the rosiest view of the council, and that therefore the prospect of changing the policies immediately makes them fear the worst. On top of that, we have reformulated the policy over quite a short period of time, which quite possibly has stoked the idea that the outcome is predetermined. Coming at a time when the council is having to make cuts to non-statutory services, there is also bound to be a suspicion that we are simply after saving money and not looking at the interests of the children affected.

Now, it is true that the home to school transport budget has exploded over the last few years. It is also true that we wish to bring it under control, but these changes are not being made in order to produce a saving this year. They could not do that because if we approve the new policies tonight they will not come into effect until September 2024.

There is a financial driver behind the changes of sorts, but it is not a requirement to meet a savings target. It is more about trying to ensure that we make as efficient use of the limited resources we have as possible, and about delivering the maximum we can for the most children and young people we can, and in particular for those children who face the most challenges. We need to eliminate waste, and inefficiency. So, to give an example, in the new policy we will be asking people who have applied for transport for their children on medical grounds to supply the medical evidence within 20 days if possible. Previously, some cases have dragged on for months while we waited for the evidence or for any communication from parents. But we won't simply withdraw the transport if someone can't get their doctor to send in a letter within 20 days, provided they communicate with us and tell us what the delay is. I hope you agree it is not sensible to allow a completely open-ended period to respond.

There are some important issues to do with promoting independence for young people with SEND associated with the post-16 changes. But the main purpose of making the changes is to get a policy that will help us sustain the home to school transport service in the context where we have very limited resources.

It is very difficult to quantify how these changes will affect the spend. That's one reason why there are no figures for costs. I think the most I can say is that we believe that the spend will not go up as much as it would have if we had not taken action.

At this point it would probably be good to talk about why this is happening now. Home to school transport policy has to be agreed a year before it comes into effect. So, we need to have a new policy in place by mid-September this year in order to use it next year. Although we had been looking at the huge increases in the budget – around 90% over the past 4 years – we did not have an opportunity to look at how to address them at an earlier time. Bear in mind that we only became the administration in May 2022, and had rather a lot to do in Children’s Services, including ensuring we got a Safety Valve deal with the government to enable us to deal with a huge deficit on the SEND budget which had been accumulating since 2017 and had begun to grow rapidly, and which could have bankrupted the council in the next 6 years if not dealt with.

Part of the Safety Valve deal is about revising and improving our SEND offer. As part of that, last year we bid for and have been granted two additional SEND schools for the borough, which should be opening in about 2028. It is the creation of more SEND provision in the borough that is actually going to be of most benefit in reducing the home to school transport budget, not changes to the policy.

Only having got through Safety Valve and also an Ofsted inspection in March, plus dealing with a critical shortage of school places, we then had to grasp the nettle of dealing with home to school transport. We didn’t want it to be delayed for another year, so it had to be done at pace. I am very grateful to all the officers who put such a lot of effort in to produce the policies.

Despite the short timeframe, as well as a public consultation, we have also had the policies subjected to a sort of peer challenge and taken external legal advice. This is a complex area and we don’t want to get it wrong.

In connection with that, it is important to make it clear that there is no change to the fact that each case, particularly where SEND children and young people are concerned, will be looked at on its own individual merits. We are not going to try to make blanket decisions. That would be potentially discriminatory. It certainly would not be in the best interests of the child or young person. It is because each case is different that we cannot write the policies in such a way as to nail down all criteria. For example, we cannot make a rule that all managed moves will not qualify for transport, or that they will qualify. It will depend on the circumstances of each managed move and the interests of the child.

One of the thorniest issues in creating the new policy was trying to make sure the language was clear. I think from the discussion that will take place in a moment it will become clear that we did not always initially succeed, but I hope you will be able to see that we have listened. I think it is also important to mention that it is not only the policy that will change. We will be writing guidance for parents and trying to make the links clearer between applying for a school place and your entitlement to transport. We will also be working with all stakeholders to develop a travel training offer. Those things are not part of the policies so are not for our agreement tonight.

Finally, I would like to say that we have tried to listen to everyone and have made and are making changes to the policy in response to feedback. I cannot promise that people will get everything they wanted, but I do believe that we have gone a long way to meet their wishes.'

The Chair of the Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee made the following points:

The purpose of Overview & Scrutiny (O&S) was for elected members and community representatives to undertake a rigorous, independent, critical friend review of a policy area. The Committee considers evidence submitted by a range of sources and offers advice and recommendations which are based on the weight of evidence and not on party political grounds.

He stated that he did not propose to go through each recommendation of the O&S Committee, he noted that many of the matters raised in the minutes of the Children's Services O&S Committee had been addressed by the Executive Member for Children's Services and by the tabled revised recommendations. He highlighted the following areas:

Recommendation 6 a) the O&S Committee had recommended that the provision of travel assistance for children under statutory school age, continue. (covered on pages 3-4 of the draft O&S Committee minutes) He noted that the revised recommendations now included that a request to exercise discretion in a particular case, could be requested. This was welcomed.

Recommendation 6 b) the O&S Committee recognised that it was implicit that when individual cases considered, a test of reasonableness was imperative.

Recommendation 6 d) again the O&S Committee reiterated the importance of the test of reasonableness.

Finally, the O&S Committee considered it important that young people eligible for post 16 travel assistance, were supported to attend the nearest, most suitable educational setting. He was pleased to see that this recommendation had been taken on board and reviewed in the policy. He gave his thanks and reiterated the importance of the test of reasonableness being integral to this work.

The Leader and Executive Member for Children's Services thanked the O&S Committee for adding real value to this work, which had led to revised recommendations. This had helped to clarify, amplify and in some cases review of proposals.

It was noted that the policy under consideration was unrelated to the travel arrangements currently under discussion relating to Shinfield buses/transport.

RESOLVED that the Executive:

1. Noted the impacts and mitigations set out in the Equality Impact Assessment ([Annex 1](#))
2. Noted the outcomes of the 28 working day public consultation ([Annex 2](#))

3. Approved changes to the Home to School/College Travel Assistance policies having considered the above documents and the recommendations and actions arising from the Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny meeting of 15th August 2023.
4. Approved the revised Home to School/College Travel Assistance policies, taking into account the response to the recommendations and actions arising from the Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny meeting of 15th August 2023, delegating final sign off to the Director of Children's Services in consultation with the lead member for Children's Services
 - I. Home to School Travel Assistance Policy for children and young people **16 years old and under**, including young people with Special Educational Need and Disabilities (SEND) ([Annex 3](#))
 - II. Transport Assistance Policy for young people resident in Wokingham **post-16**, including young people with SEND([Annex 4](#))
5. Approved the implementation of the new Travel Assistance Policies from the academic year commencing September 2024
6. Agreed that the Director of Children's Services in consultation with the Executive Member for Children's Services has delegated authority to approve the statement every year where there are no substantial changes.

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TITLE	Risk Management Policy and Guidance
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 28 September 2023
WARD	(All Wards);
LEAD OFFICER	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Finance – Imogen Shepherd-DuBey

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

Enterprise Risk Management (ERM) provides for robust and transparent decision-making. Effective ERM is therefore an integral part of the Council's governance arrangements and helps demonstrate the effective use of resources and sound internal controls. The Council's Risk Management Policy and Guidance sets out the policy framework and formal guidance to enable pro-active identification and management of risk.

RECOMMENDATION

Executive approves the Risk Management Policy and Guidance noting the comments made by Audit Committee on the 19 July.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Risk Management Policy and Guidance provides the policy framework for the management of risk in the Council. The Policy outlines the scope, principles and roles and responsibilities for risk management in the Council. The Risk Management Guidance provides detailed guidance on implementing the Risk Management Policy. Both documents have been updated following their annual review to reflect learning during the year and developments in risk management theory.

The Risk Management Group and Corporate Leadership Team have reviewed the policy and guidance. The main changes to the policy and guidance are a result of a review against the Treasury's updated "Orange Book: Management of risk – Principles and Concepts (2023)". There is no dedicated risk management standard for local authorities. The Orange Book is aimed at the Civil Service, so the principles outlined within have been adapted for a local authority situation.

The review has not established any fundamental weaknesses in the policy or guidance and changes relate to increased clarity and codifying existing best practices. The review incorporates and responds to comments made by the Audit Committee at its meeting on the 19 July 2023.

Changes have been tracked since the previous versions approved by Executive in September 2022. The significant themes of the changes are:

- Greater emphasis on collaborative nature of risk management
- Explicit Integration with other related disciplines (business continuity, health and safety and Procurement)
- Changes to improve clarity and consistency.

BACKGROUND

The Risk Management Policy and Guidance set out the Council's overall approach to risk management. The effective implementation of the Policy and Guidance supports the Council in managing its risks and ensuring the achievement of its strategic objectives.

The Risk Management Policy sets out the Council approach to risk management. It outlines the scope and principles of risk management applied by the Council. The Policy sets out the roles and responsibilities in respect of risk management.

The Risk Management Guidance is the operational guidance for the Council's management of risk. This Guidance details the benefits of risk management, the critical success factors, relationship with other stakeholders and the risk management process. Finally, the Guidance sets out the Council's overall approach to risk appetite.

BUSINESS CASE

The main changes to the Policy and Guidance are a result of a review against the Treasury's updated "Orange Book: Management of risk – Principles and Concepts (2023)". There is no dedicated risk management standard for local authorities. The Orange Book is aimed at the Civil Service, so the principles outlined within have been adapted for a local authority environment.

The changes to the Risk Management Policy are:

- The language used to describe the roles and responsibilities of the Chief Executive have now been simplified to improve clarity and consistency with other roles and responsibilities.
- The practice of the Chief Executive in providing leadership around both governance and culture necessary to support effective risk management has now been codified in the policy. (5.3, p6). The importance of culture to promote risk management has been reflected in the roles and responsibilities of Executive Members (5.9, p8)
- The responsibility for risk facilitation has been changed from the Assistant Director of Governance to the Governance and Risk Manager (5.5, p6). This better reflects their roles and provides greater objectivity to the Assistant Director of Governance in their role as Monitoring Officer.
- The officer Risk Management Group is required to liaise with emergency planning and health & safety enacted by Officers with those responsibilities attending RMG. (5.13, p9)
- The Audit Committee suggested that the RMG is provided with feedback from the Audit Committee (5.13, p9)
- Business Continuity Planning is a responsibility of Assistant Directors. (5.7, p7)
- The Audit Committee identified the need for roles and responsibilities to include challenge in the process. (5.4 p6, 5.12 p8 and 5.13 p9)

The changes to the risk management guidance are more extensive. The main changes are:

- In consultation with the Emergency Planning Team the section on Risk Management, Business Continuity and Emergency Planning have been re-written to reflect their roles. (8.1-8.5, p5)
- The guidance has provided further elaboration on the strategic approach to risk management. This makes explicit areas where strategic risks are likely to materialise during management activities, (10.2, p6). Providing managers with examples of activities where risks are likely to originate i.e. strategic planning, option appraisal, service redesign etc. This follows the Orange Book definitions.
- This is also emphasised in revisions to Stage 1 – Risk Identification (p7). For example, highlighting different sources of risk such as limitations on knowledge or unreliable information.
- Emphasis is added that the risk management process is a cycle and therefore iterative. (p6)
- The collaborative nature of risk assessment is made explicit. (p10) This is suggested by the Orange Book and enacts critical success factors 4 and 7.
- Clarity on the symbols used in the risk register are included (p10/12) to address queries received during the year. For example, the difference between the target risk symbol and actual risk symbols contained on the risk register.
- Additional advice has been including around actions managers can take to manage risk when it is above its target risk (p12), de-escalation (p13), and how mitigating actions should reduce risk (p12).
- Executive, supported by CLT, are responsible for agreeing the total amount of risk that is acceptable to the Council. The guidance has been enhanced to provide advice on the process to reduce the overall amount of risk the Council faces. (p14)
- Audit Committee suggested the inclusion of Reputation as a risk category. (Appendix 2, p19)
- Audit Committee suggested that the focus on residents be increased in (Appendix 3, p20)
- Audit Committee suggested the key role that the Constitution plays in mitigating a range of risks: ethical, partnership, financial and fraud are detailed (7.3, p4)

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	Nil	Yes	Nil
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	Nil	Yes	Nil

Following Financial Year (Year 3)	Nil	Yes	Nil
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Other Financial Information
Whilst there are no direct financial implications, the discipline of risk management mitigates financial risks and can also promote innovation in support of strategic objectives and service delivery; opening the door to the possibility of taking risks to achieve positive outcomes.

Legal Implications arising from the Recommendation(s)
Legal identified no issues.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation
Consultation with Audit Committee

Public Sector Equality Duty
Due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty has been taken in the completion of the review of the Risk Management Policy and Guidance. The Policy and Guidance themselves comply with accessibility standards.

Climate Emergency – <i>This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030</i>
Risk management is an important tool to support the Council in achieving this priority.

Reasons for considering the report in Closed Session
N/A

List of Background Papers
CIPFA/SOLACE Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework HMT Orange Book: Management of Risk – Concepts and Principles

Contact Paul Ohsan Ellis	Service Governance
Telephone Tel: 0118 974 6096	Email paul.ohsan.ellis@wokingham.gov.uk



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Enterprise Risk Management Policy

A Framework for Managing Opportunity and Risk

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Wokingham Borough Council's environment is complex and dynamic. The Council provides services directly, through partnership working and via contractors to all residents of the Borough. The Council's gross annual budget is in excess of £300 million. Risks (threats and opportunities) are inherent in all services and activities provided.
- 1.2 The importance of this Policy to the Council will increase given that the Council is becoming less risk adverse (i.e., accepting greater levels of risk) through its ambitious aspirations for the Borough, service delivery models (companies, trusts and partners), and greater use of technology. Managers will be less controlled through rules based management but empowered to take risks and opportunities as they arise.
- 1.3 The Council and its partners collaborated to produce the Council's Corporate Delivery Plan and long term (2020-2024 Community Vision for the borough: "A great place to live, learn, work and grow and an even better place to do business". The Council has identified six key priorities to enable it to deliver on its Community Vision for the borough.
- 1.4 This Enterprise Risk Management Policy (ERM) commits the Council to an effective Risk Management Guidance in which it will adopt best practices in the identification, evaluation, and control of risks in order to:
 - strengthen the ability of the Council in achieving the Community vision, priorities, and corporate delivery objectives and to enhance the value of the services it provides;
 - adopt best practices in decision making through identification, evaluation and mitigation of risk;
 - integrate and embed proactive risk management into the culture of the Council;
 - heighten the understanding of all the positive risks (opportunities) as well as negative risks (threats) that the Council faces;
 - manage risks cost-effectively and to an acceptable level;
 - reduce the risk of injury and damage;
 - help secure value for money;
 - help enable the Council to be less risk adverse;
 - enhance partnership and project working; and
 - raise awareness of the need for risk management.
- 1.5 This policy will allow management to make better informed decisions and become less risk adverse through a focus on risk and return which in turn will enhance the value of money provided to our taxpayers (domestic and non-domestic). This policy has a key role in supporting the Council's Commercialisation Strategy. This policy will be implemented through the development and application of ERM Guidance. The ERM Guidance shall be

approved by Corporate Leadership Team and Executive on behalf of the Council.

- 1.6 The importance of this policy has been emphasised in 2020 and 2021 with the impact of Covid-19 providing a framework for effectively managing and responding to the new and emerging impacts on all areas of the Council's operations and strategic objectives.

2.0 Scope

- 2.1 The importance of ERM within the Council transcends every policy, Guidance, and individual transaction, since losses arising from the failure to manage risk or take opportunities can have systemic repercussions for the Council. As such, effective ERM is of interest to all our stakeholders including Members, officers, inspectors, residents, taxpayers, and suppliers.



- 2.2 This policy is also applicable to the council's interests in its wholly-owned subsidiaries. The officer responsible for the council's interest in the subsidiary should be familiar with this policy and remains accountable for the management of all such risks.
- 2.3 Nothing in this policy overrides the Health and Safety risk assessment process which aligns with Health and Safety Executive guidance and are recorded in Business World On (BWO). Significant project and H&S risks should be identified on risk registers where appropriate.
- 2.4 The Chief Executive, the Corporate Leadership Team, Extended Corporate Leadership Team, , Members of the Audit Committee, Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Executive should be fully familiar with this policy.

2.5 All other staff and elected Members should be aware of it.

3.0 ERM Principles

3.1 This policy and the ERM Guidance shall be premised upon a common understanding and application of the following principles:

PRINCIPLE 1	The informed acceptance of risk is an essential element of good governance and management.
PRINCIPLE 2	Risk management is an effective means to enhance and protect the Council over time.
PRINCIPLE 3	Common definition and understanding of risks is necessary, in order to better manage those risks and make more consistent and informed decisions.
PRINCIPLE 4	The management of risk is an anticipatory, proactive process, to be embedded in the corporate culture and a key part of strategic planning, business planning and operational management.
PRINCIPLE 5	All risks are to be identified, assessed, measured, managed, monitored, and reported on in accordance with the Enterprise Risk Management Guidance based on best available information.
PRINCIPLE 6	All business activities are to adhere to risk management practices which reflect effective and appropriate levels of internal controls.
PRINCIPLE 7	Directors should bring to the attention of their respective executive portfolio holders all significant risks on a timely basis.

4.0 Approach to ERM

- 4.1 This policy is aligned with the Council's Local Code of Corporate Governance. This policy recognises the actions that Council makes with respect to the achievement of the Community Vision, Corporate Delivery Plan priorities, and objectives are ultimately tied to decisions about the nature and level of risk it is prepared to take and the most effective means to manage and mitigate those risks. ERM covers all the council's risks in a unified and consistent manner.
- 4.2 Risk management at the Council shall be based on an understanding of the quality and nature of the Council's assets and its sources of revenue, and the impact of any associated potential liabilities. This policy, the ERM Guidance, the related management policies and procedures and management committees, shall enable management and the Corporate Leadership Team to meet their ERM responsibilities.
- 4.3 The Council's approach to risk management is detailed in its ERM Guidance which is available on the Council's internet and intranet.

5.0 Assignments and responsibilities

- 5.1 ERM shall be integrated into existing corporate processes, thus becoming part of regular day-to-day operations and activities. ERM shall be a collective and collaborative effort by the Council in order to achieve an effective system for the management of risk.
- 5.2 The following describes the roles and responsibilities that Members and Officers will play in introducing, embedding, and owning the risk management

process and therefore contributing towards the best practice standards for risk management.

5.3 **Chief Executive**

- Ensure that risk management is an essential part of governance and leadership, and fundamental to how the organisation is directed, managed, and controlled at all levels.
- To support an effective risk management culture, they should ensure that expected values and behaviours are communicated and embedded at all levels of the Council.
- Has overall responsibility for the management of all significant risk within the Council including the creation, membership, and functions of management committees with risk management roles. This includes the Corporate Leadership Team and the assignment and performance review of Directors with responsibility for the management of identified risks.
- Plays a critical role in reporting to the Executive on identified strategic risks and communicating the strategic value of effective risk management to the Executive.
- ensuring adequate funding and resources are available for risk management activities.

5.4 **Corporate Leadership Team**

- To collectively ensure that effective systems of risk management and internal control are in place to support the Corporate Governance of the Council.
- To take a leading role in identifying and managing the risks and opportunities to the Council and to set the example and standards for all staff. Including ensuring that decision makers are informed of the risks and opportunities from decisions they make.
- To identify, analyse and profile high-level strategic cross-cutting and emergent risks on a regular basis.
- To approve the target risk for each risk detailed in the Council's Corporate Risk Register, challenging risk assessments and monitoring the total risk faced by the Council.;
- To ensure that appropriate risk management skills training and awareness is provided to appropriate elected Members and staff.

5.5 **Governance and Risk Manager**

- To facilitate the communication and implementation of this Policy and ERM Guidance to all elected Members, Directors, managers, and staff to fully embed them in the Council's service planning and monitoring processes (as per their respective roles and responsibilities).
- To report to Corporate Leadership Team, Executive and Audit Committee on the management of corporate and other significant risks and the overall effectiveness of risk management.
- To provide training and support to relevant members and officers on risk management.
- To co-ordinate all of the Council's risk management registers.

5.6 **Directors**

- Directors are individually responsible for proper monitoring of the risks identified in their relevant service plans, local action plans and for embedding risk management into the service planning of their relevant services.
- Ensuring that the risk management process is part of all major projects, partnerships, commissioning, procurement, and change management initiatives.
- Ensuring that all reports of a strategic nature written for Members include a risk assessment of the options presented for a decision.
- Report regularly to the Corporate Leadership Team on the progress being undertaken to manage their risks and provide updates on the nature of the significant risks in their relevant Directorate areas.
- To determine the risk appetite for each risk detailed in their Directorate Risk Register.
- Provide assurance on the adequacy of their relevant Directorate's risk and control procedures.
- Bring to the attention of their respective Executive portfolio holders all significant risks on a timely basis.

5.7 **Assistant Directors**

In respect of risk management, each Assistant Director is individually responsible for:

- the proper identification, assessment and monitoring of the risks associated in their area of activity.
- bringing to the attention of their Director all significant risks on a timely basis.
- ensuring that all reports of a strategic nature written for Executive Members include a risk assessment of the options being presented for a decision.
- recommending (to the Governance and Risk Manager) risk management training for their staff (where relevant).
- implementing approved risk management action plans.
- maintaining an awareness of risks and feed them into the risk identification process.
- embedding a culture of pro-active risk assessment in their area of activity;
- Ensuring that Business Continuity Plans are effective in mitigating risks.

5.8 **Audit Committee**

To provide independent, objective and high-level focus on the adequacy of governance, risk and control arrangements. In relation to risk management, it does this by:

- reviewing the council's corporate governance arrangements against the good governance framework and consider the local code of governance.
- monitoring the effective development and operation of risk management in the council.
- monitoring progress in addressing risk-related issues.

5.9 **Executive Members**

- Executive members are responsible for governing the delivery of services to the local community. Executive Members therefore have a responsibility to be aware and fully understand the strategic risks that the Council faces;
- Executive members have the responsibility to consider the risks associated with the decisions they make and will be informed of these risks in the reports that are submitted to them. They are required to consider the cumulative level of risk faced by the authority. They cannot avoid or delegate this overall responsibility, as it is vital to their stewardship responsibilities;
- To support a culture that promotes effective risk management.
- To have the knowledge and skills requisite to their role about risk management and to undertake awareness training in respect of ERM as and when specific training needs are identified;
- To receive regular reports, as presented to the Audit Committee covering the implementation of the Council's Risk Management Policy and Guidance, including updates over the management of all strategic risks.

5.10 **Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

To have due regard for this policy, and specifically, when undertaking scrutiny reviews to consider the Executive's risk identification and evaluation process.

5.11 **Members**

To have the knowledge and skills requisite to their role with regard to risk management and to undertake awareness training in respect of ERM as and when specific training needs are identified.

5.12 **Directorate Leadership Teams**

- To collate and challenge on a quarterly basis the key and consistent themes from service, project and partnership risk registers and feed these via their Risk Management Group representative to Corporate Leadership Team and give feedback to the services;
- To collate the highest level and most common operational risks (including those risks of a more health and safety or liability perspective) from a service level for communication and if required, consideration by Corporate Leadership Team;
- To monitor the implementation and embedding of risk management within key Council processes;
- To identify risk management training needs, approve training programmes and presentations;
- To facilitate services on an ongoing basis with maintaining their risk registers and matrix;
- To implement the detail of the Enterprise Risk Management Guidance;

- To ensure that risks and action plans are updated in the Corporate Risk Register;
- To share/exchange relevant information with colleagues in other service areas.

5.13 **Risk Management Group**

The risk management group is composed of each Directorate Risk Management Lead and will meet at least quarterly to:

- To share/exchange relevant information with colleagues in other service areas including feedback from CLT, Executive and the Audit Committee.
- To review the corporate risk register on a quarterly basis and provide challenge on the risk assessment and mitigating actions.
- To identify risks that should be escalated from Directorate risk registers to the corporate risk register and risks that should be de-escalated from the corporate risk register to the relevant Directorate risk register.
- To review the key and consistent themes from Directorate, project and partnership risk registers and feed these to CLT and give feedback to the services.
- To identify interdependencies between risks from a service level that in totality represent strategic risks for consideration by CLT.
- To identify risk management training needs, approve training programmes and presentations.
- Provide support to relevant Members and Officers with regard to risk management in their Directorates.
- To act as a forum for the sharing of best practice.
- To implement the detail of the Enterprise Risk Management Policy.
- Publicise and promote risk management across the council.
- Liaise with Health & Safety and Emergency Planning

5.14 **Internal Audit**

Internal audit will

- provide assurance to the Council through an independent and objective opinion on the control environment comprising risk management, control procedures and governance;
- report to Members on the control environment; and
- provide an Internal Audit Plan (on at least an annual basis) that is based on a reasonable evaluation of risk and to provide an annual assurance statement to the Council based on work undertaken in the previous year.

5.15 **Staff**

Staff have a responsibility to identify risks surrounding their everyday work processes and working environment. They are also responsible for:

- participating in ongoing risk management within service areas;
- actively managing risks and risk actions (where appropriate); and

- demonstrating an awareness of risk and risk management relevant to their role and to take action accordingly.

6.0 Review and Continual Improvement

- 6.1 The Executive shall review and adopt the ERM Policy on a regular basis or when significant changes require a revision of it.
- 6.2 The Council should continue to improve the effectiveness of its risk management arrangements through:
- learning from risk events and the application of controls;
 - review risk occurrences to identify emerging trends; and
 - learn from other organisations about their risk occurrences in order to consider whether there is a likelihood of the Council experiencing a similar occurrence.

Susan Parsonage
Chief Executive

Councillor Stephen Covey
Leader of the Council

Version Control

Date: 31 July 2023

Version: 17.3

Authors: Paul Ohsan Ellis

VERSION	DATE	DESCRIPTION
1.0	15 February 2009	Working Draft
2.0	3 March 2009	Working Draft
3.0	9 March 2009	Initial Release
4.0	11 March 2009	Draft for Consultation
5.0	25 March 2009	Draft for SLB Approval
6.0	30 April 2009	Draft for Audit Committee Adoption
7.0	13 May 2009	Draft for Approved Audit Committee
8.0	14 May 2009	Final Adopted Audit Committee 13/5/09
9.1	18 June 2010	Risk Management Group Refresh 2010-11
9.2	9 July 2010	Revised Draft for SLB Adoption
9.3	9 September 2010	Revised Draft for Audit Committee Adoption
9.4	7 October 2010	Final Adopted Audit Committee 22/09/10
10.0	31 October 2012	Revised Draft for CLT Adoption

11.0	28 November 2012	Final Adopted by Audit Committee
12.0	4 February 2014	Final Adopted by Audit Committee
12.1	21 November 2014	Final Adopted by Audit Committee
13.0	27 November 2015	Final Adopted by Audit Committee
14	6 September 2018	Final Adopted by Audit Committee (18/9/2018)
15	11 June 2020	Draft for adoption by Audit Committee (29/7/2020)
16.1	September 2022	Final for adoption by Executive
17.2	July 2023	Draft for consideration of Audit Committee
17.3	September 2023	Final for approval by Executive

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**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

Enterprise Risk Management Guidance

A Framework for Managing Opportunity and Risk

Date: 29 September 2023

Version: 20.0

Authors: Paul Ohsan Ellis

VERSION	DATE	DESCRIPTION
1.0	15 February 2009	Working Draft
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8.0	14 May 2009	Final approved by Audit Committee
9.0	18 June 2010	Refresh by Corporate Governance Group
10.0	3 September 2010	Refresh for approval by Audit Committee
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12.0	14 November 2012	Final approved by Audit Committee
13.0	22 January 2014	Final approved by Audit Committee
14.0	21 November 2014	Final approved by Audit Committee
15.0	26 November 2015	Final approved by Audit Committee
16.0	6 September 2018	Final approved by Audit Committee
17.0	1 July 2020	Draft for approval by Committee on 29/7/2020
18.0	2 June 2022	Draft for approval by Committee on 2/06/2022
19	29 September 2022	Final approved by Executive
20	September 2023	Approval by Executive

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Risk Management is about managing opportunities and threats to objectives and in doing so helps create an environment of “no surprises”. It is a crucial element of good management and a key part of corporate governance. Risk Management is an everyday mainstream activity and something that is an integral part of the management of the Council.
- 1.2 Risk Management is already inherent in much of what the Council does. Good practices like good safety systems, procurement and contract regulations, financial regulations and internal control are not labelled Risk Management but these and many other processes and procedures are used to manage risk.

2.0 Purpose of the Guidance

- 2.1 The purpose of this Enterprise Risk Management Guidance is to establish a framework for the systematic management of risk, which will ensure that the objectives of the Council’s Risk Management policy are realised.

The Purpose of this Guidance
Define what Risk Management is about and what drives Risk Management within the Council
Set out the benefits of Risk Management and the strategic approach to Risk Management
Outline how the Risk Management will be implemented
Formalise the Risk Management process across the Council

- 2.2 An overview of this framework is detailed in Appendix 1.

3.0 Approval, Communication, Implementation and Review

- 3.1 The Enterprise Risk Management Guidance has been adopted by the Corporate Leadership Team and has been approved by the Executive. It has been issued to:

- All Members of the Council
- Corporate Leadership Team
- All Assistant Directors
- Key Stakeholders
- Other interested parties such as External Audit

- 3.2 It has been placed on the Council’s intranet site so that all members of staff can have access and easily refer to it. It is included on all new staff’s corporate induction. Therefore, all individual members of staff are aware of both their roles and responsibilities for Risk Management within the Council and their service (depending on their own role within the Council). Risk Management is included within the Council’s performance management framework so that staff and managers and Directors are aware of how Risk Management contributes to the achievement of the Council’s and Service objectives.

- 3.3 All elected Members have been issued with a copy of the Guidance. It is part of all newly elected Members' induction to the Council it has been included as a training area within the Members Training and Development Programme. The Guidance will be reviewed annually by the Executive.

4.0 What is Enterprise Risk Management?

- 4.1 Risk is an unexpected future event or action that can affect the Council's ability to achieve its objectives and successfully execute its strategies. It can be a positive (an opportunity) or negative (a threat). Risk Management is the process by which risks are identified, evaluated, and controlled.

- 4.2 It has critical links to the following areas:

- Corporate governance.
- Community focus.
- Structure and processes.
- Standards of conduct.
- Service delivery arrangements; and
- Effective use of resources.

- 4.3 Enterprise Risk Management can be defined as:

“The management of integrated or holistic risk and opportunity in a manner consistent with the virtues of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness. In essence it is about making the most of opportunities (making the right decisions) and about achieving objectives once those decisions are made. The latter is achieved through controlling, transferring and living with risks”.

- 4.4 Risk Management therefore is essentially about identifying the opportunities, risks and weaknesses that exist within the Council. A holistic approach is vital to ensuring that all elements of the Council are challenged including decision making processes, working with partners, consultation processes, existing policies and procedures and also the effective use of assets – both staff and physical assets. This identification process is integral to all our strategic, service and work planning.

- 4.5 Once the risks have been identified the next stage is to prioritise them to identify the key risks to the Council moving forward. Once prioritised it is essential that steps are taken to then effectively manage these key risks. The result is that significant risks that exist within the Council can be mitigated to provide the Council with a greater chance of being able to achieve its objectives. Included within this should also be a consideration of the positive or 'opportunity' risk aspect.

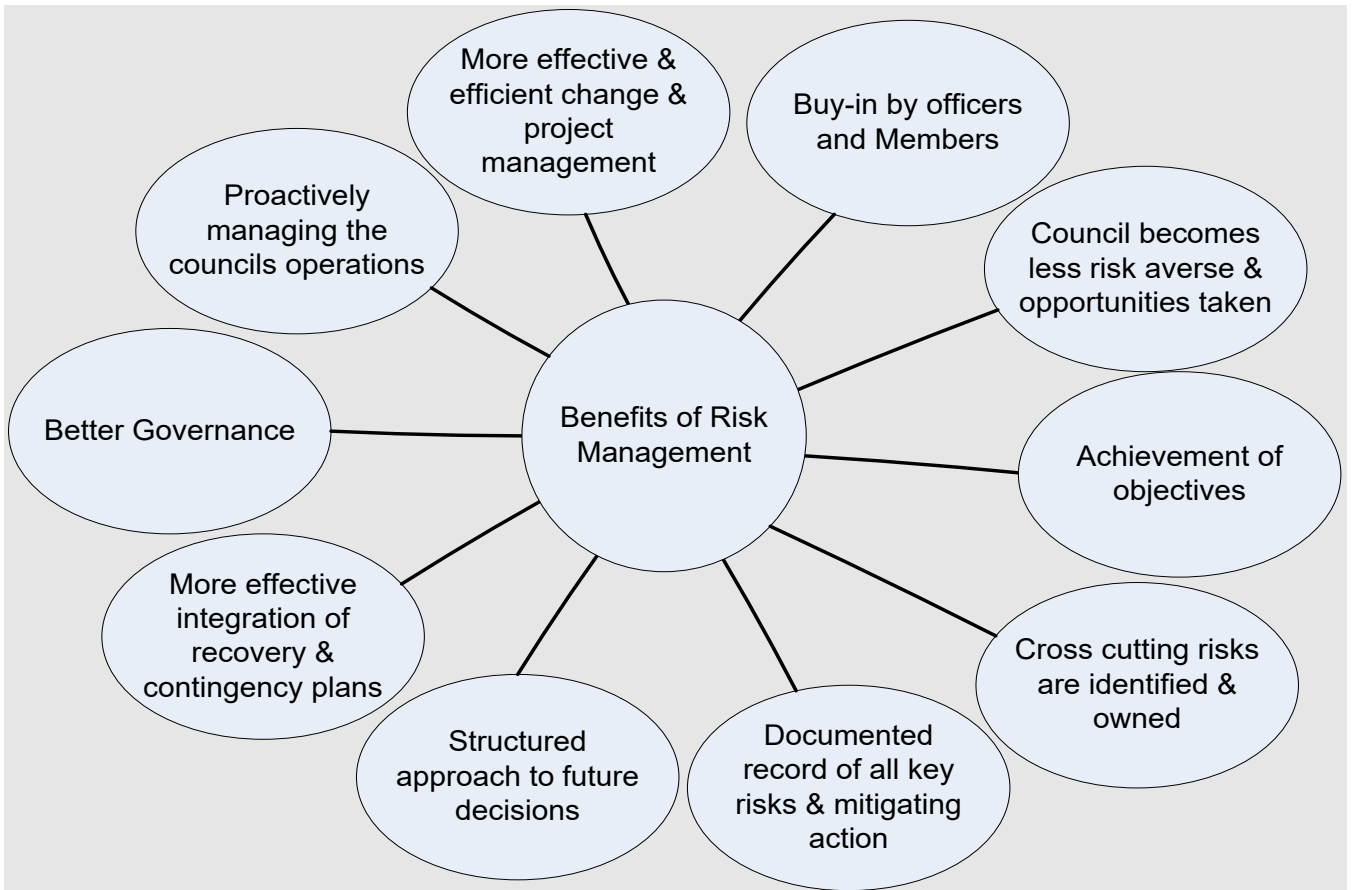
- 4.6 Risk Management will improve the business planning and performance management processes, strengthen the ability of the Council to achieve its objectives and enhance the value of the services provided.

- 4.7 In order to strive to meet the Community Vision, and Corporate Delivery Plan objectives, the Council has recognised the need to further embed Risk Management arrangements. The desired outcome is that risks associated with

these objectives can be managed and the potential impact limited, providing greater assurance that the Vision will be achieved.

5.0 Benefits of Risk Management

5.1 Successful implementation of Risk Management will produce many benefits for the Council if it becomes a living tool. These include:



6.0 Critical Success Factors

6.1 To develop a framework which:

Reference	Critical Success Factors
1	Enables the Council's performance and take advantage of opportunities.
2	Focus on the major risks to our strategies and objectives.
3	Provide a clear picture of the major risks the Council faces, their nature, potential impact and their likelihood.
4	Establish a shared and unambiguous understanding of what risks will be tolerated.
5	Develop an awareness of our ability to control the risks we have identified.
6	Is embedded in our planning and decision-making processes.
7	Actively involve all those responsible for planning and delivering services.
8	Clarify and establish roles, responsibilities and processes.
9	Enable and empower officer to manage those risks in their area of responsibility.
10	Capture information about key risks from across the Council.
11	Include regular risk monitoring and review of the effectiveness of internal control.
12	Is non-bureaucratic, cost efficient and sustainable.

7.0 Relationship between Risk Management and Internal Controls

7.1 The Council recognises that Risk Management is an integral part of its internal control environment. The constitution states that internal controls are required to manage and monitor progress towards strategic objectives.

7.2 The system of internal control also provides measurable achievement of:

- Efficient and effective operations.
- Reliable financial information and reporting.
- Compliance with laws and regulations; and
- Risk Management.

7.3 Management of key risks is embedded in the Council constitution: in particular in relation to ethical, partnership, financial, fraud and procurement risks. The controls for these risks are detailed in the relevant sections of the constitution.

7.4 Internal Audit uses the Council's Risk Registers to inform their work. Internal Audit provide assurance on a cyclical work programme on the Council's key risks as identified by management using this guidance. The Internal Audit overall opinion is an objective assessment of the current and expected level of control. The overall opinion is a statement of the audit view of managements effectiveness in managing the risk.

8.0 Risk Management, Business Continuity and Emergency Planning

- 8.1 There is a link between these areas. However, it is vital for the success of Risk Management that the roles of each, and the links, are clearly understood. Both business continuity and emergency planning are duties placed on the Council as a Category 1 responder, as part of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. The Council recognises that there is a link between Risk Management, Business Continuity Management and Emergency Planning. This is demonstrated by the lead in all three issues being taken by the Corporate Leadership Team.

Business continuity management

- 8.2 Business continuity is the processes, plans, activities and governance the Council has in place to continue its priority services during and following a disruptive event. For the Council specifically, good business continuity management means understanding which of our services are considered priority and the key risks that can disrupt them, and having robust and regularly exercised plans in place to mitigate disruption and minimise recovery time.

Emergency planning

- 8.3 The main difference between emergency planning and business continuity - is the focus on reducing harm to people, the environment and infrastructure from an incident. There is also a greater need for collaboration with other responders in planning for, responding to, and recovering from incident.
- 8.4 Emergency planning and business continuity overlap where an event is causing harm to people, the environment and/or infrastructure, whilst impacting on the Council's ability to run its services effectively.
- 8.5 The Emergency Planning team input into two other separate risk registers - one collectively owned by the Berkshire Local Authorities Emergency Planning Group, and the Community Risk Register owned by the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum.

9.0 Risk Management in Projects, Partnerships and Health and Safety

- 9.1 It is recognised that Risk Management needs to be a key part of the ongoing management of projects, Health and Safety and partnerships.

Project / Programme management

- 9.2 There is a consistent and robust approach to Risk Management used in projects both at initiation and throughout the project.

Partnerships

- 9.3 The Council has a Partnership Protocol, of which Risk Management is a key aspect. The Partnership Protocol requires that this approach to risk management is adhered to. The Partnership Protocol is available on the intranet.

Health and Safety

- 9.4 The Council has a Health and Safety Policy, of which management of risk is a critical aspect. Health and safety risks are managed in accordance with Health and Safety Executive guidance and are recorded in Business World On (BWO). The Health and Safety Policy is available on the intranet.

10.0 Strategic Approach to Risk Management

- 10.1 In order to formalise and structure Risk Management the Council has recognised that there are obvious and clear links between Risk Management and: strategic and financial planning; policy making and review; and performance management.

- 10.2 Risks need to be managed within the following:

- setting strategy and plans
- evaluating options and delivering programmes, projects or policy initiatives
- prioritising resources through budget setting
- supporting efficient and effective operations through service redesign/commissioning
- managing performance
- managing tangible and intangible assets
- delivering improved outcomes through change activities

11.0 Implementation Guidance Risk Management

The risk management process

While this process is presented as a series of stages it is important to understand that the risk management process is iterative and that is why it is presented as a cycle in the diagram below. Implementing this Guidance involves a 5-stage process to identify, analyse, prioritise, manage and monitor risks as shown in figure 1. This section will outline the approach.

Figure 1: The Risk Management Cycle



Stage 1 – Risk Identification

The first step is to identify the 'key' risks that could have an adverse effect on or prevent key objectives from being met. It is important that those involved with the process clearly understand the service or Council's key objectives i.e., '*what it intends to achieve*' in order to be able to identify '*the risks to achievement*'. Managers should be horizon scanning for emerging risks and opportunities to ensure they are able to identify risks with sufficient time to effectively manage them. It is important to consider the relevant Service Plans in a broader context, i.e., not focusing solely on specific detailed targets but considering the wider direction and aims of the service and the outcomes it is trying to achieve. It is important to consider a broad range of risks:

- tangible and intangible sources of risk
- changes in the external and internal context
- uncertainties and assumptions within options, strategies, plans, etc
- indicators of emerging risks
- limitations of knowledge and reliability of information
- any potential biases and beliefs of those involved.

When identifying risks, it is important to remember that as well as the 'direct threats', risk management is about 'making the most of opportunities' e.g. making bids for funding, successfully delivering major projects and initiatives, pursuing beacon status or other awards, taking a national or regional lead on policy development etc.

Using Appendix 2 as a prompt, various techniques can then be used to begin to identify 'key' or 'significant' risks including: -

- A 'idea shower' session;
- Own (risk) experience;
- 'Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats' analysis or similar;
- Experiences of others - can we learn from others' mistakes?
- Exchange of information/best practice with other Councils, organisations or partners.

It is also recommended that a review of published information such as other Service Plans, strategies, financial accounts, press releases, and inspectorate and audit reports be used to inform this stage, as they are a useful source of information. A common source of risk are single points of failure. These are parts of a system or process that if they don't work cause the failure of the whole. These can be individuals who are the only ones who hold the knowledge, skills and experience required to successfully complete objectives.

The process for the identification of risk should be undertaken for projects (at the beginning of each project stage), partnerships and for all major revenue and capital contracts. Details of who contributes to these stages are explained further in the 'Roles, Assignments and Responsibilities' section of the Enterprise Risk Management Policy.

Risks, both opportunity and threats, identified should be recorded in a Risk Register as per figure 2.

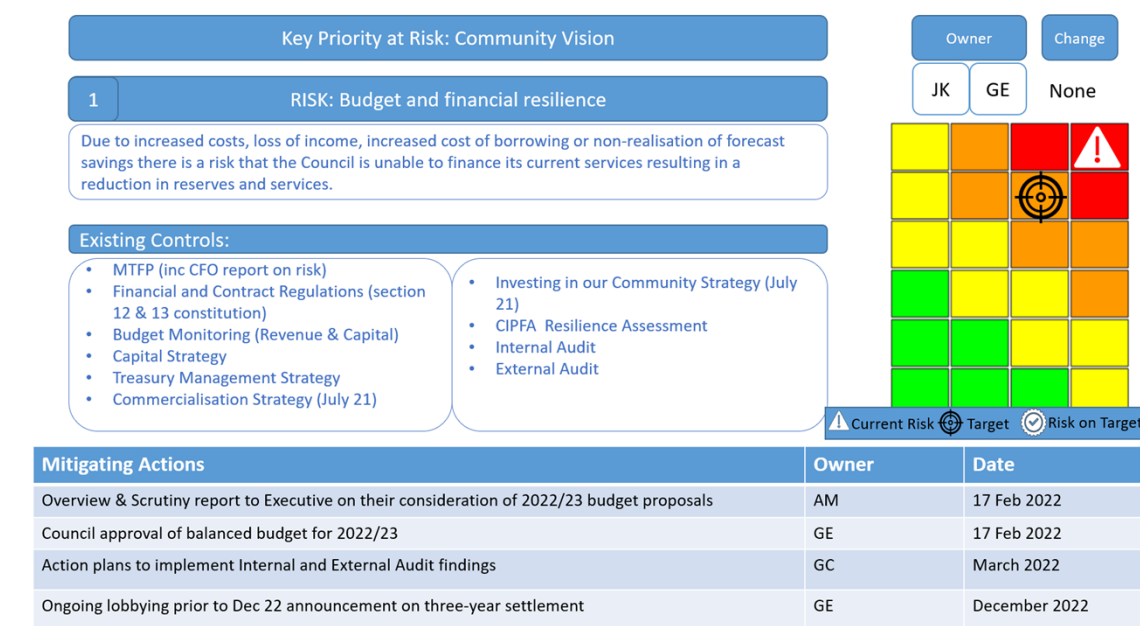
Risk should be expressed in the format.

"Due to

there is a risk that....

leading to....

Figure 2: Risk Register Summary (example)



Stage 2 – Risk Analysis

The information that is gathered needs to be analysed into risk scenarios to provide clear, shared understanding and to ensure the potential root cause of the risk is clarified. Risk scenarios detail the possible consequences of the risk so that its impact can be assessed.

There are 2 parts to a risk scenario:-

- The cause describes the situation and/or event (that may be perceived) that exposes the Council to a risk; and
- The consequences are the events that follow in the wake of the risk.

Risk Scenario

Figure 3: Example of the structure of a risk scenario

Due to ...increased costs, loss of income, increased cost of borrowing or failure to...deliver planned savings there is a risk that...the Council is unable to finance its current services leading to ... reduction in reserves and services for residents

Each risk scenario is logged on the respective Risk Register. These registers could be potentially strategic, against a specific Service Plan, or relating to a project, partnership or procurement.


For further information on the project Risk Register template and guidelines, please refer to the project management methodology.

Stage 3 – Prioritisation

Following identification and analysis the risks will need to be assessed. Their ranking is determined using the potential likelihood of the risk occurring and its impact if it did occur. Appendix 3 provides the criteria for scoring corporate risks. The risks are plotted on the risk matrix(Figure 4) and once completed this illustrates the priority of each risk. It is

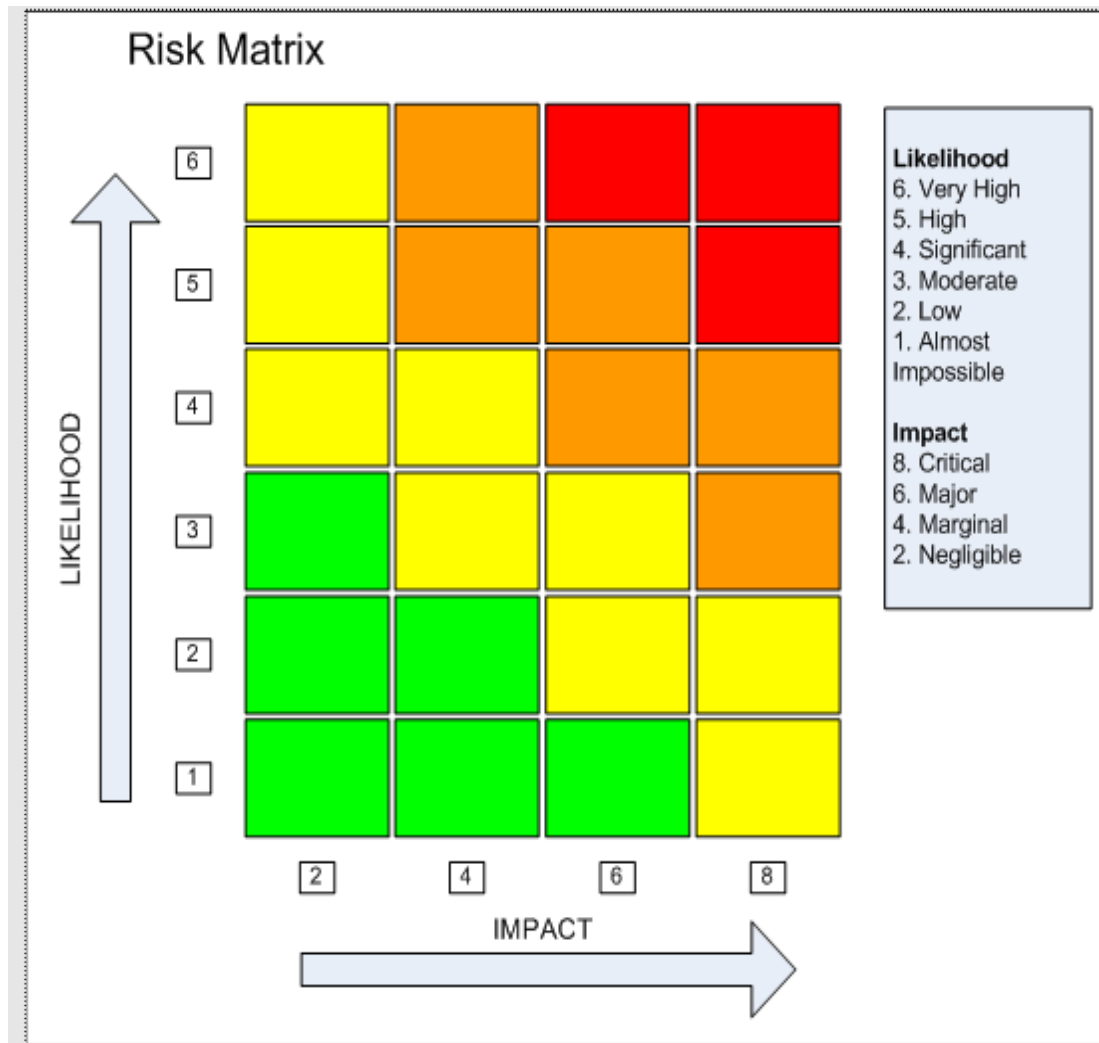
helpful in assessing the risk to consult widely to gain different perspectives on the likelihood and impact. Different professional perspectives will enhance the robustness of the assessment and provide challenge.

When assessing the potential likelihood and impact the risks must be compared with the appropriate objectives e.g. corporate objectives for the strategic risk profile, and service objectives for the Service Plan risk profile. The challenge for each risk is how much impact it could have on the ability to achieve the objective and outcomes. This allows the risks to be set in perspective against each other. The likelihood and impact of a risk should be assessed where the risk is today with the existing controls in place. The current

position of the risk should be recorded on the matrix using the  symbol.

At the beginning of this stage a period needs to be agreed, and the likelihood and impact should be considered within the relevant timeframe. Often a 3-year time horizon is used at strategic level, with perhaps a 1-year timeframe used at service level, to link with service delivery planning. The likelihood and impact should be assessed with existing controls in place, not taking future mitigating actions into account at that time.

Figure 4: Example of the Council risk matrix and filters



The matrix is also constructed around 4 filters - these being red (very high), orange (high), amber (medium) and green (low). The red and orange filtered risks are of greatest priority. Amber risks represent moderate priority risks. Green risks are low priority but should still be monitored.

If there are numerous red, orange and amber risks to be managed it is prudent to cluster similar risks together. This is to aid the action planning process as a number of risks can be managed by the same or similar activity. Each cluster should be given a title e.g. recruitment and retention, staff empowerment etc. This technique of clustering should only be used when there are many risks to be managed e.g. in excess of 15 red and amber risks and where risks share common causes and consequences and therefore could be managed in a similar way.

Stage 4 – Control / Manage

It is important that each risk has an owner. This should include the responsible Lead Member and a senior officer. It is important at this stage to determine the Council’s target for this risk. This should be through discussion with the relevant Director and Executive Lead Member. Where the risk is within its target the identity of the decision maker must

be formally recorded under the mitigating action section of the risk register i.e. “no further action at this time” and owner recording who made the decision and the date. If the risk is currently within its target , then there is no need to mitigate the risk then stage 4 can



be skipped. The risk should be record on the risk matrix using this symbol
Where there is a difference between the current level of the risk and the target risk the target risk



should be recorded on the risk matrix using this symbol

This is the process of turning ‘knowing’ into ‘doing’. It is assessing whether to control, accept, transfer or terminate the risk on an agreed ‘risk appetite’. Risks may be able to be: -

Controlled - It may be possible to mitigate the risk by ‘managing down’ the likelihood, the impact or both. The control measures should, however, be commensurate with the potential frequency, impact and financial consequences of the risk event.

Accepted - Certain risks may have to be accepted as they form part of, or are inherent in, the activity. The important point is that these risks have been identified and are clearly understood.

Transferred or Shared – the Council may choose to share risk or transfer risk with another body or organisation i.e. insurance, contractual arrangements, outsourcing, partnerships etc. Only some risks can be transferred i.e. financial risks can be transferred but the Council will remain accountable for delivery and reputational elements of risk.

Terminated - By ending all or part of a particular service or project.

Most risks are capable of being managed – either by managing down the likelihood or impact or both. Relatively few risks have to be transferred or terminated. These service plans will also identify the resources required to deliver the improvements, timescale and monitoring arrangements.

Where further action is required to bring the current level of risk to meet the target further mitigations should be identified. These should be recorded in the mitigating actions section with clear owners and implementation dates. Where the identified mitigating actions are insufficient to manage the risk to its target this should be escalated with the risk owner.

Consideration should be given to the ‘Cost-Benefit’ of each control weighed against the potential cost / impact of the risk occurring. N.B. ‘cost / impact’

High cost/low impact of mitigating risk	High cost/big impact of mitigating risk
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Low cost/low impact of mitigating risk	Low cost/big impact of mitigating risk
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Stage 5 – Monitoring & Reporting

The Corporate Leadership Team is responsible for ensuring that the key risks on the Corporate Risk Register are managed and the progress with the risk mitigation measures should be monitored at appropriate intervals. Directors and Assistant Directors are responsible for ensuring that the key risks in the Risk Registers linked to respective services are managed. It is recommended that the 'red risks' feature as a standing item on Directorate Leadership Team meeting agendas.

On a quarterly basis, the Corporate and service Risk Registers should be reviewed and where necessary risks re-prioritised. Risks should be amended so they reflect the current situation, if risks have reduced they should be de-escalated to the appropriate register and new risks identified. This ensures that the Risk Registers and resulting risk mitigation measures are appropriate for the current service and corporate objectives. The quarterly review of the Corporate Risk Register must be undertaken by Corporate Leadership Team and the Directorate Registers should be reviewed / updated by the respective Director and Assistant Director with their management teams.

During the year new risks are likely to arise that have not previously been considered on the existing Risk Registers. Also, the environment in which the risks exist will change making some risks more critical or others less important. Every quarter the respective Risk Registers and matrices at each level should be updated to reflect these changes. If such risks require Corporate Leadership Team ownership and management then they should be incorporated into the Corporate Risk Register. If the management of such risks is more appropriate at a service level, then it should be included in the respective service Risk Register. This will need to be undertaken on a quarterly basis by Corporate Leadership Team, Directors and Assistant Directors.

Some Directorate risks have the potential to impact on the corporate objectives and these will often be the red risks on the matrix. Every quarter, the Directorate Risk Registers will be fed into the Corporate Leadership Team where a decision will be taken on whether to prioritise any of these risks on the strategic risk matrix and include them on the Corporate Risk Register (owned by Corporate Leadership Team). At the relevant Corporate Leadership Team session to review risk management, each Director will also feedback the headline risks from their individual areas.

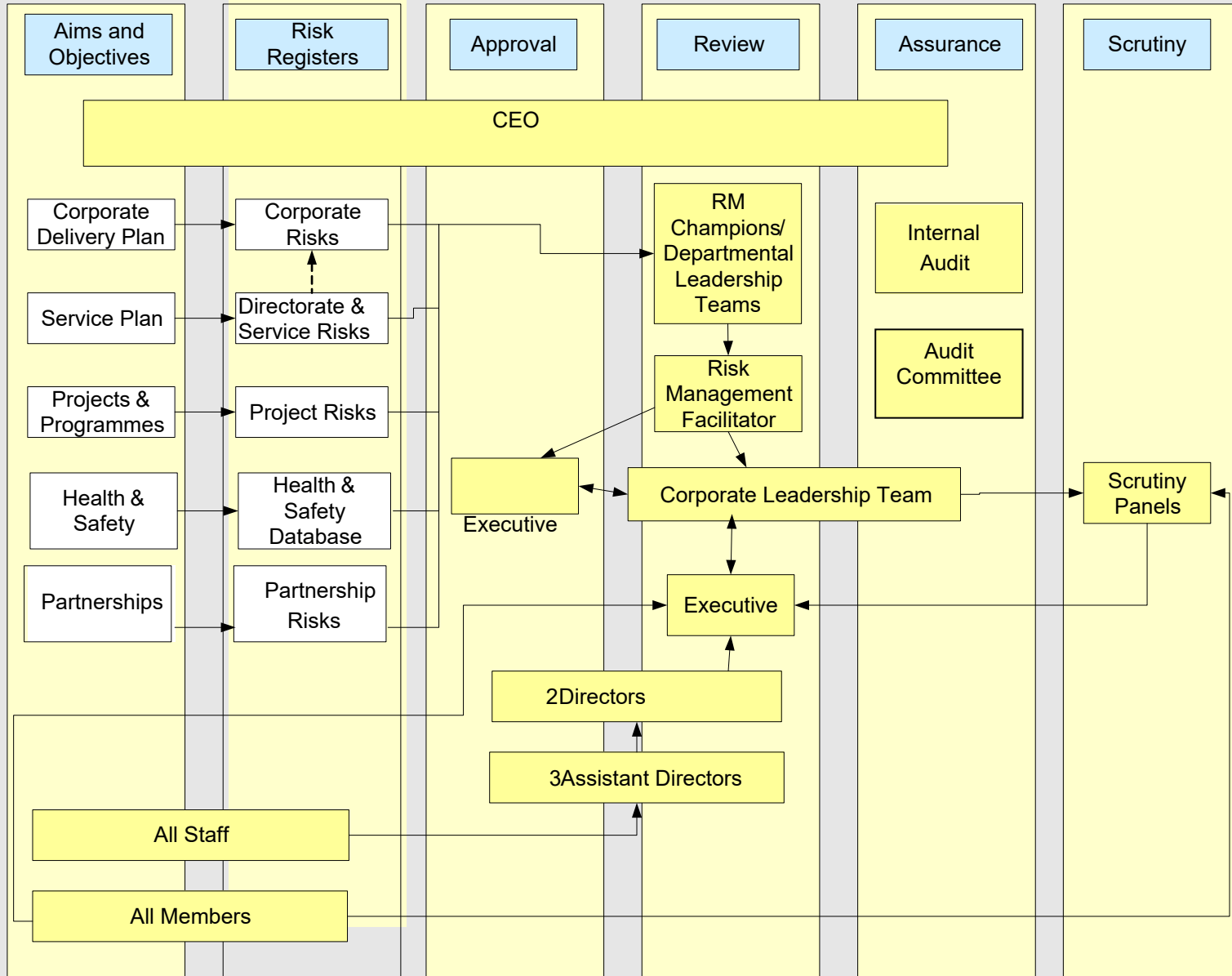
12.0 Target Risk

Target Risk is the phrase used to describe how much risk the council is prepared to take in pursuit of its objectives (also known as risk appetite). Due to its diverse range of services the council does not have a single risk tolerance and appetite for risk will vary between different services and activities, or even at different times. For certain types of risk, the Council does not have the power to determine its risk appetite as this is set by legislation i.e. the compliance framework for the safeguarding of children is determined by law.

Considering and setting risk targets will enable the council to optimise its risk taking and accepting calculated risks by enabling risk-reward decision making. Equally, it reduces the likelihood of unpleasant surprises. Target risks is determined on each of the risks and is essentially the target we need to manage the risk against

While individual risks have their own target levels of risks, Executive and CLT have the responsibility to assess the total risk exposure of the Council. They have the responsibility to challenge individual targets where the cumulative effect would be to expose the Council to too great a level of risk. They can use RMG to implement this challenge.

Overview of Risk Management Framework



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Appendix 1

Appendix 2 – Example of Risk Categories

Risk	Definition	Examples
Political	Associated with the failure to deliver either local or central government policy or meet the local administration's manifest commitment	New political arrangements, Political personalities, Political make-up
Economic	Affecting the ability of the Council to meet its financial commitments. These include internal budgetary pressures, the failure to purchase adequate insurance cover, external macro level economic changes or consequences proposed investment decisions	Cost of living, changes in interest rates, inflation, poverty indicators
Social	Relating to the effects of changes in demographic, residential or socio-economic trends on the Council's ability to meet its objectives	Staff levels from available workforce, ageing population, health statistics
Technological	Associated with the capacity of the Council to deal with the pace/scale of technological change, or its ability to use technology to address changing demands. They may also include the consequences of internal technological failures on the Council's ability to deliver its objectives	IT infrastructure, Staff/client needs, security standards, Business Continuity.
Legislative	Associated with current or potential changes in national or European law	Human rights, appliance or non-appliance of TUPE regulations
Environmental	Relating to the environmental consequences of progressing the Council's strategic objectives	Land use, recycling, pollution
Competitive	Affecting the competitiveness of the service (in terms of cost or quality) and/or its ability to deliver best value	Fail to win quality accreditation, position in league tables
Customer/ Citizen	Associated with failure to meet the current and changing needs and expectations of customers and citizens	Managing expectations, extent of consultation
Managerial/ Professional	Associated with the particular nature of each profession, internal protocols and managerial abilities	Staff restructure, key personalities, internal capacity
Financial	Associated with financial planning and control	Budget overspends, level of Council tax & reserves
Legal	Related to possible breaches of legislation	Client brings legal challenge
Partnership/ Contractual	Associated with failure of contractors and partnership arrangements to deliver services or products to the agreed cost and specification	Contractor fails to deliver; partnership agencies do not have common goals
Physical	Related to fire, security, accident prevention and health and safety	Offices in poor state of repair, use of equipment
Reputational	Related to change in perception of the Council, media (including social media) coverage and impacts on public opinion.	Unethical behaviour, lack of transparency/openness, incompetence.

Appendix 3 - Impact Scores

Score	Level	Description	
8	Critical	Critical impact on the achievement of objectives and overall performance. Impact on residents is high and long term. High impact on costs and / or reputation. Very difficult and possibly long term to recover.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unable to function without aid of Government or other external Agency. • Inability to fulfil obligations. • Medium - long term damage to service capability • Severe financial loss – supplementary estimate needed which will have a critical impact on the council’s financial plan and resources are unlikely to be available. • Death • Adverse national publicity – highly damaging, severe loss of public confidence. • Litigation certain and difficult to defend. • Breaches of law punishable by imprisonment
6	Major	Major impact on costs and objectives. Impact on residents is significant and/or medium term. Serious impact on output and / or quality and reputation. Medium to long term effect and expensive to recover.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant impact on service objectives • Short – medium term impairment to service capability • Major financial loss - supplementary estimate needed which will have a major impact on the council’s financial plan. • Extensive injuries, major permanent harm, long term sick • Major adverse local publicity, major loss of confidence • Litigation likely and may be difficult to defend. • Breaches of law punishable by fines or possible imprisonment
4	Marginal	Significant waste of time and resources. Impact on residents is minor or short term. Impact on operational efficient, output and quality. Medium term effect which may be expensive to recover.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service objectives partially achievable • Short term disruption to service capability • Significant financial loss - supplementary estimate needed which will have an impact on the council’s financial • Medical treatment requires, semi- permanent harm up to 1 year • Some adverse publicity, need careful public relations. • High potential for complaint, litigation possible. • Breaches of law punishable by fines only
2	Negligible	Minimal loss, delay, inconvenience or interruption. Resident are inconvenienced for a short time. Short to medium term affect.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minor impact on service objectives • No significant disruption to service capability • Moderate financial loss – can be accommodated. • First aid treatment, non-permanent harm up to 1 month • Some public embarrassment, no damage to reputation • May result in complaints / litigation. • Breaches of regulations / standards

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Appendix 4 – Likelihood Scores

Score	Level	Description				
6	Very High	Certain.	>95%	Annually or more frequently	>1 in 10 times	An event that is has a 50% chance of occurring in the next 6 months or has happened in the last year. This event has occurred at other local authorities
5	High	Almost Certain. The risk will materialise in most circumstances.	80 – 94%	3 years +	>1 in 10 - 50 times	An event that has a 50% chance of occurring in the next year or has happened in the past two years.
4	Significant	The risk will probably materialise at least once.	50 – 79%	7 years +	>1 in 10 – 100 times	An event that has a 50% chance of occurring in the next 2 years or has happened in the past 5 years.
3	Moderate	Possibly the risk might materialise at some time.	49 – 20%	20 years +	>1 in 100 – 1,000 times	An event that has a 50% chance of occurring in the next 5 or has happened in the past 7 years.
2	Low	The risk will materialise only in exceptional circumstances.	5 – 19%	30 years +	>1 in 1,000 – 10,000 times	An event that has a 50% chance of occurring in the next 10 year or has happened in the past 15 years.
1	Almost Impossible	The risk may never happen.	< 5%	50 years +	>1 in 10,000 +	An event that has a less than 5% chance of occurring in the next 10 years and has not happened in the last 25 years.

TITLE	Treasury Management Report
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 28 September 2023
WARD	(All Wards);
LEAD OFFICER	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Finance - Imogen Shepherd-DuBey

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

To demonstrate that the Council's treasury function has effectively managed the Council's debt and cash balances to support the funding of the delivery of the Council's key priorities.

RECOMMENDATION

The Executive is asked to support the Treasury Management Outturn Report 2022-23 and recommend it to Council and note:

- 1) that all approved indicators set out in the Treasury Management Strategy have been adhered to; with the exceptions of;
 - Internal borrowing ratio.
 - Ratio of financing costs to net revenue stream – General Fund.
 - Capital financing requirement – HRA.
- 2) As at the end of March 2023, the total external general fund debt was £118m, which reduces to £68m after taking into account cash balances (net indebtedness) reducing interest costs in the current economic climate. This was an improved position from the forecast at mid-year stage of £81m net indebtedness and £72m at March 2022.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides a summary of the treasury management operations during the 2022/23. It is presented for the purpose of monitoring and review, in accordance with Council's treasury management practices. This includes ensuring the necessary liquidity to deliver on the day-to-day operations of the Council. There are two aspects of treasury performance: debt management which relates to the Council's borrowing and cash investment which relates to the investment of cash balances.

The Council report on its treasury management position throughout the year. Previously this has been presented to Audit Committee as part of the treasury management strategy, the mid-year update and the outturn report (this report). The Executive will now consider these reports going forward.

Key highlights from this report to note are:

- All approved indicators set out in the Treasury Management Strategy have been adhered to with the exceptions of;

- Internal borrowing ratio

Although internal borrowing is higher than the forecast in the strategy, this is positive on the basis, the Council has reduced the need for external borrowing by utilising cash balances more than was planned in the strategy.

- Ratio of financing costs to net revenue stream – General Fund.

The movement on this from the original budgets is as a result of reducing the interest charge to town centre (to better reflect the actual interest costs) to help maintain its movement to a surplus following significant economic challenges. The net general fund financing costs of the Council are forecast to remain minimal, at 0.47% of the net revenue expenditure, equal to c£0.8m. It is important to note the calculations of this indicator as set out in the prudential code does not include the total income (over and above amount that funds capital debt costs) received from commercial / regeneration assets. If these were included, this would further improve the ratio and reduce the true cost of financing.

- Capital financing requirement – HRA.

The CFR for the HRA has increased from the estimate when the treasury management strategy was set due to inclusion of the Gorse Ride Regeneration project agreed at Executive in February 2022.

- The Councils net indebtedness at 31 March 2023 was £68m, this is an improved position from the £72m at 31 March 2022.
- The average interest rate of external borrowing for 2022/23 was 2.35%. Due to the rise in the Bank of England base rate, this is an expected increase from 2021/22 average borrowing cost of 1.56%. Interest rates have continued to increase throughout 2023/24 with the peak remaining uncertain and frequently changing. Working with our external treasury management advisors, the finance team will continue to monitor the financial risks from higher interest rates. When the strategy was set, the interest rate market was fairly stable with regards to future forecasts of interest rates remaining low. Based on these market conditions, the Council would have looked to secure some medium to long external borrowing. However, due to the continued volatility and rises in interest rates, alongside a reduction in capital spend and the maintaining of cash balances, it was financially more prudent to minimise external borrowing, thus avoiding higher external debt costs. This approach has been discussed with our external treasury management advisors and is considered prudent due to the strength of our cash balances.

Prudential Indicators Debt and Investment

The table below summarises the prudential indicators, comparing the limits set in the strategy, the outturn forecast reported in the mid-year and the actual outturn position (31 March 2023). These are primary indicators designed to ensure the key objectives of the Prudential Code are met and that local authorities' capital investment plans are affordable, prudent and sustainable; that treasury management decisions are taken in accordance with good professional practice.

- The total Capital Financing Requirement (CFR) of £453m was below the authorised and operational boundary limits set out in the treasury management strategy. The

CFR is a technical calculation of historic capital expenditure less that already paid for, required to arrive at the annual level of debt repayment. There are two main reasons for the reduction in the CFR for 2022/23;

- Reduced capital expenditure in year than originally planned in the strategy, driven by savings identified across the programme and reprofiling of expenditure into later years.
- Debt repayments made in year from town centre capital receipts, subsidiary company loan repayments, developer contributions and minimum revenue provision (MRP) payments.
- General fund external borrowing as at 31 March 2023 was £118m, which was broadly in line with the mid-year estimate of £112m presented to audit committee in November 2022. External borrowing was significantly lower than the forecast when the treasury strategy was set as a result of the capital programme reprofiling. Furthermore, the internal borrowing level has remained high to offset the impact from increasing interest rates and volatility in the market. The Council will look to minimise new external borrowing through utilising its cash balances. This will avoid higher external debt costs.

Prudential Indicators	Treasury Strategy	Outturn Forecast (Reported at mid-year)	Outturn Actual
	£m	£m	£m
<u>Affordability</u>			
<u>Limits</u>			
Authorised Limit (Note: CFR*120%, outturn = CFR)	760	589	453
Operational Boundary (Note: CFR*110%, outturn = CFR)	696	540	453
<u>Performance Indicators</u>			
Capital financing requirement – General Fund (GF)	554	412	371
Capital financing requirement – HRA	79	79	82
Gross external borrowing – General Fund (GF)	388	112	118
Gross external borrowing - HRA	69	66	64
% of internal borrowing to CFR – General Fund (GF)	30%	73%	68%
% of internal borrowing to CFR - HRA	13%	17%	22%
Ratio of financing costs to net revenue stream - GF	-0.60%	0.10%	0.47%
Ratio of financing costs to net revenue stream - HRA	29.90%	29.69%	25.54%
<u>Prudence</u>			
Maturity structure of borrowing	See table B		

Council's Net Indebtedness

Net indebtedness represents the underlying debt position the Council holds. The table below shows how this is calculated. Included below are the estimates from the 22/23 treasury management strategy, the mid-year estimate and the actual position for March '23. The previous year's outturn is included for comparison. Please note the figures below are for the general fund only.

	Treasury Strategy	Outturn Forecast (Reported at mid-year)	Outturn Actual March '23	Outturn Actual March '22
	£m	£m	£m	£m
General Fund – Capital Financing Requirement	554	412	371	382
<u>Less</u> Internal funded borrowing	(166)	(300)	(253)	(186)
External Debt Total	388	112	118	196
<u>Less</u> Cash investment balances	(152)	(31)	(50)	(124)
Net Indebtedness Total	236	81	68	72

The Councils net indebtedness at 31 March 2023 was £68m, this is an improved position from the £72m at 31 March 2022. This is driven mainly by the reduction in the capital financing requirement (CFR).

During 2022/23, due to strong cash balances, the Council were able to reduce external borrowing from £196m to £118m. This reduced the Council's interest payable costs and reduced the exposure to the volatile interest rate market. In addition from reducing cash investments to lower external debt, the Council were also able to increase the level of internal borrowing (use of the internal cash reserves of the Council to fund its capital expenditure), saving the Council further costs in interest payments.

The HRA borrowing is excluded from this calculation as it is a ringfenced account with external borrowing funded from housing tenants.

The Council are monitoring interest rates very closely and working with our treasury management advisors to review the latest interest rate forecasts which currently suggest interest rates are expected to peak in 2024. The market is very volatile and difficult to make decisions on interest rates with certainty. During these times, operating a higher level of internal borrowing will help offset the impact from higher interest rates. It is expected that the Council will need to borrow next financial year to support the capital programme. The timing of this borrowing requirement will continue to be monitored taking into account updated forecasts for capital expenditure, cash balances and interest rates to minimise the financial impact for the Council. The Council have reviewed the underlying cash balances (reserves + working capital) and are confident these can support a high level of internal borrowing for 2023/24. The impacts for 2024/25 onwards are being monitored and will be considered as part of the budget setting process and setting of the treasury management strategy in February 2024.

The table below shows how external borrowing has changed during 2022/23. Repayments of borrowing will occur when historic loans reach maturity date. Depending on the cash position of the Council, we may need to refinance these loans (i.e. take out new loans) or will be in a position to not require new additional loans. During the year, c£156m of external borrowing was repaid and only £75m of new borrowing was taken out.

	Opening @ 01/04/2022	New Borrowing	Repayments of Borrowing	Closing @ 31/03/2023
	£m	£m	£m	£m
General Fund	£196m	£75m	(£153m)	£118m
Housing Revenue Account	£67m	£0m	(£3m)	£64m
Total	£263m	£75m	(£156m)	£182m

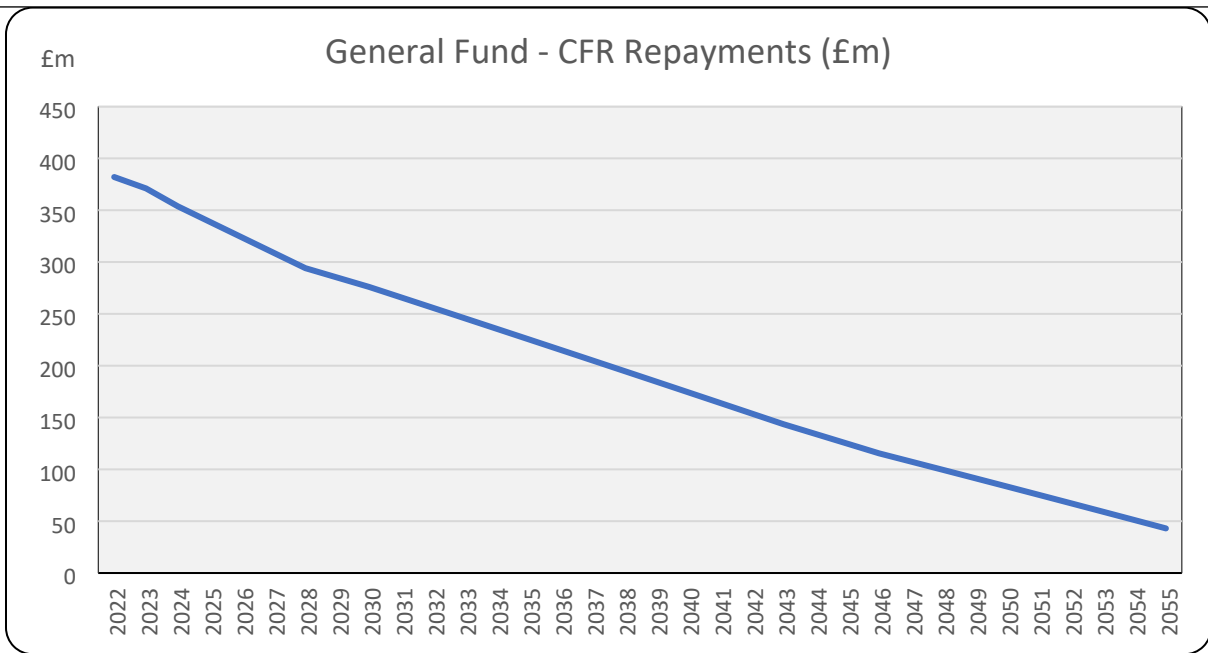
CFR Debt Repayment

The Capital Financing Requirement (CFR) is the total historic outstanding capital expenditure which has not yet been paid for from resources (e.g. Capital receipts or grants).

A major source of funding for the Council's capital programme is borrowing. This is described in two forms, supported borrowing and general fund borrowing. A significant part of the Council's capital programme is either self-financing or makes a surplus where the income generated is greater than the cost of financing and therefore is available to fund other council services. These are referred to as "supported borrowing". General fund borrowing is funded through existing base budget and supports general investment to maintain Council assets and continue to provide services to customers and residents.

The CFR position for the general fund as reported above is £371m at the end of March 2023. The CFR covers areas such as town centre regeneration, loans to WBC housing companies, forward funding of infrastructure, commercial properties and invest to save assets. Despite the high risk that comes with an ambitious capital programme in relation to housing, economy, and regeneration, this has delivered many assets that residents are benefiting from and we expect debt repayments each year in the region of c£10m - £15m.

The graph below shows the expected repayment of the current general fund CFR balance of £371m. It is important to note, the CFR balances below do not take into account the asset value and the impact if the Council were to realise these values through disposals, etc.



Investment of Cash Balances

Cash flow balances vary significantly throughout the year due to differences in timing of income (council tax, developer contributions, grants, etc.) and timing of expenditure (running costs - revenue, and investment in assets and services – capital). During times when the council holds cash balances, investments will be made based on security, liquidity, and yield (in this order).

As highlighted in the table below, treasury investment returns were £1.4m over the year. This was an improved position from the forecast of c£1.1m reported in the mid-year report. Cash investment balances were £43m at the end of the financial year, an improved position from the mid-year estimate of £31m resulting in additional investment income for the Council. In addition, throughout the second half of the year, interest rates have increased creating greater returns on short term investments.

Interest rates have continued to increase throughout 2023/24 which will result in further returns on investments however more importantly for the Council is the security and liquidity of these balances before yield is considered. In addition, reducing cash investments to avoid the need to borrow externally can have a greater benefit through cost avoidance on interest payable costs compared to interest from investment returns.

	Average Invested*	Interest Received	31 st March 2023 Balance
	£m	£m	£m
Treasury Investments			
- Local Authorities	£76m	£1.01m	£30.0m
- Money Markets / Fund Managers	£23m	£0.39m	£12.7m
Total	£99m	£1.4m	£42.7m

* Average invested – this is the average amount invested across the year. The balance invested was higher at the start of the year and reduced during the year as borrowing was repaid as described earlier in the report.

In addition to treasury investments, the Council receive income from housing, local economy and regeneration assets. This income covers the interest costs from the borrowing associated with the assets and contribute a net income to the Council to help fund vital services. Included within the Housing, Local Economy & Regeneration are the capital loans made to the Councils housing companies which support the development of new affordable housing. The Council have a statutory requirement under the Subsidy Control Act 2022 (previously known as state aid) to charge interest at the market rate which is higher than the investment returns the Council would achieve on treasury investments.

The following table sets out the investments the Council have in place at 31 March

Investment Number	Counterparty	Start Date	Maturity Date	Loan Principal	Interest Rate
S1281	Local Authority	18/01/2023	18/04/2023	10,000,000	3.20%
S1287	Local Authority	03/01/2023	03/04/2023	10,000,000	3.32%
S1291	Local Authority	24/03/2023	26/06/2023	5,000,000	4.50%
S1292	Local Authority	23/03/2023	23/06/2023	5,000,000	4.50%
 					
S1133	Aberdeen Assets			655,019	Variable
S1001	Invesco Global Sterling Liquidity Portfolio			10,000,000	Variable
S1002	Deutsche Global Liquidity Series			2,000,000	Variable
 					
Current Account				7,383,569	Variable

2023, including maturity dates and interest rates.

Maturity Structure of Borrowing

The maturity structure of the Council external borrowing is shown in 'Table B' below. This highlights the period for when external borrowing matures and becomes repayable. External debt is £118m for the general fund and £64m for the HRA, totalling £182m.

Table B

	31 March 2023 Actual £m
External Borrowing (GF + HRA)	
Less than 1 year	59
Between 1 and 2 years	4
Between 2 and 5 years	15
Between 5 and 10 years	29
Between 10 and 15 years	31
Between 15 and 20 years	0
Between 20 and 25 years	2

Between 25 and 30 years	9
More than 30 years	34
Total	182

Note: Less than a year borrowing will be replaced with a mixture of new external debt and internal borrowing if possible. Due to current high interest rates and expectations rates will reduce over the next 12-18 months, any new borrowing will be taken on a short-term basis (i.e. less than 2 years). The treasury service through the use of its cashflow, constantly review its debt and will endeavour to get the best rates available while looking at the long and short term picture of anticipated receipts and payments.

The following table sets out the current loans the Council have in place, including maturity dates and interest rates. These cover external borrowing for the general fund and the housing revenue account (HRA).

General Fund External Borrowing

Loan Number	Counterparty	Start Date	Maturity Date	Loan Principal	Interest Rate
L1167	Local Authority	28/03/2023	26/03/2024	10,000,000	2.50%
L1168	Local Authority	23/03/2023	21/03/2024	10,000,000	2.50%
L1169	Local Authority	31/10/2022	05/10/2023	15,000,000	4.10%
L1182	Local Authority	21/03/2023	21/09/2023	5,000,000	4.50%
L1183	Local Authority	24/03/2023	24/04/2023	10,000,000	4.40%
L1184	Local Authority	24/03/2023	30/06/2023	5,000,000	4.40%
488876	Public Works Loan Board	16/07/2004	01/02/2034	2,343,298	4.95%
491320	Public Works Loan Board	15/02/2006	01/08/2051	2,929,123	3.85%
491456	Public Works Loan Board	26/04/2006	30/09/2046	1,430,867	4.35%
491474	Public Works Loan Board	28/04/2006	01/08/2052	5,587,374	4.40%
493309	Public Works Loan Board	24/05/2007	31/03/2054	9,763,742	4.60%
505948	Public Works Loan Board	31/03/2017	31/03/2034	6,000,000	2.30%
505949	Public Works Loan Board	31/03/2017	31/03/2035	8,000,000	2.34%
505950	Public Works Loan Board	31/03/2017	31/03/2036	4,000,000	2.37%
3b	Barclays	24/02/2007	24/02/2077	4,881,871	4.35%
2c	Barclays	11/01/2007	11/01/2077	4,881,871	4.60%
1c	Just retirement	06/02/2006	06/02/2066	4,881,871	4.88%
4	Barclays	16/02/2006	16/02/2066	1,952,748	3.68%
5	Barclays	19/10/2006	19/10/2076	4,881,871	3.73%
6	Barclays	19/10/2006	19/10/2076	1,952,748	3.77%

Housing Revenue Account External Borrowing

Loan Number	Counterparty	Start Date	Maturity Date	Loan Principal	Interest Rate

488876	Public Works Loan Board	16/07/2004	01/02/2034	56,702	4.95%
491320	Public Works Loan Board	15/02/2006	01/08/2051	70,877	3.85%
491456	Public Works Loan Board	26/04/2006	30/09/2046	34,623	4.35%
491474	Public Works Loan Board	28/04/2006	01/08/2052	135,200	4.40%
493309	Public Works Loan Board	24/05/2007	31/03/2054	236,258	4.60%
501035	Public Works Loan Board	28/03/2012	28/03/2032	8,516,000	3.30%
501037	Public Works Loan Board	28/03/2012	28/03/2031	7,231,000	3.26%
501039	Public Works Loan Board	28/03/2012	28/03/2029	6,378,000	3.15%
501040	Public Works Loan Board	28/03/2012	28/03/2027	5,415,000	3.01%
501043	Public Works Loan Board	28/03/2012	28/03/2033	9,276,247	3.34%
501044	Public Works Loan Board	28/03/2012	28/03/2034	1,000,000	3.37%
501045	Public Works Loan Board	28/03/2012	28/03/2025	3,744,000	2.82%
501046	Public Works Loan Board	28/03/2012	28/03/2028	5,981,000	3.08%
501047	Public Works Loan Board	28/03/2012	28/03/2030	6,789,000	3.21%
501048	Public Works Loan Board	28/03/2012	28/03/2026	3,971,000	2.92%
501049	Public Works Loan Board	28/03/2012	28/03/2024	4,116,000	2.70%
3b	Barclays	24/02/2007	24/02/2077	118,129	4.35%
2c	Barclays	11/01/2007	11/01/2077	118,129	4.60%
1c	Just retirement	06/02/2006	06/02/2066	118,129	4.88%
4	Barclays	16/02/2006	16/02/2066	47,252	3.68%
5	Barclays	19/10/2006	19/10/2076	118,129	3.73%
6	Barclays	19/10/2006	19/10/2076	47,252	3.77%

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	N/A	N/A	N/A

Other Financial Information

None

Legal Implications arising from the Recommendation(s)

None

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation
None

Public Sector Equality Duty
Equality assessments are carried out as part of each capital project.

Climate Emergency – <i>This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030</i>
The capital programme includes projects which help achieve our priorities in relation to climate change.

Reasons for considering the report in Closed Session
N/A

List of Background Papers
N/A

Contact Mark Thompson	Service Business Services
Telephone Tel: 0118 974 6555	Email mark.thompson@wokingham.gov.uk

TITLE	Residential Leasehold Building Insurance Renewal
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 28 September 2023
WARD	(All Wards);
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Place and Growth - Giorgio Framalicco
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Finance - Imogen Shepherd-DuBey

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

The purpose of this report is to seek Executive approval to procure a new buildings insurance policy for leasehold 'Right to Buy' and shared ownership properties.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive approves this request to conduct a competitive procurement exercise to enable the Council to obtain the best value buildings insurance policy to provide adequate cover for buildings insurance for council leaseholders and shared ownership properties.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Council is acutely aware of the current cost of living challenges faced by many people in the Borough, and it is working as hard as possible to ensure that leaseholders are kept informed, and that the approach to securing the new insurance delivers the least possible financial impact on leaseholders.

This buildings insurance cover was last procured to commence in April 2020 on a 3-year term with the option to extend for 2 years. However, at very short notice the Council's insurance provider (Avid) pulled out of the leaseholder insurance market with effect from March 2023.

The premium paid in 2022-'23 was £70,300. Following the withdrawal of the council's insurers from the market, 'emergency' renewal quotations were sourced by the council's brokers from the only insurers prepared to provide the cover. One of these was 300% more expensive than Avid. The second was 80% more expensive and was only available on a 3-year deal. This was not acceptable under procurement regulations and would not have been recoverable from leaseholders because there was insufficient time to carry out the two statutory 30-day consultations with them. A third quote at a 60% increase on the previous year's premium was obtained from the council's main property insurers. They will not normally cover council residential leasehold premises agreed to do so for the year because of the exceptional circumstances, but this cover is subject to a high excess.

WBC could try to extend the current year's arrangements, but this is not the recommended approach. The current cover is not as comprehensive as policies specifically designed for leaseholder risks, the excess is very high, and we have had to separately enter in to a second supporting contract with loss adjusters to provide the claims-handling service.

The next tender was due to take place in 2024-'25 for a commencement date of April 2025, but now needs to be undertaken a year earlier for the new insurance to commence April 2024.

The Council is required under the terms of the leases to procure this buildings insurance cover. Because leaseholders will be required to pay for the cover, and it will cost over £250 per year, two statutory 30-day consultations with leaseholders are required and are built into the procurement timetable.

The leasehold insurance market is extremely limited. Two of the main insurers in this sector have recently withdrawn and a third has pulled back and is not responding to tenders. The leasehold property market is currently in a very challenging position because of the current demands of insuring typical social rented property types. Based on market intelligence from the Council's broker, the market is now very small, selective, and expensive. Based on current market conditions, it is therefore not unreasonable to expect an increase of at least 10% in the annual premium compared to the Council's current 23/24 annual premium of £113k, and there is a risk that it could be higher.

Working in partnership with the Council's broker, WBC intend to go out to tender using an open tender procurement process. This process will achieve the best value for leaseholders in a very limited insurance market. The process will be supported by WBC's broker who will provide professional guidance on the specifications, and the evaluation of tender returns. They will also help provide information for the insurance provider to use.

BACKGROUND

The Council is required under the terms of the leases to procure this buildings insurance cover. This insurance was last procured to commence in April 2020 on a 3-year term with the option to extend for 2 years. At very short notice the Council's insurance provider pulled out of the market with effect from March 2023.

Via the Council's broker 'emergency' cover was secured and put in place for the twelve-month period until 31st March 2024. A procurement exercise must be completed to put in place a new insurance to commence on 1st April 2024.

The cost of the insurance will be passed on to leaseholders. It is a requirement that leaseholders have building insurance, and in common with most landlords we provide this under the lease. This arrangement benefits the landlord and the leaseholders because it protects the building (and other residents) and landlords can achieve better prices across a portfolio across a longer period than leaseholders can hope to achieve annually.

If the landlord is procuring a service that will be charged to leaseholders and it will cost more than £250 a year, the landlord has to consult them.

The actual cost of insurance is not known because so many insurers have withdrawn from insuring local authority housing, and the ones still in the market are charging higher prices to cover the perceived risks. This affects us and our leaseholders because we are insuring council housing.

We have approximately 220 leaseholders in total, including shared owners. Previously, before the provider pulled out last year, the cost was approximately £70k per annum, or £320 per leaseholder on average. Current premiums range from £300 to £650 per leaseholder. The current interim contract costs £113k per annum, but it carries a high excess. The estimated range of prices for the new contract starts at about 10% higher, £125k per annum and runs to over £250k, with a potentially high excess at the lower end, depending on who decides to bid.

It is essential that our whole buildings are covered, so all our leaseholders must have buildings insurance. We are confident that with our robust procurement approach and with the support of a specialist broker that understands this challenging sector of the insurance market, with our buying power, we will secure better prices than homeowners would be able to achieve individually, and this will ensure that individual insurance premiums will be the most competitive that can be achieved in the current market conditions, minimising the financial impact on leaseholders.

Local authority associations, landlord bodies and the insurance market are in constant discussions with the Government to improve the situation, but the main emphasis has been on high-rise buildings. Some recent media reports suggest these are effectively becoming uninsurable. We hope these discussions will benefit the whole market, but there has been little progress for some time.

BUSINESS CASE

The Council is required under the terms of the leases to procure this buildings insurance cover. The Council intends to procure the new insurance using a competitive tender process in order to identify a suitable provider and attempt to achieve best value for money. The tender process will meet WBC's own internal governance for procurements,

and it will also comply with current public sector procurement rules. This approach will ensure that the Council achieves the best possible value for the leaseholders in a difficult market.

The existing insurance expires on 31st March 2024, so the tender process will need to be concluded in timescales to ensure the new insurance is in place in advance of the expiration of the current insurance. If bids received are unsuitable, or there are no bids, the Council may have no other option but to 'self-insure'.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Next Financial Year Estimate (Year 1)	The Councils' current 23/24 annual premium is £113k. Based on current market conditions the annual premium from Year 1 of the new insurance agreement may increase by 10% or more.	Yes.	WBC pay the premium up front for the year; this is then recovered from the leaseholders and those shared owners insured under the council's arrangements.
Following Financial Year Estimate (Year 2)	£113k (plus % increase following tender)	Yes.	As Year 1 above.
Following Financial Year Estimate (Year 3)	£113k (plus % increase following tender)	Yes.	As Year 1 above.

Other Financial Information

Although the council pays the insurance premium up front, the cost is recharged to the leaseholders that are included in scope of this insurance agreement, and therefore the costs are recoverable, reducing the potential financial exposure to the authority. The amount the leaseholders would pay annually would increase in line with any annual increase incurred in the value of the annual insurance premium.

The current insurance market has a very limited appetite for these services and for insurers in this sector, Wokingham may present a higher-than-average risk due the number and cost of claims that have been generated over the previous 7–8-year period.

There is a possibility in the future that the Council may be left with no option but to 'self-insure' and any issues with properties will be paid directly out of Council funds.

Legal Implications arising from the Recommendation(s)
The Council is required under the terms of the leases to procure this buildings insurance cover. The recommendation is within the power of the Executive under 1.4.4 and 5.1.9 of the Council's constitution.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation
Two statutory 30-day consultations with leaseholders are required and are built into the procurement timetable. During the process to identify suitable insurance, leaseholders will be kept advised with assurances about the tender process that will be conducted by the council to achieve the best outcome for leaseholders in the current market conditions, and as soon as is practicable, leaseholders will be informed about any potential increased cost implications that may impact on annual insurance premiums.

Public Sector Equality Duty
The Council complies with the government's agenda to achieve efficiencies through the adoption of good practice in their procurement processes, including compliance with the Equality Act 2010 where it applies.

Climate Emergency – <i>This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030</i>
Not applicable to this procurement.

Reasons for considering the report in Closed Session
Not applicable.

List of Background Papers
No additional background papers.

Contact Rod Coyle	Service Economy and Housing
Telephone 0118 974 6000	Email rodney.coyle@wokingham.gov.uk

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TITLE	Enhanced Partnership
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 28 September 2023
WARD	(All Wards);
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Place and Growth - Giorgio Framalico
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways - Paul Fishwick

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

Agreement is sought to make a legally binding partnership agreement between the Council and local bus operators. The requirement to make the Agreement was set out in the National Bus Strategy and it is the Department for Transport's expectation that all local authorities will make an Enhanced Partnership Agreement.

The Enhanced Partnership Agreement aims to improved improve partnership working between the Council and local bus operators. Subject to funding the Enhance Partnership will identify how any grant or other new funding will be used to improve bus services which better meet the local needs of our residents by improving access to jobs, health care and other services and amenities. Where improvements are made the wider benefits will be reduced congestion, improved air quality and reduced carbon emissions.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive approve the Enhanced Partnership Agreement so that it can become formally "made" into a legal agreement between Wokingham Borough Council and local bus operators by the end of September 2023.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Bus Strategy published in March 2021 required all Local Transport Authorities (LTA) in England and outside of London, to publish a local Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and agree an Enhanced Partnership (EP).

The BSIP sets out the Council's vision and objectives for local bus services in the borough, along with details about the existing network. The Council's second BSIP was published on 27th January 2023 and is available here: <https://myjourneywokingham.com/bus-travel/enhanced-partnership/> All LTAs are required to review and monitor their BSIPs on an annual basis.

An EP is a legal partnership agreement between an LTA and local bus operators operating in the borough. It is aimed at helping to deliver the BSIP. The EP sets minimum standards for local bus service, provides a framework for specifying how grant funding or any other funding will be spent, provides a governance framework for partnership working and partnership decision making, as well as a legal mechanism for its variation. Any decisions made by the partnership would then be subject to the Council's statutory processes, legal duties and Constitution.

Wokingham Borough Council had been unsuccessful in achieving any original BSIP grant funding but has recently been allocated £400,000 for financial year 2023/4. The Council is likely to receive a further £400,000 in 2024/25. It is understood that to receive the full funding an Enhanced Partnership would need to be adopted by the end of September.

The Executive are asked to approve the Enhanced Partnership document so that it can become a legally binding agreement. A statutory objection period has been carried out with all local bus operators who would be bound by the agreement. No objections were received. A statutory consultation, with statutory consultees has been completed. Responses to the consultation are included as Annex A. There were no significant issues arising from the consultation which would prevent the EP being made.

Following a decision by the Council's Executive Committee, the EP would be made on 29th September 2023 with a notice published on the Council's My Journey website on the same day.

BACKGROUND

The Enhanced Partnership (EP) Agreement, once formally made, forms a legal agreement between Wokingham Borough Council and local bus operators who operate qualifying local bus services. Qualifying local bus services are all registered local bus services, with the exceptions set out in 2.3.1, which mainly relate to school time only, community transport or coach services.

If the EP Agreement is approved at the Council's Executive Committee on 28th September 2023, the Agreement will be formally made on 29th September 2023 and commence 70 calendar days after this date.

The EP has been to Overview and Scrutiny Committee where suggestions were made in relation to an exit clause and clarity around future funding. In response, it has been confirmed with the Department for Transport that a single party exit clause cannot be included within an EP, instead the EP can be modified by variation or completely revoked for parties. Clause 5.2.1 has been amended to:

"All decisions made by the EP Forum are subject to any relevant approvals which are required by Wokingham Borough Council's Constitution or any legislation, regulation, or statutory guidance, including the availability of funding from all sources".

The EP Agreement is formed of two key components, the Enhanced Partnership Plan (EPP) and the Enhanced Partnership Scheme (EPS). The EPP sets out the Council's vision for local bus services and the key objectives and outcomes for improvements to local bus services. The EPP aligns with the Council's adopted Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), which was adopted in January 2023. The EPP has no end date and will be reviewed every 5 years.

EPS form the basis of the EP Agreement and provide details of which party will deliver which improvements and by when for local bus services. As the delivery of improvements to local bus services in the borough is subject to funding being provided by the Department for Transport (DfT), the EP Agreement presented for approval at this stage is a "shell agreement" which consists of headings, which can later be varied to include appropriate facilities, measures, routes or operational requirements as funding becomes available.

Once made the Enhanced Partnership Agreement can only be varied using either the powers adopted under powers at s.138E of the Transport Act 2000 or the bespoke variation arrangement, as detailed in Section 5 of the EP Agreement.

Vision, Objectives and Outcomes

The Enhanced Partnership's vision is:

"for a high-quality bus network for residents and visitors that contributes towards improving accessibility, local air quality, reducing road congestion and enabling carbon neutrality by 2030."

The Council will look to work in partnership with local bus operators and other key stakeholders to achieve the EP vision through 9 key objectives. The 9 key objectives are:

Objective 1: Grow passenger numbers to pre-pandemic levels and to continue that growth.

Objective 2: Return bus services to pre-pandemic levels, improve levels of service and extend to new areas of travel demand.

Objective 3: Improve bus journey times, reliability and punctuality along key transport corridors.

Objective 4: Make fares affordable and simpler.

Objective 5: Deliver a greener bus network by reducing carbon emissions and provide residents with attractive greener travel alternatives.

Objective 6: Improve bus integration with rail passengers, cyclists, pedestrians and car drivers.

Objective 7: Improve passenger engagement and satisfaction of bus services.

Objective 8: Improve accessibility to transport services and the local bus network for communities in more rural and low-density areas.

Objective 9: Ensure bus travel is a safe means of transport.

Through the 9 key objectives the EP Plan aims to secure positive outcomes for residents and visitors, particularly younger and older residents, and those with disabilities for whom bus travel provides independence. Improved access to education, employment, and social opportunities is important for improving employment prospects and reducing social isolation.

Bus services are socially and economically necessary as they play a vital role in access to employment at all times of the day and night. More frequent and reliable bus services are important for improving connections to centres of employment, broadening the choice of work and education for local communities. More accessible and reliable buses increase opportunities for businesses to recruitment and improves prospects of job mobility for residents, this is particularly true for sectors where shiftwork is common such as retail, hospitality, warehousing, and healthcare. Reduced fares make buses more affordable and accessible which is particularly important for those on low-income, in education/training or unemployed.

When bus travel increases this has a positive outcome on both the economic viability of the service, and the on-going ability of local bus operators to reinvestment in further improvements. With buses able to take up to take up to 75 cars off the road, this can reduce local congestion and improve local air quality, both of which have a positive impact on the climate emergency.

Governance Arrangements

The governance arrangements are detailed in Section 5 of the EPS. An EP Forum will be set-up to oversee and direct the work of the EP Scheme. The members of the EP Forum are detailed in Section 5.1.1 and can include:

- Wokingham Borough Council Officers

- Local Bus Operators
- Representatives of key stakeholders, including businesses, anchor institutions, community transport operators, Towns and Parish Councils and passenger focus groups.

The EP Forum will be chaired by The Executive Member for Active Travel Transport & Highways. The EP Forum will meet every 6 months and decisions will be taken on a simple majority basis. The votes will be allocated as followed:

- 1) All bus operators who run qualifying bus services (1 vote per operator that exceed 20% of bus mileage and **2 votes** for an operator that runs more than 50% of the bus mileage. Operators which function as more than one company but are part of the same financial entity will be treated as a single operator).
- 2) A bus Operator and any of its Group Companies that operate less than 20% of the aggregate miles operated by all Bus Operators in respect of Qualifying Bus Services within the Scheme Area, **1 vote** in total to represent all of those Operators interests.
- 3) Wokingham Borough Council Executive Member for Active Travel Transport & Highways (chair, **1 vote** and **casting vote**).
- 4) Wokingham Borough Council Officers (Highways and Transport) (1 vote each up to **2 votes**).

All other members of the EP Forum would be non-voting members. All decisions made by the EP Forum are subject to any relevant approvals which are required by Wokingham Borough Council's Constitution or any legislation, regulation, or statutory guidance.

Funding

All costs of improvements to bus services will be covered by grant funding from the Department for Transport (DfT). Any additional costs would be required to go through the council's usual financial approval process and be considered against the overall MTFP position.

Any delay to the approval of the Enhanced Partnership will mean a delay in the receipt of BSIP+ funding, which is current estimated to be £400,000 and therefore a delay in being able to progress improvements.

If the Enhanced Partnership is not made there is also a risk to other central government grant funding, including the Bus Service Operator Grant (BSOG), which is currently £111,400 pa. This would place a further pressure on the Councils overall revenue budget position or require a reduction in services provided.

Next Steps

29th September 2023 Publish Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative

that Council resources are optimised and are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	nil		
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	nil		
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	nil		

Other Financial Information

Improvements to bus services will be covered by grant funding from the Department for Transport (DfT). Any delay to the approval of the Enhanced Partnership will mean a delay in the receipt of BSIP+ funding, which is current estimated to be £400,000.

If the Enhanced Partnership is not made there is also a risk to other central government grant funding, including the Bus Service Operator Grant (BSOG), which is currently £111,400 pa.

Legal Implications arising from the Recommendation(s)

Include comments from legal officers, which set out all legal implications arising from the recommendations.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

A 28-day statutory consultation was carried out between 18th August 2023 and 8th September 2023 with statutory consultees. See Annex A.

Public Sector Equality Duty

An Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA) has been undertaken and a positive impact was identified. Any individual schemes or measures which result from the Enhanced Partnership would be subject to separate to a EQIA.

Climate Emergency – *This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030*

The EP Agreement will oversee and govern local bus service improvements which contribute reducing the number of miles driven, reducing carbon emissions and reducing congestion on local roads

Reasons for considering the report in Closed Session

n/a

List of Background Papers

Enhanced Partnership Agreement
Annex A – Statutory Consultation Responses

Contact Rebecca Brooks	Service Place
Telephone Tel: 0118 908 8302	Email rebecca.brooks@wokingham.gov.uk

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WOKINGHAM BOROUGH

ENHANCED PARTNERSHIP PLAN AND SCHEME

2023

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PART 1 – ENHANCED PARTNERSHIP PLAN

(1st October 2023 – 30th September 2028)

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 The Wokingham Borough Enhanced Partnership (EP) Plan is made in accordance with Section 138G(1) of the Transport Act 2000 by Wokingham Borough Council ('the Council').
- 1.1.2 Wokingham Borough Council and local bus operators have been working in partnership to deliver bus services across the borough. This has been a major factor in the steady growth in passengers over the past 10 years, which contrasts with the national trend and that seen in the wider Southeast region. The success of local bus services is a result of continued investment in local bus services for growth areas such as Shinfield, and investment by bus operators in bespoke service brandings and new vehicles.
- 1.1.3 Most local bus services in Wokingham Borough already support new technologies such as contactless payment, audio, and visual announcement, wi-fi and USB charging which enhance the passenger experience of bus travel. Wokingham Borough Council has promoted bus travel to residents and employees, both existing and new through its My Journey brand. Meanwhile, Reading Buses and Thames Valley Buses have developed an award-winning mobile application to bring journey planning, ticketing, and live information all in one place.
- 1.1.4 The pandemic has had a significant effect on bus travel across the borough. Following the publication of the National Bus Strategy, Bus Back Better, Wokingham Borough Council and local bus operators have entered into an Enhanced Partnership agreement to formalise partnership working. The vision for the Enhanced Partnership is:

Vision

The Council's vision for Bus Services in Wokingham Borough is for a high-quality bus network for residents and visitors that contributes towards improving accessibility, local air quality, reducing road congestion and enabling carbon neutrality by 2030.

1.1.5 The objectives and the approach of the Enhanced Partnership are summarised below.

Objectives

Objective 1: Grow passenger numbers to pre-pandemic levels and to continue that growth.

Whist bus passenger journeys in Wokingham Borough increased against the national trend for the 10-years leading up until 2020, the effects of the pandemic have been significant. Bus passenger levels are at about 85% of their pre-pandemic levels and concessionary travel remains the most affected. Residents place a high importance on high quality, affordable and accessible local bus services.

Objective 2: Return bus services to pre-pandemic levels, improve levels of service and extend to new areas of travel demand.

By 2037, the population of Wokingham Borough is projected to reach 180,900 people, which is the equivalent to adding 20 people a day. Wokingham Borough Council's Core Strategy and Local Plan update set out the plans for the delivery of 10,000 new homes and the associated communities and infrastructure across the borough. As the borough continues to grow local bus services must support and enable residents to make the journeys they need to make. It is also part of the growing Thames Valley region.

Objective 3: Improve bus journey times, reliability and punctuality along key transport corridors.

Along many of the main transport corridors buses are delayed in traffic especially during peak periods. While there are physical constraints along sections of road due to the nature of the road network, every effort is needed to deliver bus priority measures with bus lanes, bus gates and traffic signals in both physical and virtual form. There is also potential to speed up boarding times with ticketing systems. Reducing journey time variation so there is greater reliability is also important.

Objective 4: Make fares affordable and simpler.

As the cost-of-living increases, keeping fares affordable is more important than ever. Fares in Wokingham Borough are below the national average for an average 3-mile journey. Targeted fare reductions have already taken place in some areas of the borough because of feedback from passengers where there is the opportunity to grow patronage commercially. Coordinated thinking with the Reading Borough BSIP has led to the introduction of a discounted day ticket across the whole of greater Reading, benefitting many residents in Wokingham borough. The opening and relaunch of park and ride sites in the borough present a good opportunity to consider a strategy for seamless, affordable fares and ticketing schemes with the aim of attracting more passengers back to these services. Future tap-on tap-off fare capping schemes will help to provide confidence that customers will always get the best value fare without having to plan in advance, and help to speed up boarding.

Objective 5: Deliver a greener bus network by reducing carbon emissions and provide residents with attractive greener travel alternatives.

The Council is aware of the pressing concerns of climate change and has committed to reaching carbon neutrality by 2030. The way residents travel and the distances covered have a significant impact on the borough's carbon footprint. One bus has the potential to take 75 cars off local roads, reduce congestion and reduce the associated carbon footprints by 111 tCO₂e. With approximately 5,101 miles driven in the Borough for each of these cars per year, we will encourage residents and visitors to make greener choices in the way that they travel.

Objective 6: Improve bus integration with rail passengers, cyclists, pedestrians and car drivers.

Interchanges and bus stops need to be convenient, easy to use, comfortable and safe. Rail passengers require easy access to bus services. Bus stops should be the appropriate standard (Gold, Silver or Bronze) and be well maintained. Our Park & Ride services will need to offer a seamless, comfortable, and convenient travel experience to make them attractive and ensure viability. Park & Ride can be the first step car users make towards using ordinary local bus services, and form an important part of growing overall bus usage.

Objective 7: Improve passenger engagement and satisfaction of bus services.

It is important that passengers are satisfied with the services provided to both retain and attract more passengers to local bus services. The National Highways and Transport surveys for Wokingham Borough helps identify aspects of bus travel which are most important to residents and those aspects where there is least satisfaction, to allow for effective targeting of improvements.

Objective 8: Improve accessibility to transport services and the local bus network for communities in more rural and low-density areas.

In rural communities the difficulty some residents experience with poor accessibility to public transport due to low population density, and the effect this can have on their ability to access key services, is understood and needs to be improved upon subject to funding.

Objective 9: Ensure bus travel is a safe means of transport.

Bus travel is a relatively safe mode of transport, mainly due to a strong regulatory system for drivers, vehicles and operators. Personal safety can however be an issue at bus stops and the routes to/from them, as well as whilst on buses themselves.

Competition Test

- 1.1.6 The Wokingham Enhanced Partnership Scheme has been subject to the Competition Test as set out in Part 1 of Schedule 10 of the Transport Act 2000. Wokingham Borough Council believes the Enhanced Partnership Scheme will not or is unlikely to have a significantly adverse effect on

competition, for the purposes of Part 1 of Schedule 10 of the Transport Act 2000. The Enhanced Partnership Scheme is aimed at delivering improvements to bus services for passengers in a deregulated environment. The Enhanced Partnership Scheme will not impact on competition, as operators will be free to amend and introduce services in the area if the standards which universally apply to all operators are met.

1.2 Extent of Wokingham Enhanced Partnership

1.2.1 Both the Enhanced Partnership (EP) Plan and the Enhanced Partnership (EP) Scheme cover the full administrative boundary of Wokingham Borough. The full administrative boundary and the area within the borough are shown in Figure EP1-1. Any changes to the area covered by the Enhanced Partnership Scheme will be subject to an EP Scheme Variation, to be agreed as per Section 5 of the EP Scheme.

1.2.2 Wokingham Borough Council has worked closely with neighbouring authorities to ensure a consistent approach to the Enhanced Partnership for cross-boundary travel. The Council has worked closely with Reading Borough Council in particular, given the significant daily movements between Wokingham and Reading Boroughs. Neighbouring authorities will continue to be engaged with the Enhanced Partnership on a non-statutory basis through the Enhanced Partnership Forum.

Figure EP1-1 – Enhanced Partnership Plan Area - Wokingham Unitary Authority Boundary

WOKINGHAM BOUNDARY

WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL



1.2.3 The EP Plan has no end date and will be reviewed at least every five (5) years from the commencement date on 29th September 2023 or until it is varied or revoked in accordance with Section 5 of the EP Scheme. The Enhanced Partnership is formed of the following Schemes:

Scheme 1. – Borough wide Enhanced Partnership Scheme

1.2.4 Scheme 1 will be in place for a period of five years and commence 70 days after the making of the Enhanced Partnership (29th September 2023) or until it is varied or revoked in accordance with Section 5 of the EP Scheme.

1.2.5 Additional Schemes may be added at any time subject to the mechanism set out in Section 5 of the EP Scheme.

1.2.6 Each of the EP Schemes will be reviewed annually in line with the annual review of the Bus Service Improvement Plan. An annual progress report will be produced and published on the anniversary of the adoption of the Enhanced Partnership Plan (30th September each year). A full review of the Enhanced Partnership Plan (including its extent, objectives, and partnership governance) and Schemes (including measures and facilities provided, and requirements imposed) and compliance of both with competition legislation will take place in the 12 months prior to 30th September 2028.

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1.2.7 The implementation of any changes to the EP Plan will be in accordance with the Bespoke Arrangements in Section 5 of the EP Scheme.

1.2.8 The implementation of any changes to an EP Scheme will be in accordance with the Bespoke Arrangements in Section 5 of the EP Scheme.

1.2.9 Engagement with key stakeholders has been undertaken in preparation of the Local Bus Service Improvement Plan, including all local bus, rail, and community transport operators as well as those in the volunteer sector. The Council's engagement has extended to Town and Parish Councils who represent the views of their residents, in addition to some local resident associations. Discussions have also been undertaken with representatives of the Department for Work and Pensions, young and elderly carers, and the local Mental Health Alliance Partnership. The responses to engagement for the Local Bus Service Improvement Plan have informed the Enhanced Partnership implementation of any changes to the EP Scheme will be in accordance with the Bespoke Arrangements in Section 5 of the EP Scheme.

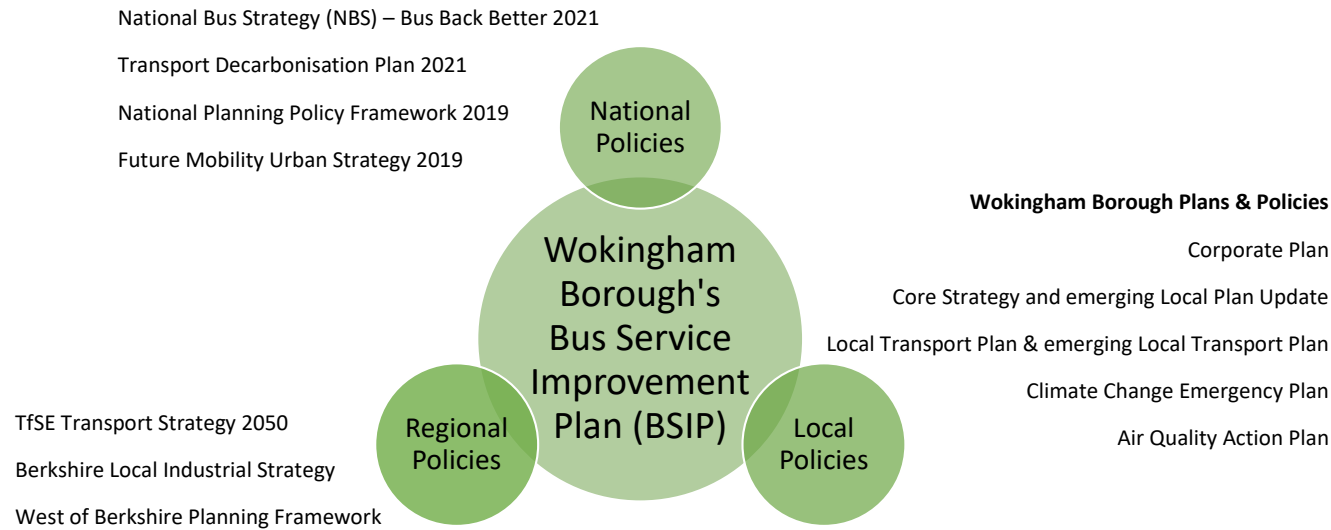
1.2.10 Independent comprehensive passenger surveys for the two largest local bus operators in the borough, Reading Buses and Thames Valley Buses, have been used to inform the Enhanced Partnership and will be used to monitor and evaluate its success subject to available funding. Residents' annual responses to the National Highways and Transportation survey have been considered in relation to satisfaction with local bus services and will be used to monitor and evaluate the success of the Enhanced Partnership.

1.3 Policy Context

1.3.1 The EP Plan aligns with key national, regional, and local policies as shown on Figure 1.4. In particular, the objectives highlighted in the National Bus Strategy (NBS) to “get bus use back to what it was before the pandemic [and] then ... increase patronage and raise buses mode share”. With one of the highest levels of car ownership in the country, buses in Wokingham Borough will truly need to meet the NBS’s aspiration of being an attractive alternative to the car for far more people.

Figure EP1-2 – The Policy Framework

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The EP Plan is fully aligned with our emerging fourth Local Transport Plan (LTP4). One of the challenges which our Corporate Plan highlights is to manage and balance need with the requirements for new housing, whilst protecting the quality of our environment and the sustainability of our existing communities. The number of households in the borough is growing which provides an opportunity for greener travel and particularly an increase in bus travel. We will work in partnership with local bus operators to achieve a virtual cycle of improvement, with an increase in services and frequencies to match any growth in bus travel.

The Council's Core Strategy sets out the Council plans for accommodating up to 10,000 new homes in the borough by 2026, as required by Central Government housing allocations set for Wokingham Borough. Figure 1-3 shows where most new homes are accommodated in one of four strategic development locations, these are: North Wokingham (yellow), South Wokingham (green), the area to the South of the M4 (blue) and in and around Arborfield (orange).

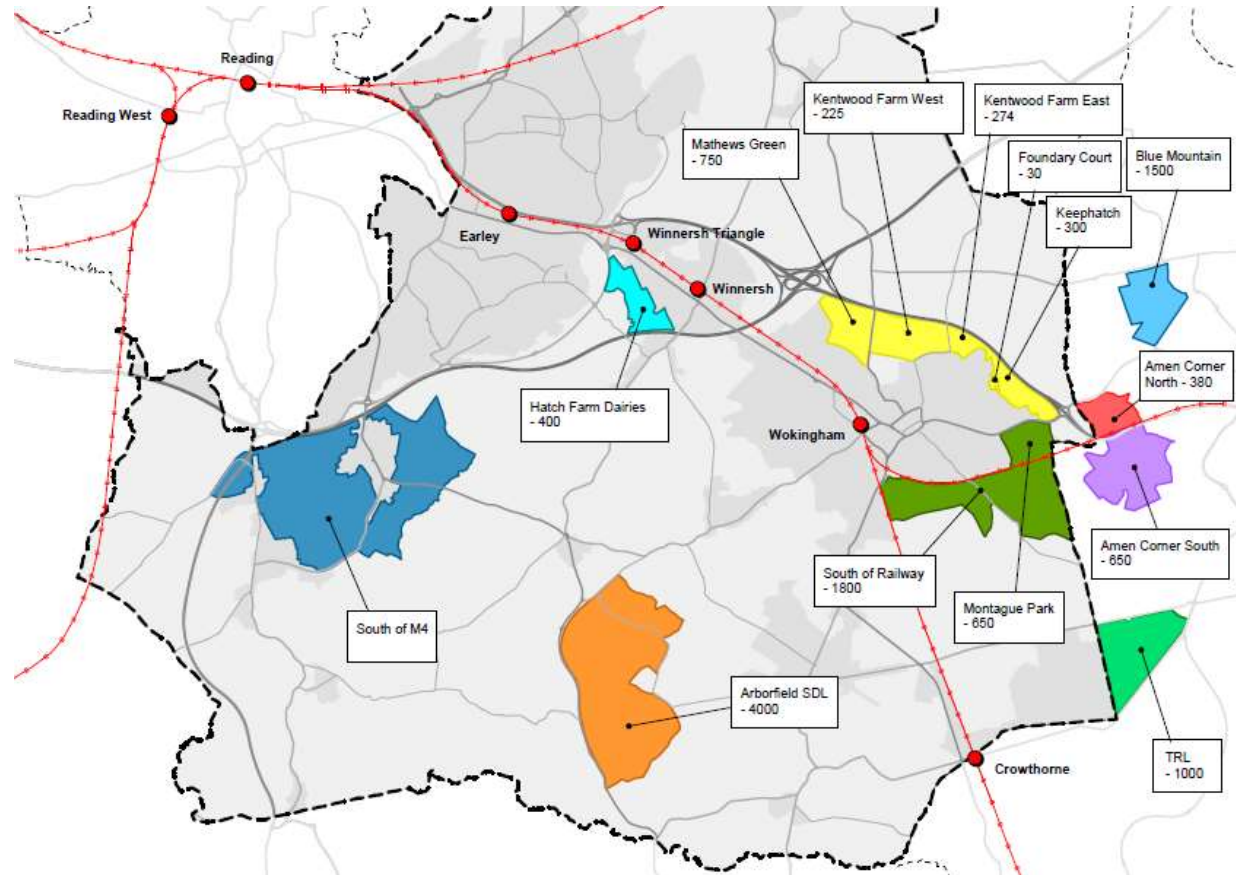


Figure EP 1-3 – Strategic Development Locations

1.3.2 Key plans and strategies the EP aligns with are listed below:

- **Local Transport Plan 4** – to reduce congestion and improve productivity, tackle climate change, reduce social exclusion, improve network resilience and future-proof transport networks for new and emerging technology.
- **Climate Emergency Action Plan** – the promotion of active and sustainable travel choices, encouraging greater use of public transport networks, encouraging transport operators to use greener vehicles and the use of intelligent transport systems to prevent future congestion.
- **Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) 2011-2026** – a focus on sustainable travel, particularly in our Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) in Wokingham Town and at Twyford Crossroads. Emissions from vehicles can negatively impact on the levels of air quality, and therefore present a particular challenge for buses with their stop, start nature.
- **Economic Development Strategy 2016-2021** – creating a borough where businesses can thrive and encouraging innovation and technology to build a competitive environment. For local bus services this means increasing links in and around Wokingham Borough, particularly with strategic transport hubs such as Twyford where Crossrail is introduced.
- **Intelligent Transport Strategy** (draft) – maximising the use of new technology in making the most efficient use of road and junction capacity for all users. The focus is on digital technologies which aim to reduce congestion and improve journey times. Digital technologies can be used to provide live information to residents on the day to day running of transport networks, including live data on actual journey times, air quality levels, availability of car share vehicles, integrated ticketing, and bus arrival times.
- **Local Walking and Cycling Implementation Plan (LCWIP)** (draft) – with the development of local walking and cycling networks across the borough. By co-ordinating the approach of the Local Bus Service Improvement Plan and Enhanced Partnership Plan with that of the (LCWIP) the Council can ensure direct and convenient points of access to the bus network for people who walk and cycle and therefore enable bus travel to form part of longer journeys.

1.3.3 Complementary policies and legislation which also have an impact on residents’ decision to travel by bus and the operation of bus services in the borough include:

- Traffic Management Policies
- Car Parking Plans and Policies
- Traffic Management Act 2004

1.4 Challenges and Opportunities for Bus Travel

1.4.1 These are grouped into four headings and are set out below with 14 challenges and 17 opportunities:

1.4.2 Pandemic and economic recovery:

Pandemic and Economic Recovery	
Challenges	Opportunities
1) Inflation from driver and fuel cost increases with driver costs the highest outside London. This is increasing costs of services and making viability more difficult.	1) Passenger demand returns and stabilises after the pandemic with services returning to a pre pandemic levels.
2) Bus driver shortages causing buses to be cancelled and services become less reliable. This is especially a problem for Thames Valley Buses and relates to the above driver cost inflation.	2) The BSIP presents an opportunity to reconsider the current public transport provision and how the network can be revised and simplified to better meet the needs of existing and future communities.
3) Changes in travel patterns post pandemic, with more people working from home. The Borough has a high proportion of professionals who are able to work from home 2-3 days per week. This reduces peak hour travel demand, less bus travel and reduced fares income.	3) Through the Customer Charter and the annual review of the BSIP, bus passengers in the Borough will be given more of a voice in the way that local bus services are delivered.

1.4.3 Travel choices and alternatives:

Travel Choices and Alternatives	
4) Ensure that ticket integration between bus operators continues.	The Reading All-Bus ticket allows inter ticketing.
5) The cost of travel and journey times for rail passengers is increased by poor accessibility to local stations. The lack of seamless ticketing and through fares between bus services and between bus and rail (other than the PlusBus offer which is not sufficiently comprehensive).	5) Increases in fuel costs, cars and general cost of living will increase the attractiveness of buses. Plus Bus offers most the requirement, but need to be able to extend Plus Bus sale via app and smart card.
6) Some corridors and local routes have low frequency which is not sufficiently attractive to non-public transport users or occasional users.	6) An increase in the Borough's parking charges will make bus travel more price competitive.
7) The rise of Uber and other private hire schemes are able to compete with bus fares especially if in a shared vehicle.	7) Providing bus priority measures to reduce journey times and variations in times will make buses more efficient and attractive. Continue to develop bus group ticketing options.
8) By providing segregated cycle routes in line with LTN1/20 road space may be allocated to cycles in preference to bus lanes. The Council will need to carefully consider the use of road space for local bus services and balance the needs of all road users.	8) By co-ordinating the approach of the BSIP with the Local Walking and Cycling Implementation Plan (LCWIP) the Council can ensure direct and convenient points of access to the bus network for people who walk and cycle, so allowing walking and cycling to form parts of longer active journeys utilising the bus network.

1.4.4 Decarbonisation and air quality:

Decarbonisation and Air Quality	
Challenges	Opportunities
9) The bus fleet is mostly clean, all with EURO6 apart from biomethane EURO5, which is arguably cleaner. There are practical operational challenges with using Ebuses associated with a limited range, charging points, long order times and high capital prices. Initially there is most potential for P & R services where they can recharge and smaller buses.	10) Supporting operators to migrate to electric vehicles there is an opportunity to improve outcomes of the Air Quality Action Plan. However, this cost also needs to be assessed against the carbon saving from removing cars from the road
10) Lack of Electric bus charging locations, either on the journey or at the depots.	11) Increased bus usage is an important component of the Borough Air Quality Action Plan and Climate Change Emergency Plan.
11) Walking for short trips and cycling for longer ones are being encouraged and more attractive, as the cycle network expands. Ebikes in particular offer an excellent way to travel bus distances.	12) Expanding the success of the My Journey programme to target areas other areas of the Borough to replicate the successes since pre-pandemic

1.4.5 Future growth and sustainability communities:

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Challenges	Opportunities
12) High levels of car ownership and lack of regular bus services especially in the lower density areas, means that buses are not attractive to car drivers.	13) Connecting to new demand from the Strategic Development Locations at the south of M4, Arborfield, South Wokingham and North Wokingham.
13) New housing areas are not always able to provide frequent and reliable bus services. This in is part due to some areas being of relative low density with high car ownership and 2 parking spaces per dwelling.	14) Potential to improve accessibility to lower density and rural areas.
14) Population growth is expected to be greatest amongst the over 85 age group, as residents live longer and are active for longer. With more residents becoming eligible for concessionary bus travel this presents increasing financial pressures for the Council through increased concessionary fare payments	15) With more residents becoming eligible for concessionary travel passenger trips will increase. The concessionary reimbursement system requires improvement.
	16) Hospital shuttle Park and Ride bus has the potential to be developed into a local bus service.
	17) Continued house building and new home occupations has the potential to change behaviours and increase bus travel.

1.5 Overview of Local Bus Network

1.5.1 Bus operators providing local bus services within Wokingham Borough are:

- **Reading Buses** (part of Reading Transport, an arm's length company owned by Reading Borough Council) operate 79.13% of the total mileage of local bus services within the borough. Reading Buses operate mainly commercial and some financially supported local bus services. Reading Buses operate services on all key corridors as well as in the urban areas of Earley and Woodley.
- **Thames Valley Buses** (part of Reading Transport) only operate local bus services which are financially supported by Wokingham Borough Council. Most local bus services operated by Thames Valley Buses are in and around the Town of Wokingham, with the one exception of the interurban service between Wokingham Town, Winnersh, Twyford, Charvil, Sonning, Woodley and Reading.
- **Arriva, The Shires** provides one interurban local bus service on the A4/A321 corridor between High Wycombe via Henley and Twyford to Reading. The Arriva service is commercially operated and represents 6.58% of the total operated mileage in the borough.
- **Horseman Coaches** operate three registered school bus routes and three 'weekly shopper' local bus services. Each of the 'weekly shopper' local bus services offer one return trip on one day each week from rural villages. All routes operated by Horseman Coaches receive financial support from Wokingham Borough Council.
- **Stagecoach South** operate one commercial school bus route into Hampshire.

Furthermore, although not registered as a local bus service:

- **Stewarts Coaches** operate a shuttle service from Reading to the Thames Valley Park business park.

1.5.2 A summary of the services operated by each local bus operator within the borough are provided in Table EP1-1.

Table EP 1-1 – Local Bus Operators and Local Bus Services

Local bus operator	Registered address	Local bus routes operated
Reading Transport Limited (trading as Reading Buses)	Great Knollys Street, Reading, RG1 7H	Leopard route: 3 Lion routes: 4/X4 Orange routes: 13, 14 Little Oranges routes: 19A/19B/19C Claret routes: 21, 21A Park and Ride routes: 300, 500, 600, 81
Thames Valley Buses Limited	Unit 3, Maple Centre, Downmill Road, Bracknell, RG12 1QS	121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 125A, 125B, 127, 128, 129, 151, 151A
Horseman Coaches	2, Acre Road, Reading, RG2 0SU	145, 153, 154 202, 244, W983
Stagecoach (South) Limited	Bus Station, Basin Road, Chichester, PO19 8DG Depot address: Halimote Road, Aldershot, GU11 1NJ	406
Arriva the Shires Limited	4 Westmoreland Avenue, Thurmaston, Leicester, LE4 8PH Depot address: Cressex Business Park, High Wycombe, HP12 3RH	850
Stewarts Coaches Limited	Headley Park Eight, Headley Road East, Woodley, Reading, RG5 4SA	Thames Valley Park shuttle (not registered as a local bus route)

- 1.5.3 Across the network 1.9 million vehicle kilometres were operated in 2019, accommodating 2.8 million passenger journeys. This is less than a quarter of the average for England and half the average journey per head of population for the South East region. Of the 2.8 million passenger journeys, 21.8% were made using a concessionary pass. This is lower than the national average.
- 1.5.4 In recent years, and up until the first quarter of 2020, Wokingham Borough saw a steady increase in bus service demand and supply, with an approximate 23% increase in journeys per head of population between 2010 and 2020. In contrast journeys per head of population have fallen in England in the same period.

1.6 Bus Passenger's Priorities for Improvement

- 1.6.1 Passenger and resident priorities for bus travel have been identified from a combination of customer surveys and high-level engagement. Transport Focus Surveys for Reading Buses and Thames Valley Buses measured bus passengers' satisfaction with local bus service in 2019. 94% of passengers were either fairly or very satisfied with Thames Valley Buses services. The only two categories which scored below 80% satisfaction were value for money (62%) and information provided inside the bus (67%), which is in line with national trends. General satisfaction on Reading Buses services is consistently above 90%, the areas where satisfaction has been less than 80%, but still above the national average, were:
- Value for Money amongst all passenger groups (particularly amongst the 16-34 age group).
 - Punctuality of the bus.
 - The length of time waiting for the bus.
 - The information provided inside the bus.
 - The amount of personal space you had around you.

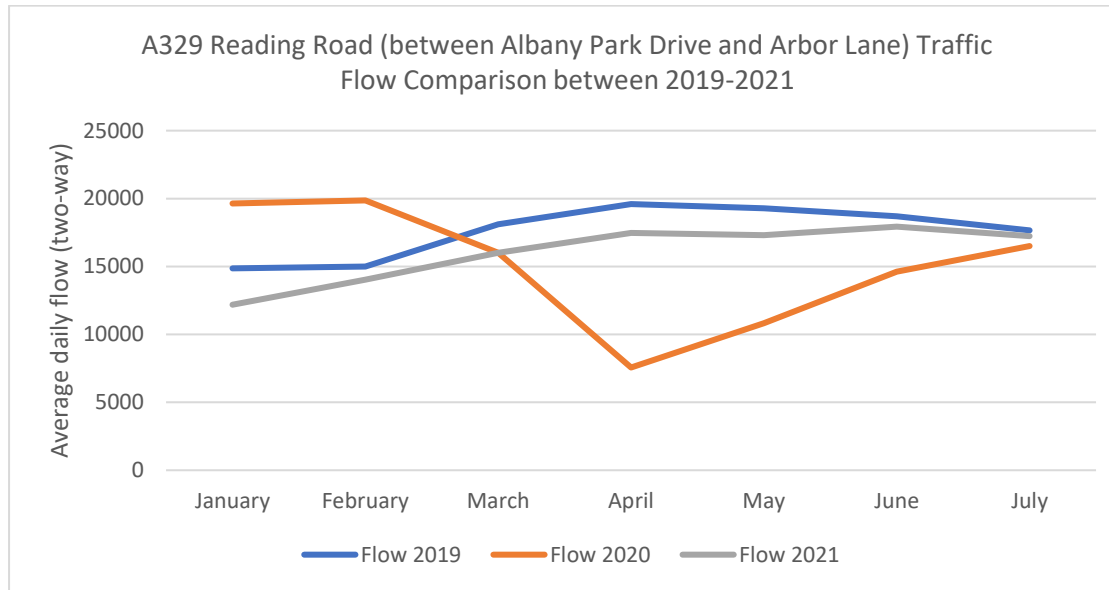
- 1.6.1 The National Highways and Transport (NHT) Survey asks a randomly selected sample of Wokingham Borough residents their satisfaction levels with local bus services. The NHT survey extends to both bus users and non-bus users in the borough. In Wokingham Borough 61% of residents reported being satisfied with local bus services compared with 60% nationally. The highest satisfaction levels were related to bus stop infrastructure, bus fares, personal safety and the overall quality of the bus services when compared to residents in other local authority areas. Categories where satisfaction levels fell below that of residents elsewhere in England were in relation to bus frequency, information on bus services, the responsiveness of transport and community transport provision.

- 1.6.2 Engagement with Town and Parish Councils indicated that priorities for local Town and Parish Councils varied across the borough. Overall, Town and Parish Councils reported that they were most satisfied with safety on board the bus and the quality of the vehicles provided. Overall, Town and Parish Councils reported they were least satisfied with no bus services being provided in some areas, the cost of travel and buses not going where they are perceived to be needed. The main priorities for improvement were identified to be more direct services, more buses throughout the day and lower fares. All Town and Parish Council who responded to the survey were prepared to support the Borough Council with the promotion and publicity of local bus services.
- 1.6.3 More specifically targeted priorities which were identified by Town and Parish Councils included inequitable fares in some areas compared to others due to fare zone boundaries, better information being needed at bus stops especially for more complex bus services, and that bus services all tend to go to Reading but not always by the most direct route. More rural parishes identified priorities for better bus stop infrastructure and information, better links with stations and better bus service coverage in general. Electric buses for urban areas were also noted as a future ambition to help to tackle climate change.
- 1.6.4 Engagement with wider stakeholders revealed a high proportion of carers use local bus services, a quarter of whom travel at least once a week. Priorities for improvement for carers who do not use the bus were buses going where needed, at the right time and having quicker journey times. For carers who do use the bus, priorities for improvements were drivers having a better understanding of disabilities, more direct services, better information, and better waiting facilities. The Department for Work and Pensions indicated that bus services in Wokingham Borough provided good access to Reading and Bracknell job centres. Any improvements to bus services were recommended to focus on the timings of services for employment outside of non-standard office hours such as that of the hospitality industry.

1.7 Congestion and Journey Speeds

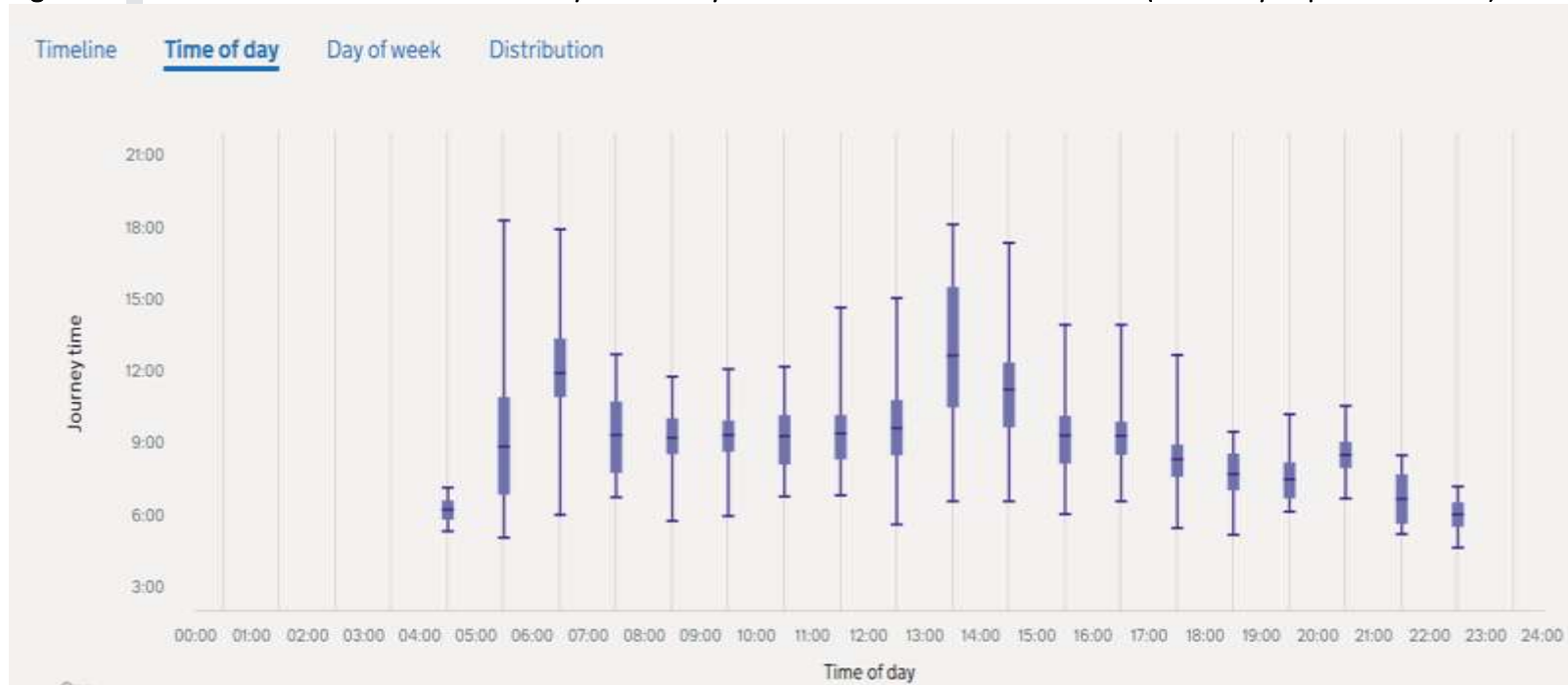
1.7.1 Increasing traffic levels and junction capacity can have a detrimental effect on bus journey speeds and the reliability of services. Average daily flows (two-way) on key corridors in the borough have nearly returned to pre-Covid 19 levels. The A329 traffic flows were just under 18,000 vehicles in summer 2019, returning to a similar level by summer 2021. On the A4 corridor average daily traffic flows were slightly higher at close to 20,000 vehicles in summer 2019, returning to just under 18,000 vehicles by summer 2021. In all cases, traffic flows dropped significantly during the pandemic, in some cases by as much as 39%, as shown on Figure EP1-3. Traffic flows in 2022 have largely returned to pre-pandemic levels.

Figure EP1-3 – Key Corridor Traffic Flows: A329 Reading Road



- 1.7.2 The variation in timetabled journey times can provide a good indication of where bus services may face daily challenges from slow traffic speeds or high passenger boardings. Where bus journey times are extended due to slow traffic speeds bus priority measures may be an effective way of providing quicker bus journey times.
- 1.7.3 The evidence indicates that there would be some benefit to investigating further where the delays are occurring on the key corridors and the benefits different types of bus priority measures could potentially bring.

Figure EP1-4 – Variation in Scheduled Journey Time Daily Profile on the A329 Northbound (Weekday September 2022)



1.8 Reliability and Punctuality

- 1.8.1 The reliability of bus services in Wokingham Borough by the two main operators, Reading Buses and Thames Valley Buses, is already quite high at 99.47% and 99.37% respectively.
- 1.8.2 On average, the punctuality of bus services in Wokingham Borough was 72.5% in 2019 rising to an average of 91.3% during the pandemic. The 18.8% difference in bus service punctuality demonstrates the challenge local bus services face from the daily variations in traffic conditions and from the potential effects of congestion.
- 1.8.3 Bus punctuality levels vary greatly by service. The longest routes tend to experience the highest risk of poor punctuality, whilst the shorter town link routes have a much lower risk of poor punctuality.

1.9 Roadworks

- 1.9.1 Roadworks and the coordination of roadworks can have a significant effect on punctuality of local bus services. Feedback from local bus operators indicates that the council is not always doing well in keeping them informed of when and where roadworks take place in the Borough. For corridor and cross-boundary services a coordinated approach with neighbouring Councils to ensure these longer services are not subject to several sets of delays would further improve bus punctuality during roadworks.

1.10 Enhanced Partnership Plan Outcomes

- 1.10.1 Wokingham's Enhanced Partnership Plan aims to achieve the following outcomes / objectives to improve local bus services:
- Objective 1: Grow passenger numbers to pre-pandemic levels and to continue that growth.
 - Objective 2: Return bus services to pre-pandemic levels, improve levels of service and extend to new areas of travel demand.
 - Objective 3: Improve bus journey times, reliability and punctuality along key transport corridors.
 - Objective 4: Make fares affordable and simple.
 - Objective 5: Deliver a greener bus network by reducing carbon emissions and provide residents with attractive green travel alternatives.
 - Objective 6: Improve bus integration with rail passengers, cyclists, pedestrians and car drivers.

- Objective 7: Improve passenger engagement and satisfaction of bus services.
- Objective 8: Improve accessibility to transport services and the local bus network for communities in more rural and low-density areas.
- Objective 9: Ensure bus travel is a safe means of transport.

1.10.2 Interventions and proposals that will be jointly delivered by Wokingham Borough Council and local bus operators to achieve the outcomes are listed below by each objective. There are 17 proposals identified and the detailed actions for these are set out in the BSIP2.

- **More frequent and reliable services.** This corresponds into the delivery of the first three Council objectives which are:

Objective 1: Grow passenger numbers to pre-pandemic levels and to continue that growth.

Objective 2: Return bus services to pre-pandemic levels, improve levels of service and extend to new areas of travel demand.

Objective 3: Improve bus journey times, reliability and punctuality along key transport corridors.

The proposals aim to improve service frequencies and introducing more bus priority along the five bus corridors based on three proposals:

- Proposal 1: Review and increase service frequency on key corridors.
- Proposal 2: Review and improve service frequency to urban areas of Earley, Woodley, Wokingham Town and new development areas.
- Proposal 3: Increase bus priority measures on key corridors. Identify bus priority that includes additional bus lanes, bus gates and traffic signal priority along the key corridors.

It will also be important to work with Reading Borough Council as most corridors extend into Reading Borough. The key partners for this are Bus operators, Reading BC, Bracknell BC, the Hospital and Town & Parish Councils.

- **Make fares affordable and simple.** Lower fares will attract more passengers. Fares currently in the area are considered to be reasonable and, given the inflationary pressures in the industry, there have been some recent increases. Subject to funding, there are a series of proposals that aim to reduce and simplify fares. In terms of having consistent fares and fares structures a dominant operator is helpful. Some of the proposals are relying on the Reading BC BSIP which is applying subsidies to the Greater Reading area. These include parts of Wokingham Borough that cover the University, Woodley, Earley, Mere oak and Sonning. The proposals are as follows:

- Proposal 4: Keep fares at an affordable level and reduce where possible.
- Proposal 5: Simplify fares.
- Proposal 6: Integrate ticketing between operators and other sustainable modes.

The key partners to deliver these fare proposals are the bus operators, Reading BC, Bracknell BC and Department for Transport (DfT).

- **Deliver a greener bus network by reducing carbon emissions and provide residents with attractive greener travel alternatives.** A clean and green bus fleet is essential for the network. Much of the funding for this is done via the Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas Scheme (ZEBRA) which includes grants for the rolling stock and charging infrastructure. The proposal is:
 - Proposal 7: Invest in improved bus vehicles and transition buses to zero carbon. The key partners are the Department for Transport (DfT), bus operators and Reading BC.

- **Improve bus integration with rail passengers, cyclists, pedestrians and car drivers.** Greater integration of buses with all other modes of transport is an important aspect of delivering a seamless public transport network. The Borough has done much work in recent years on the Park and Ride sites and includes the new one at Coppid Beech. Demand for them has reduced following the pandemic due to government messaging about safety, and the flexibility that car users have to park in central areas, but it is returning slowly with new and more flexible ways of using the sites and bus services are being identified to help support the running costs. The borough is also looking to develop a differential car parking charging system which should improve the attractiveness of Park & Ride sites. The multi-operator Reading All-Bus ticket enables easier and more cost-effective travel on local buses in the borough, with wider zones a potential future enhancement. Better ticketing also includes making it easier to travel by bus and rail through the expansion of joint ticketing schemes and reviewing the park and ride ticketing offer to encourage greater use of park and ride services in the borough. The proposals split by mode are as follows:
 - Proposal 8: Integrate with walking and cycling networks.
 - Proposal 9: Integrate with the rail network.
 - Proposal 10: Continue to develop the Park & Ride sites so they become effective transport interchanges.

The key partners for these proposals are the bus operators, Reading BC, rail operators, regional organisations, and Town & Parish Councils.

- **Improve passenger engagement and satisfaction of bus services.** There are several groups and organisations in the Borough that are consulted on regarding any proposed changes to bus services. These include community groups in Earley and Woodley and a number of parish councils, but there is no overarching representation of bus users. There are a series of proposals including a charter and a user group, which should help to involve the public to a greater extent in services. The proposals are as follows:
 - Proposal 11: Develop a Passenger Charter.
 - Proposal 12: Develop a user group

- Proposal 13: Improve passenger information.

The key partners for these proposals are the bus operators, community groups, Town & Parish Councils, Reading BC, Bracknell BC and West Berks Council.

- **Improve accessibility to transport services and the local bus network for communities in more rural and low-density areas.** Bus services in rural areas are generally infrequent and lack accessibility for many residents because bus service economics rely on being a method of mass transit. In the north and the east of the Borough this is a particular problem. There are similar rural and low-density areas in nearby authorities such as Windsor & Maidenhead, West Berkshire and Bracknell Forest. The Council has discussed with neighbouring authorities the potential for a joint Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) operation, subject to suitable funding being made available. By sharing resources such as control centre, software and reservations process it maybe more cost-effective. The proposals are as follows:

- Proposal 14: Improve service quality and accessibility in low density areas.
- Proposal 15: Invest in accessible and inclusive bus services.

The key partners are the bus operators, community groups, Town & Parish Councils and Reading BC.

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- **Ensure bus travel is a safe means of transport.** Wokingham’s bus network has low levels of crime and anti-social behaviour, but perception is important, and the Council wants the bus network to feel welcoming and safe. The proposals are:
 - Proposal 16: Protect the personal safety of bus passengers.
 - Proposal 17: Minimise highway accidents involving buses.

Key partners are the bus operators, Reading BC and Thames Valley Police.

1.10.3 In addition to the policy interventions within the Enhanced Partnership Plan, wider Council policies and plans, as detailed in Section 1.3 will help support the implementation and success of the Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme.

1.10.4 The first EP Scheme to be introduced will cover the whole of Wokingham Borough and all local bus services which operate within the borough, unless formally exempted in accordance with the exemption mechanism detail in Section 2.3 of the Enhanced Partnership Scheme. The interventions will be delivered along key corridors, in urban areas and across rural areas as appropriate.

1.10.5 The key corridors are defined as:

- **A329 Corridor** – Bracknell – Wokingham – Winnersh – Reading
- **A329m Corridor** – Winnersh Triangle – Reading
- **A33 Corridor** – Spencers Wood – Three Mile Cross and Reading
- **A4 / A321 Corridor** – Henley / Wokingham – Twyford – Sonning – Reading
- **A327 Corridor** – Wokingham – Finchampstead – Arborfield/Spencers Wood – Shinfield – Reading

1.10.6 The urban areas are defined as:

- **Earley / Lower Earley / Maiden Erlegh Area**
- **Woodley and North Earley**
- **Wokingham Town and the surrounding areas** – including the communities of Emmbrook, Woosehill, the Norreys Estate, Easthampstead, Finchampstead and Barkham.

1.10.7 The rural and low-density areas are defined as:

- **North Parishes** – including Wargrave, Remenham, Sonning and Charvil
- **Eastern Parishes** – Hurst and Ruscombe
- **Southern Parishes** – including Spencers Wood, Swallowfield, Riseley and Finchampstead Village

1.11 Funding Arrangements

1.11.1 To deliver the 17 proposals set out above, the cost is estimated to be in excess of £17m. The above improvements cannot be delivered without appropriate funding from central government, which is not currently available. It is because the patronage gained from the measures would not be derived over a reasonable enough period for purely commercial payback, and some of the environmental gains do not derive a commercial payback for bus operators. Significant DfT funding has been allocated to Reading Borough Council, with much of Wokingham in the Reading Journey to Work Area. However, we remain optimistic that further funding will be made available in the future. In the meantime, we will consider the limited funding the Council has available and work with partners to bid for any appropriate funding that maybe available.

- 1.11.2 Wokingham Borough Council provided £870,010 (year 2021/2022) of financial support towards local bus services. £111,000 of this funding is provided by Central Government through the Bus Service Support Grant, the remainder is Council funding. Inflationary pressures, the impact of changing travel patterns and a slow recovery in concessionary passengers has increased the cost of local bus services whilst passenger revenues have fallen. Due to the importance placed on maintaining local bus services, the Council's Executive Committee has agreed to £350,000 of budget growth from 2023/2024, in addition to the release of £450,000 per year of S106 funding for the three financial years up until 2026/2027.
- 1.11.3 Other funding which the Council provides towards the operation of local transport services or because of revenue forgone includes:
- £884,250* per annum for concessionary fare reimbursement (*based on annual budget)
 - £103,000 per annum for community and volunteer transport services
- 1.11.4 £14.9 million has been committed for the construction and expansion of park and ride sites in the borough. Approximately £9.5 million of the funding has been secured from the Local Enterprise Partnership.
- 1.11.5 The Council has also secured a further £1.6 million from developers for the provision of bus infrastructure in and around new developments.

1.12 Governance Arrangements

- 1.12.1 The Enhanced Partnership has been made following engagement with local bus, community transport operators, voluntary transport operators, rail operators, neighbouring authorities and Towns and Parish Councils. Consultation has been carried out with local bus operators, neighbouring authorities, the Local Enterprise Partnership, the Chief of Police and the Traffic Commissioner.
- 1.12.2 Section 5 of EP Scheme 1 sets out the governance arrangements for the Enhanced Partnership.
- 1.12.3 If variations to the EP Scheme are required, this will be undertaken in accordance with Section 5.4 of the EP Scheme.

1.13 Monitoring and Consultation

- 1.13.1 Local bus operators will be consulted regularly on the progress of the EP Plan and EP Scheme(s). The EP Forum will allow key stakeholders to review the progress of the Enhanced Partnership. Community led working groups maybe set up within the community and provide feedback to Transport Officers on how well the EP Plan and EP Scheme(s) are working.

PART 2 – ENHANCED PARTNERSHIP SCHEME 1

1 EP Scheme Content

1.1.1 This document fulfils the statutory requirements set out by the Bus Services Act 2017 for an Enhanced Partnership (EP) Scheme. In accordance with statutory requirements in section 138G(1) of the Transport Act 2000, the EP Scheme document sets out:

Section 2 – Scope of the EP Scheme and commencement date

Section 3 – Obligations on the Local Authorities

Section 4 – Obligations on Bus Operators

Section 5 – Governance Arrangements

Section 6 – Dispute and Resolution Arrangements

1.1.2 The EP Scheme can only be put in place if an associated EP Plan has been made. Therefore, this document should be considered alongside Wokingham’s Enhanced Partnership Plan.

1.1.3 The EP Scheme has been jointly developed by Wokingham Borough Council which is the Local Planning and Highway Authority and those bus operators that provide local bus services in the EP Scheme Area. It sets out obligations and requirements on both Wokingham Borough Council and local bus operators to achieve the intended improvements, with the aim of delivering the objectives of Wokingham’s EP Plan.

1.1.4 The objectives of the EP Plan are:

1. Grow passenger numbers to pre-pandemic levels and to continue that growth.
2. Return bus services to pre-pandemic levels, improve levels of service and extend to new areas of travel demand.
3. Improve bus journey times, reliability and punctuality along key transport corridors.
4. Make fares affordable and simpler.
5. Deliver a greener bus network by reducing carbon emissions and provide residents with attractive greener travel alternatives.
6. Improve bus integration with rail passengers, cyclists, pedestrians and car drivers.
7. Improve passenger engagement and satisfaction of bus services.
8. Improve accessibility to transport services and the local bus network for communities in more rural and low-density areas.
9. Ensure bus travel is a safe means of transport.

2 Scope of the EP Scheme and Commencement Date

2.1 Scope of the EP Scheme

2.1.1 The Enhanced Partnership Plan and Enhanced Partnership Scheme 1 cover the full extent of Wokingham Borough.

2.1.2 The EP Scheme will support the improvement of all qualifying local bus services operating within Wokingham Borough (Section 2.3). The EP Scheme does not include registered long distance coach services, school time only services, community transport services operated under Section 19 or Section 22 licences or voluntary transport services.

2.1.3 The EP Scheme will support the delivery of the EP Plan objectives across the following corridors, urban areas, and rural / low-density areas:

a) EP Scheme Corridors:

- i. **A329 Corridor** – Bracknell – Wokingham – Winnersh – Reading
- ii. **A33 Corridor** – Spencers Wood – Three Mile Cross and Reading
- iii. **A4 / A321 Corridor** – Henley / Wokingham – Twyford – Sonning – Reading
- iv. **A327 Corridor** – Wokingham – Finchampstead – Arborfield/Spencers Wood – Shinfield – Reading

b) EP Scheme Urban areas:

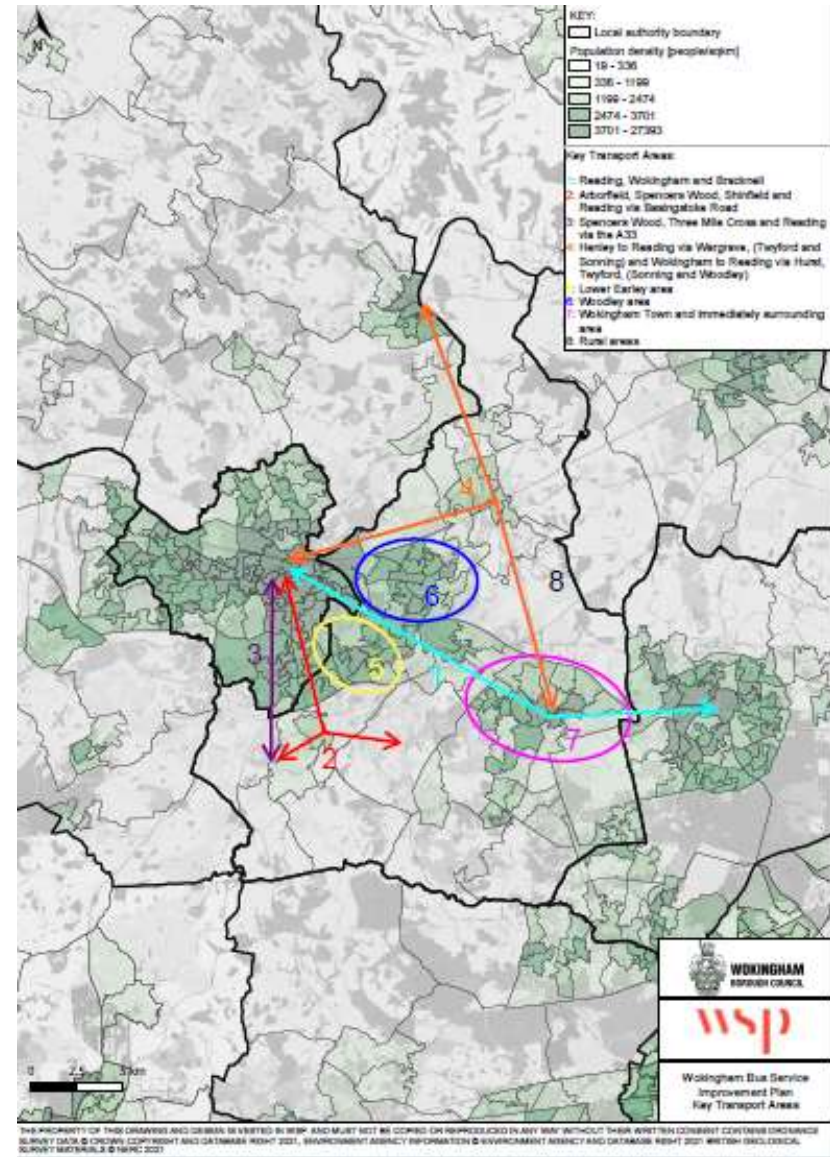
- i. **Earley / Lower Earley / Maiden Erlegh Area**
- ii. **Woodley and North Earley**
- iii. **Wokingham Town and the surrounding areas** – including the communities of Emmbrook, Woosehill, the Norreys Estate, Easthampstead, Finchampstead and Barkham.

c) EP Scheme Rural and Low-Density areas:

- i. **North Parishes** – including Wargrave, Remenham, Sonning and Charvil
- ii. **Eastern Parishes** – Hurst and Ruscombe
- iii. **Southern Parishes** – including Spencers Wood, Swallowfield, Riseley and Finchampstead Village.

2.1.4 Taken together the key corridors, urban areas, and rural / low-density areas cover the full extent of Wokingham Borough, as shown in Figure ES1.1.

Figure ES1.1 – Enhanced Partnership Scheme Area



2.2 Commencement Date

2.2.1 The EP Plan and EP Scheme are made on 29th September 2023. The EP Plan will have no end date but will be reviewed every five years from the commencement date. The EP Scheme will start 70 days after it has been made, unless stated otherwise, with subsequent milestone dates by which certain facilities and measures (Section 3) and bus service operator obligations will be introduced (Section 4). The EP Scheme will have no specific end date but will be reviewed by Wokingham Borough Council annually on or by 1st October each year (see Section 5).

2.3 Exempted Services

2.3.1 Registered Local Bus Services with one or more stopping places within the EP Scheme area are classed as ‘qualifying local bus services’, except those with locally agreed exemptions, as set out below:

- i. Services run under section 89 to 91 of the Transport Act 1985 where the service operates at school times only and the intended purpose is to solely serve an educational establishment.
- ii. Registered local services that are excursions or tours.
- iii. Services operated under Section 22 of the Transport Act 1985 (community bus services).
- iv. Services operated under Section 19 of the Transport Act 1985 (not for profit services).
- v. Services that have 10% or less of their overall distance registered as local bus services.
- vi. Services operated by vehicles that by law do not permit standing.

2.3.2 Any amendments to Section 2.3 will be implemented under the EP by means of the Bespoke Arrangements for Varying the Enhanced Partnership Scheme as set out in section 5.4 below.

3 Obligations on the Authorities

3.1 Summary of obligations on authorities

3.1.1 The following table summarises the specific interventions that Wokingham Borough Council will deliver as part of the EP Scheme.

Table ES1.1 – Summary of Existing Facilities and Measures

Facilities ¹	EPS Section
Existing Bus Priority Facilities	3.2
Existing Bus Stops	3.3
Existing Bus Shelters	3.4
Existing Real Time Passenger Information Screens	3.5
Existing Park and Ride Sites	3.6
My Journey Website	3.7
Measures ²	EPS Section
Local Authority Mechanisms and Procedures	3.13
Managing roadworks in the EP Scheme Area	3.14
Marketing and Promotion of Local Bus Services in the EP Scheme Area	3.15
Procurement of Contracted Services to the Benefit of the Passenger	3.16
Consultation on Appropriate Traffic Management Measures	3.17
External Funding Bids	3.18
Planning Consultation	3.19

3.1.2 Wokingham Borough Council will make provisions to allow the variation of the Enhanced Partnership Scheme so that Wokingham Borough can provide the Facilities and Measures summarised in Table ES1.2, subject to funding and feasibility:

¹ Provided under s.138D(1) of the Transport Act 2000

² Provided under s.138D(1) of the Transport Act 2000

Table ES1.2 – Summary of New Facilities and Measures, Subject to Variation

Facilities³	EPS Section
New Bus Priority Facilities	3.8
New Bus Stops in Development Areas	3.9
New Bus Stops outside Development Areas	3.10
New Real Time Passenger Information Screens	3.11
New Park and Ride Sites	3.12
Measures⁴	EPS Section
Bus Lane and Junction Enforcement	3.20
Integration with other sustainable travel modes	3.21
Feasibility Studies	3.22
Bus Stop Audit	3.23
Branding	3.24
Passenger Charter	3.25
Pilot New Technology	3.26
Demand Responsive Transport	3.27

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³ Provided under s.138D(1) of the Transport Act 2000

⁴ Provided under s.138D(2) of the Transport Act 2000

3.2 Existing Bus Priority Facilities

- 3.2.1 Wokingham Borough Council will provide and maintain the list of existing bus priority facilities described in Table A1 of Annex A.
- 3.2.2 Bus priority facilities may be removed from or amended in Annex A by means of the Bespoke Arrangements for Varying the Enhanced Partnership Scheme as set out in section 5.4 below.

3.3 Existing Bus Stops

- 3.3.1 Wokingham Borough Council will provide bus stops at the locations registered on the National bus stop database ([NaPTAN - DfT](#)), with the exception of those stops which are designated as “hail and ride”. Bus stops are in three categories: Bronze with a post and flag only, Silver with and shelter added and Gold with Real Time Information (RTI) added.
- 3.3.2 Existing bus stops may be improved in accordance with the standards set out in Wokingham Borough Council’s Bus Stop Policy (July 2013) or any subsequent revision.

3.4 Existing Bus Shelters

- 3.4.1 Bus shelters are provided in certain locations across the EP scheme area. Bus shelters are maintained in accordance with the adopted Bus Stop Policy (July 2013) or any subsequent revision.

3.5 Existing Real Time Passenger Information Screens

- 3.5.1 Wokingham Borough Council will provide real time information screens at the locations listed in Table B1 of Annex B.
- 3.5.2 Existing real time information screens will form part of an on-going maintenance contract.
- 3.5.3 Where real time information screens are subject to damage beyond the scope of the maintenance contract, Wokingham Borough Council will replace the screens subject to available funding.

3.5.4 Annex B may be varied or replaced by means of the Bespoke Arrangements for Varying the Enhanced Partnership Scheme as set out in section 5.4 below.

3.6 Existing Park and Ride Sites & Operational Review

3.6.1 Park and Ride sites are provided at Winnersh Triangle, Mere oak and Thames Valley Park. When the sites are operational, the maintenance and operation of these sites will be undertaken in accordance with the appropriate site-specific management agreement.

3.6.2 Any amendments to the operation and maintenance of Park and Ride sites, will be made using a bespoke variation under the powers at s.138E of the Transport Act 2000, by a revised copy of the management agreement, or an equivalent document, being distributed to all local operators who serve the park and ride site at that time. If no objections are received within 14 calendar days, clauses 3.9.1 and 3.9.2, may be varied or replaced. If an objection is received, the Council will try to resolve the objection with the operator, if this is not possible the amendment will then be implemented under the EP by means of the Bespoke Arrangements for Varying the Enhanced Partnership Scheme as set out in section 5.4 below.

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3.7 My Journey Website

3.7.1 Wokingham Borough Council will continue to provide information on local bus services and school bus services on the My Journey website.

3.7.2 Wokingham Borough Council will review the website annually throughout the EP Scheme. Timetable, route, and fare information will be updated ahead of each new academic year in September or on receipt of any notification provided by an operator to Wokingham Borough Council via www.myjourneywokingham.com.

3.7.3 Any Operator may object to the posting of information on the My Journey website by e-mailing myjourney@wokingham.gov.uk. Should any objections be received, the information will be removed within 5 working days at the discretion of Wokingham Borough Council. Any Operator may raise any further objections by activating the dispute mechanism in Section 6.

3.7.4 Section 3.7 may be varied by means of the Bespoke Arrangements for Varying the Enhanced Partnership Scheme as set out in section 5.4 below.

3.8 New Bus Priority Facilities

3.8.1 New bus priority facilities can be added to the list at Annex A by means of the Bespoke Arrangements for Varying the Enhanced Partnership Scheme as set out in section 5.4 below.

3.8.2 All operators running local bus services along any part of the corridor that would be subject to the new bus priority can object to the proposals. Those proposals will only go ahead if no objections are received within the specified objection period. If an objection is received, the Council will try to resolve the objection with the operator, if this is not possible the amendment will then be implemented under the EP by means of the Bespoke Arrangements for Varying the Enhanced Partnership Scheme as set out in section 5.4 below.

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3.9 New Bus Stops in Development Areas

3.9.1 Wokingham Borough Council will install or upgrade, or oversee the installation or upgrading of, any new bus stops in areas of new development, in accordance with any agreed planning obligations.

3.9.2 Bus stops in new development areas will be added to the NaPTAN database.

3.9.3 All operators running local bus services which would be affected by the introduction of new bus stops can object to the proposals within the terms of any associated planning permission. Proposal will only go ahead in accordance with an appropriate planning permission.

3.10 New Bus Stops Outside Development Areas

3.10.1 Wokingham Borough Council may install bus stop infrastructure across the EP Scheme Area. Any new bus stops outside development areas will be added to the NaPTAN database.

3.10.2 All operators running local bus services which would be affected by the introduction of new bus stops will be provided with a copy of any proposal to introduce new stops outside of developments areas. Those proposals will only go ahead if no objections are received within the proposal's specified objection period. If an objection is received, the Council will try to resolve the objection with the operator, if this is not possible the amendment will then be implemented under the EP by means of the Bespoke Arrangements for Varying the Enhanced Partnership Scheme as set out in section 5.4 below.

3.11 New Real Time Passenger Information Screens

3.11.1 Wokingham Borough Council may install additional real-time passenger information screens across the EP Scheme Area. The initial list of locations is included in Annex B.

3.11.2 Any additional real-time information screens will be reflected in a revised copy of Annex C which will be implemented under the EP by means of the Bespoke Arrangements for Varying the Enhanced Partnership Scheme as set out in section 5.4 below. All operators running local bus services which would be affected by the introduction of new Real Time Passenger Information screens will be provide with a copy of any proposal to introduce new screen on the network. Those proposals will only go ahead if no objections are received within the proposals specified objection period. If an objection is received, the Council will try to resolve the objection with the operator, if this is not possible the amendment will then be implemented under the EP by means of the Bespoke Arrangements for Varying the Enhanced Partnership Scheme as set out in section 5.4 below.

3.12 New Park and Ride Sites

3.12.1 Wokingham Borough Council may bring into operation new Park and Ride sites within the borough at an appropriate time as it sees fit.

3.12.2 Prior to bringing any new park and ride site into operation appropriate documentation will be distributed to all operators who have a registered local bus service which runs into or out of the new Park and Ride. Clauses 3.6.1 and 3.6.2 will be replaced under powers at s.138E of the Transport Act 2000 using the Enhanced Partnership Scheme bespoke variation arrangements. All operators who have a registered a local bus service which will run into or out of the new Park and Ride site can object to the proposals. Those proposals will only go ahead if no objections are received within the specified objection period. If an objection is received, the Council will try to resolve the objection with the operator, if this is not possible the amendment will then be implemented under the EP by means of the Bespoke Arrangements for Varying the Enhanced Partnership Scheme as set out in section 5.4 below.

3.13 Local Authority Reporting Mechanisms and Procedures

3.13.1 Annex C lists the service areas and contact email addresses in the borough that can be contacted as required. Should the email addresses or any other aspects of the reporting procedures included in Annex C change, Wokingham Borough Council will inform Operators at least 5 working days in advance of the change and Annex C will be updated.

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3.14 Managing roadworks in the EP Scheme Area

3.14.1 From 1st October 2023 Wokingham Borough Council will work collaboratively with all bus operators to minimise disruption to local bus services from both planned and emergency roadworks. This will include liaison with bus operators to ensure that the co-ordination of works across the network to minimise disruption in the EP Scheme Area.

3.14.2 Wokingham Borough Council will ensure, as far as practical:

- a) All road and street works are published on one.Network.
- b) Planned and unplanned road and street works are published on Wokingham Borough Council's Traffic and Travel Facebook and Twitter social media platforms.
- c) All local bus operators receive a formal notification of planned temporary Traffic Regulation Orders (TTROs) 21 days before works commence.
- d) All local bus operators receive notification of disruptive emergency works as soon as feasibly possible.

- e) All local bus operators receive a bespoke list of major and disruptive works at least once a month.
- f) All works are planned in coordination with neighbouring local authorities.

3.14.3 Any amendments to Section 3.14 will be made under the EP by means of the Bespoke Arrangements for Varying the Enhanced Partnership Scheme as set out in section 5.4 below. Any Operator may object to the amendment of Section 3.14 by e-mailing myjourney@wokingham.gov.uk. If an objection is received, the Council will try to resolve the objection with the operator. If this is not possible the amendment will then be implemented under the EP by means of the Bespoke Arrangements for Varying the Enhanced Partnership Scheme as set out in section 5.4 below.

3.15 Marketing and Promotion of Local Bus Services in the EP Scheme Area

3.15.1 Wokingham Borough Council will actively promote bus travel in the EP Scheme Area. Promotion will include social media promotion, information on the My Journey website and the production of a network map across the whole EP Scheme Area. A network map will be refreshed at least once a year, which will usually be ahead of the new academic year each September.

3.15.2 Any amendments to Section 3.15 will be implemented under the EP by means of the Bespoke Arrangements for Varying the Enhanced Partnership Scheme as set out in section 5.4 below.

3.16 Procurement of Contracted Services to the Benefit of the Passenger

3.16.1 Where appropriate Wokingham Borough Council will tender for local bus services to meet local need which is unmet by commercial services.

3.16.2 Any services procured after the making of the EP Scheme, which are not subject to Section 2.3 (Exempted Services), must comply with the scheme requirements.

3.17 Consult on Appropriate Traffic Management Measures

- 3.17.1 Where appropriate Wokingham Borough Council will consult on appropriate traffic management measures which will benefit bus travel.

- 3.17.2 Wokingham Borough Council will work with Operators to identify appropriate traffic management measures for consultation and where these are agreed upon, they will be implemented under the EP by means of the Bespoke Arrangements for Varying the Enhanced Partnership Scheme as set out in section 5.4 below, subject to the approval of an appropriate Traffic Regulation Order. Operators may object to proposals for traffic management measures through the Traffic Regulation Order process.

- 3.17.3 Any amendments to Section 3.17 will be implemented under the EP by means of the Bespoke Arrangements for Varying the Enhanced Partnership Scheme as set out in section 5.4 below.

3.18 External Funding Bids

- 3.18.1 Wokingham Borough Council will, in partnership with Operators, submit bids to relevant Government competition funding sources to seek external contributions towards Enhanced Partnership ambitions in the EP Scheme Area. Wokingham Borough Council will work with Operators to identify and pursue other funding sources where appropriate.

3.19 Planning Consultation

- 3.19.1 Wokingham Borough Council will ensure Operators are informed of significant planning applications for developments where public transport will be a consideration (for example large residential and commercial sites). The Borough Council will consult all Bus Operators running existing bus services at the time of consultation who are likely to be impacted by the development.

- 3.19.2 Wokingham Borough Council will secure appropriate planning contributions through S106 agreements, the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) or other appropriate means to ensure appropriate local bus service provision and appropriate bus infrastructure can be provided.

3.19.3 For proposed residential developments Wokingham Borough Council will request a My Journey contribution to support the promotion and marketing of all bus services. For proposed developments of a qualifying size, as set out in government planning guidance, and where a My Journey contribution has not been secured, Wokingham Borough Council will request a travel plan in line with Wokingham Borough Council's Travel Plan Guidance.

3.20 Bus Lane and Junction Enforcement

3.20.1 Wokingham Borough Council may apply to the Traffic Penalty Tribunal Service, or any subsequent organisation which assumes these powers, for permission to set-up bus lane and junction enforcement along with a suitable appeals process. Where these permissions are granted Section 3.20 may be varied or amended under the EP by means of the Bespoke Arrangements for Varying the Enhanced Partnership Scheme as set out in section 5.4 below to reflect the granted permission. All Operators of qualifying local bus services will be notified within 28 days of receiving any such permissions.

3.20.2 Operators may object to any application of bus lane and junction enforcement through the statutory Traffic Regulation Order process associated with any bus lane or junction in which the granted permission is applied.

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3.21 Integration with other Sustainable Travel Modes

3.21.1 Wokingham Borough Council will use any suitable and available funding, following successful funding bids, to undertake appropriate feasibility, design, and project delivery work to improve the connectivity of local bus services with other sustainable modes of travel, namely local train stations, the wider cycle network, local footpaths and park and ride sites.

3.21.2 Any feasibility, design, and project delivery work to improve the connectivity of local bus services with other sustainable modes of travel, will be implemented under the EP by means of the Bespoke Arrangements for Varying the Enhanced Partnership Scheme as set out in section 5.4 below or notification to Operators who will be affected by the proposal or the statutory objection mechanism as set out in The Enhanced Partnership Plans and Schemes (Objections) Regulations 2018, as appropriate to the scale and nature of the works.

3.22 Feasibility Studies

- 3.22.1 Wokingham Borough Council will use any suitable and available funding, following successful funding bids, to undertake appropriate feasibility studies to improve the efficiency and attractiveness of bus travel in the EP Scheme Area. Wokingham Borough Council will, in partnership with Operators bid for appropriate funding for feasibility studies relating to bus priority measures, long-term local bus network improvements, park and ride network improvements, park and ride capacity studies and demand responsive transport studies. Any feasibility studies, for which funding is secured, will be implemented under the EP by means of the Bespoke Arrangements for Varying the Enhanced Partnership Scheme as set out in section 5.4 below.

3.23 Bus Stop Audit

- 3.23.1 Wokingham Borough Council will use any suitable and available funding, following successful funding bids, to carry out an on-site audit of all bus stops in Wokingham Borough and develop a prioritised list of bus stop infrastructure improvements which brings bus stop standards in line with Wokingham Borough Council's adopted bus stop policy. Any programme for improving bus stop infrastructure will be implemented under the relevant clauses.

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3.24 Branding

- 3.24.1 Wokingham Borough Council will use any suitable and available funding, following successful funding bids, to review the branding of travel in Wokingham Borough and make greater use of Park and Ride branding. The detailed specification of any branding projects will be implemented under the EP by means of the Bespoke Arrangements for Varying the Enhanced Partnership Scheme as set out in section 5.4 below.

3.25 Passenger Charter

- 3.25.1 Wokingham Borough Council with bus operators are to produce a bus passenger charter to give passengers more confidence with the service that is provided. The passenger charter is being developed alongside the EP.

3.26 Pilot New Technology

- 3.26.1 Wokingham Borough Council will use any suitable and available funding, following successful funding bids, to pilot new technology, which may include zero emission buses, to enhance the attractiveness and efficiency of the bus network. The detailed specification of any pilot projects will be implemented under the EP by means of the Bespoke Arrangements for Varying the Enhanced Partnership Scheme as set out in section 5.4 below.

3.27 Demand Responsive Transport

- 3.27.1 Wokingham Borough Council will consider the implementation of demand responsive transport to improve accessibility and flexibility of transport networks in rural areas, subject to funding being available. The detailed specification of any pilot projects will be implemented under the EP by means of the Bespoke Arrangements for Varying the Enhanced Partnership Scheme as set out in section 5.4 below or through the statutory objection mechanism as set out in The Enhanced Partnership Plans and Schemes (Objections) Regulations 2018, as appropriate to the scale and nature of the provision.

4 Obligations on Local Bus Operators ⁵

4.1 Vehicle standards

- 4.1.1 Vehicles used on qualifying local bus services will be required to meet specific standards depending on when the route was introduced.
- 4.1.2 For vehicles operating on qualifying routes which were in place prior to the EP Scheme being made, the minimum specification, including Euro classification, should be the equivalent to or better than what was in place on the route on 31st October 2022. Details of the minimum specification for vehicles on each route are included in Annex D.
- 4.1.3 The following minimum vehicle specification shall apply to all new local bus service registrations commencing after 29th July 2025 and additionally to all vehicles used on qualifying bus services within the EP Scheme Area where the date of first registration falls after 29th July 2025:
- a) All vehicles must be Euro VI (or equivalent standards) or better.
 - b) CCTV installed for safety and security. This should provide images inside the vehicle for safety and security and facing forwards from the vehicle.
 - c) AVL equipment installed that will feed into the Wokingham Borough Council's real time information system.
- 4.1.4 For all new local bus service registrations with at least 2 buses an hour, commencing after 29th July 2025, the following minimum specification will apply in addition to that in Section 4.1.3:
- a) Option to pay for tickets through cashless payment.
- 4.1.5 Operators must use any suitable and available funding, following successful agreed funding bids, to enhance vehicle standards in the EP Scheme Area. These criteria will be varied in future under the EP by means of the Bespoke Arrangements for Varying the Enhanced Partnership Scheme as set out in section 5.4 below.

⁵ Under s.138C of the Transport Act 2000

- 4.1.6 Where the Council engages with the operator in joint branding and or marketing of a route, the livery should where reasonably possible continue or be varied in future under the EP by means of the Bespoke Arrangements for Varying the Enhanced Partnership Scheme as set out in section 5.4 below.
- 4.1.7 Operators must use any suitable and available funding, following successful agreed funding bids, to implement tap-on, tap-off technology in the EP Scheme Area. Any tap-on, tap-off technology will be implemented under the EP by means of the Bespoke Arrangements for Varying the Enhanced Partnership Scheme as set out in section 5.4 below.
- 4.1.8 Any amendments to Section 4.1 will be made under the EP by means of the Bespoke Arrangements for Varying the Enhanced Partnership Scheme as set out in section 5.4 below.

4.2 Timetable changes

- 4.2.1 Operators will be requested, where possible, to limit the number of timetable changes on all routes operating within the EP Scheme Area. The most significant timetable changes should be made for the start of each new academic year in September.

4.3 Ticketing

- 4.3.1 Operators must use any suitable and available funding, following successful funding bids, to review ticket acceptance for travel in the EP Scheme Area, particularly for those aged 18 and under and in offering group tickets. Any new ticket acceptance schemes will be implemented under the EP by means of the Bespoke Arrangements for Varying the Enhanced Partnership Scheme as set out in section 5.4 below.

4.4 Fares

- 4.4.1 Operators must use any suitable and available funding, following agreed and successful funding bids, to provide a suitable and attractive young person's fare offer in the EP Scheme Area. Any new young person's fare offer will be implemented under the EP by means of the Bespoke Arrangements for Varying the Enhanced Partnership Scheme as set out in section 5.4 below.
- 4.4.2 Operators must use any suitable and available funding, following agreed and successful funding bids, to provide a group travel offer in the EP Scheme Area. Any new group fares offer will be implemented under the EP by means of the Bespoke Arrangements for Varying the Enhanced Partnership Scheme as set out in section 5.4 below.
- 4.4.3 Operators must use any suitable and available funding, following agreed and successful funding bids, to implement multi-operator capping schemes in the EP Scheme Area. Any new multi-operator capping schemes will be implemented under the EP by means of the Bespoke Arrangements for Varying the Enhanced Partnership Scheme as set out in section 5.4 below.

4.5 Potential Service Enhancements

- 4.5.1 Enhancements and new services will be required to improve bus services in the EP Scheme Area but delivery of these are currently constrained by additional funding. It is hoped that enhancements and/or amendments to frequency and timing of service can be introduced.

4.6 Passenger Charter

- 4.6.1 Local bus operators with Wokingham Council are to produce a bus passenger charter to give passengers more of a voice and say in the future of bus services in Wokingham. This aims to ensure that passengers are more involved in bus service planning and improvements. The passenger charter is being developed alongside the EP.

5 Governance Arrangements

5.1 EP Forum

The Enhanced Partnership Forum will be used to oversee and direct the work of the Scheme. It is set up with the aims of:

- Providing the opportunity for representatives of key stakeholders to discuss issues relating to the local bus network.
- Having the ability to influence consultations, engagement with new stakeholders and make recommendations and decisions.
- Discussing future content and arrangements for the variation and revocation of the EP Plan and EP Scheme.

5.1.1 Membership of the Wokingham Borough Council Enhanced Partnership Forum will comprise of, including voting rights:

- 1) All bus operators who run qualifying bus services (1 vote per operator that exceed 20% of bus mileage and **2 votes** for an operator that runs more than 50% of the bus mileage. Operators which function as more than one company but are part of the same financial entity will be treated as a single operator). A bus Operator and any of its Group Companies that operate less than 20% of the aggregate miles operated by all Bus Operators in respect of Qualifying Bus Services within the Scheme Area, **1 vote** in total to represent all of those Operators interests.
- 2) Wokingham Borough Council Executive Member for Active Travel Transport & Highways (chair, **1 vote** and casting vote).
- 3) Wokingham Borough Council Officers (Highways and Transport) (1 vote each up to **2 votes**).
- 4) Neighbouring Local Authority Officers (no votes).
- 5) Representatives of Town or Parish Councils, (up to 3 attendees) (no votes).
- 6) A representative from Reading University (no votes).
- 7) A representative from Royal Berkshire Hospital (no votes).
- 8) Representatives of Community Transport Operators in the EP Scheme Area (no votes).
- 9) Representative of the passenger focus group (no votes).

5.1.2 The operation of the Forum will include these rules:

- 1) Meetings will be arranged by Wokingham Borough Council and take place once every six months.
- 2) An agenda will be circulated by Wokingham Borough Council in advance of the meeting. Minutes will be taken of each meeting and circulated after the meeting for approval by all attendees.

- 3) Decisions will be subject to voting on a simple majority basis. Voting rights are set out in paragraph 5.1.1. above. In the event of a tie the chair will hold the casting vote.
- 4) Wokingham Borough Council's Executive Member for Highways and Transport or a representative nominated by the Executive Member for Highways and Transport will Chair each meeting.
- 5) All members of the EP Forum will be subject to appropriate confidentially agreements on information disclosed and discussed within the forum.
- 6) Any information for disclosure must be agreed by the appropriate forum members and Wokingham Borough Council prior to its disclosure.
- 7) Listed members of the EP Forum do not have to attend each meeting for the meeting to take place. Any member not attending the meeting will forfeit their ability to input into the meeting. EP Forum members may nominate a representative to attend on their behalf. Any representative must be a member of the organisation which they represent.
- 8) In addition to the above members, external organisations may be invited to join in an advisory capacity. Prior to any external organisation joining the Forum, the invitation, including the length of time the invitation is permitted for, must be approved prior to the Forum meeting, at least three members must approve the invitation to allow the external organisation to attend.
- 9) Any new members of the EP Forum are subject to bespoke variation arrangements in Section 5 and appropriate confidentially agreements.
- 10) Proposals may be put forward for consideration at the EP Forum by any community group, Town or Parish Council. This should be submitted by emailing the proposals to MyJourney@wokingham.gov.uk. Wokingham Borough Council Officers will consider and decide if the proposal is appropriate for consideration at the Forum.
- 11) Any member of the EP Forum may request an interim meeting of the EP Forum by notifying Wokingham Borough Council using the following email address MyJourney@wokingham.gov.uk and explaining what the issue is and its urgency. Wokingham Borough Council will notify all agreed members of the Forum of the request. An Interim Forum meeting may go ahead if majority support is gained for calling the meeting by members of the forum as listed in Section 5.1.1.
- 12) After EP Forum approval the proposal will move to the local authority approval process, which may include any further statutory approval required. In the event of a local authority approval or statutory approval not being given, the proposal may be reworked and returned to the EP Forum so that it can be reconsidered by Forum members.

5.1.3 Variations to the terms and membership of the Enhanced Partnership Forum maybe made under the EP by means of the Bespoke Arrangements for Varying the Enhanced Partnership Scheme as set out in section 5.4 below.

5.2 Local Authority Approval Process

- 5.2.1 Where proposals are of the nature that Wokingham Borough Council's Constitution requires an Individual Executive Member Decision (IEMD) or a formal Executive Decision, this process will need to take place after the proposal has been approved by the EP Forum. Where a decision does not require an IEMD sign off or an Executive Decision, Wokingham Borough Council may still request sufficient time to allow appropriate consultation prior to the proposal being adopted as a variation to the EP Scheme. All decisions made by the EP Forum are subject to any relevant approvals which are required by Wokingham Borough Council's Constitution or any legislation, regulation, or statutory guidance, including the availability of funding from all sources.

5.3 Review of EP Scheme

- 5.3.1 Once the EP Scheme is made, it will be reviewed by the EP Forum every six months following publication of data on progress towards targets, as required by the Local Bus Service Improvement Plan. Wokingham Borough Council will initiate each review.
- 5.3.2 The EP Forum or EP Board can also decide to review specific elements of the scheme on an ad-hoc basis. EP Forum members, as relevant, should contact Wokingham Borough Council using the following email address MyJourney@wokingham.gov.uk explaining what the issue is and its urgency. Wokingham Borough Council will then decide whether to table at the next scheduled meeting or arrangement for all or the necessary members of the appropriate board to gather more quickly using the mechanism outline in Section 5.1.2(11).

5.4 Bespoke Arrangements for Varying or Revoking the Enhanced Partnership Scheme

- 5.4.1 Under powers at s.138E of the Transport Act 2000, Enhanced Partnership Scheme Variations where this section is quoted will be subject to the bespoke voting mechanism also as set out in this section.
- 5.4.2 Changes to or new flexibility provisions may be added to any part of the EP Scheme under powers at s.138E of the Transport Act 2000, where Section 5.5.1 does not apply (Revocation of an EP Scheme), using the Enhanced Partnership Scheme bespoke variation arrangements in Section 5 or the statutory objection mechanism as set out in The Enhanced Partnership Plans and Schemes (Objections) Regulations 2018 if Wokingham Borough Council consider this to be more appropriate.

Proposer of a variation

- 1) Consideration will be given to potential EP Scheme variations highlighted either by a local authority, one of the organisations represented on the EP Forum, or by an operator of local bus services. The proposer of a variation should demonstrate how this might contribute to achieving the objectives set out in the BSIP, EP Plan and current local transport policies. Such requests should be in writing and submitted to MyJourney@wokingham.gov.uk. Wokingham Borough Council will forward all requests onto all EP Forum members within 10 working days and place the item on the agenda for the next EP Forum meeting.
- 2) Variation to the “Proposer of a Variation” mechanism may be amended or replaced using a bespoke variation under the powers at s.138E of the Transport Act 2000.
 - a. Decision-making process and bespoke objection mechanism at EP Forum
- 3) On receipt of a request for a variation under this section, Wokingham Borough Council will place the item on the agenda for the EP Forum, giving at least 14 days’ notice in advance of the meeting, so that the EP Forum members can consider the proposed variation. If the proposed variation is agreed by a majority of representatives present and approved by any subsequent approval process, Wokingham Borough Council will make the EP Scheme variation within seven working days and publish the revised EP Scheme on the My Journey website.

5.5 Revocation of an EP Scheme

- 5.5.1 If Wokingham Borough Council or another member of the EP Forum believes it is necessary to revoke the EP Scheme, the EP Forum will be reconvened. If the decision is taken to revoke the EP Scheme it will follow the legislative procedures for revocation or use bespoke arrangements as set in Section 5.

- 5.5.2 If at any point in the future, any area covered by this EP Scheme is included in a Bus Franchising Scheme, the relevant requirements set out in this EP Scheme document will cease to apply to areas covered by the franchising scheme, in line with the arrangements set out in the franchising scheme.⁶

5.6 Confidentiality and data sharing

- 5.6.1 Members of the EP Forum must respect the confidentiality of any data or other information that is shown to them in confidence as part of their membership of the EP Forum.

- 5.6.2 If appropriate the Wokingham EP Forum will consider issuing individual Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs) to all EP Forum members to support confidentiality.

⁶ Section 123H(6)-(8) of the Transport Act 2000

5.7 Force Majeure

- 5.7.1 If any party is prevented, hindered, or delayed in or from performing any of its obligations under this Enhanced Partnership Scheme by a Force Majeure Event (**Affected Party**), then, so long as that Force Majeure Event continues, the Affected Party shall not be in breach of this agreement or otherwise liable for any such failure or delay in the performance of such obligations under the agreement.
- 5.7.2 The corresponding obligations of the other parties will be suspended to the same extent as those of the Affected Party.
- 5.7.3 The Affected Party shall:
- i. As soon as reasonably practicable after the start of the Force Majeure Event, but not later than three (3) Working Days from its start, notify Wokingham Borough Council in writing of the Force Majeure Event, the date on which it started, its likely potential duration, and the effect of the Force Majeure Event on its ability to perform any of its obligations under this Agreement; and
 - ii. use all reasonable endeavours to mitigate the effect of the Force Majeure Event.
- 5.7.4 As soon as practicable following such notification, Wokingham Borough Council will arrange an Enhanced Partnership Forum meeting to agree all reasonable endeavours and appropriate terms to mitigate the effects of the Force Majeure Event and facilitate the continued performance of the agreement in the public interest given any constraints by legislation, regulations or otherwise.
- 5.7.5 The Affected Party shall notify Wokingham Borough Council as soon as practicable after the Force Majeure Event ceases or no longer causes the Affected Party to be unable to comply with its obligations under this Agreement. Following such notification, this Agreement shall continue to be performed on the terms existing immediately prior to the occurrence of the Force Majeure Event, unless amended, varied or otherwise prior to the Force Majeure Event ceasing. On receipt of such notification, Wokingham Borough Council will contact all EP Forum members and all other affected stakeholders to confirm that the Force Majeure Event has ceased.

6 Section 6 Dispute Resolution

- 6.1.1 If a dispute arises in connection with this Scheme, the parties shall follow the procedure set out in this Section 6.
- 6.1.2 Any party shall give to the other written notice of the Dispute, setting out its nature and full particulars (Dispute Notice), together with relevant supporting documents. On Service of the Dispute Notice, Wokingham Borough Council shall attempt in good faith to resolve the Dispute.
- 6.1.3 If Wokingham Borough Council and the affected parties are unable for any reason to resolve the Dispute within twenty (20) working days of the Service of the Dispute Notice, Wokingham Borough Council will seek the advice of the Department for Transport.
- 6.1.4 Nothing in this Dispute resolution produce shall prevent the Parties from seeking from any court of competent jurisdiction an interim order restraining the other Party from doing any act or compelling the other Party to do any act.
- 6.1.5 If the dispute cannot be resolved by the Parties pursuant to Clause 6.1.3 the Parties shall refer it to mediation pursuant to the Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution (CEDR) Model Mediation Procedure unless:
- i. Wokingham Borough Council considers that the dispute is not suitable for resolution by mediation; or
 - ii. One or more of the Parties does not agree to mediation.

6.2 Dispute Mediation and Consequential Provisions

- 6.2.1 The procedure for mediation and consequential provision relating to mediation are as follows:
- 6.2.2 A neutral adviser or mediator ("the Mediator") shall be chosen by agreement between the Parties or, if they are unable to agree upon a Mediator within 10 Working Days after a request by one Party to the other or if the Mediator agreed upon is unable or unwilling to act, either Party shall within 10 Working Days from the date of the proposal to appoint a Mediator or within 10 Working Days of notice to either Party that he is unable or unwilling to act, apply to appoint a Mediator.
- 6.2.3 The Parties shall within 10 Working Days of the appointment of the Mediator meet with Mediator to agree a programme for the exchange of all relevant information and the structure to be adopted for negotiations to be held. If considered appropriate, the Parties may at any stage seek assistance from a Mediator, to provide guidance on a suitable procedure.
- 6.2.4 Unless otherwise agreed, all negotiations connected with the dispute and any settlement agreement relating to it shall be conducted in confidence and without prejudice to the rights of the Parties in any future proceedings.
- 6.2.5 If the Parties reach agreement on the resolution of the dispute, the agreement shall be recorded in writing and shall be binding on the Parties once it is signed by their duly Authorised Representatives.
- 6.2.6 Failing agreement, either of the Parties may invite the Mediator to provide a non-binding but informative opinion in writing. Such an opinion shall be provided on a without prejudice basis and shall not be used in evidence in any proceedings relating to the Agreement without the prior written consent of both Parties; and
- 6.2.7 If the Parties fail to reach agreement in the structured negotiations within sixty (60) Working Days of the Mediator being appointed, or such longer period as may be agreed by the Parties, then any Dispute or difference between them may be referred to the courts or Traffic Commissioner as appropriate.

Table A1: Bus Priority Facilities

Intervention Number	Type of Bus Facility	Bus Link Description	Hours of Operation	Category of Vehicle Permitted	Responsibility for Maintaining
A1	Bus Lane	A3290	24 hours, 7 days a week		Wokingham Borough Council
A2	Bus Lane	A33 from the junction of Mere oak Lane towards M4 Junction 11 up to Wokingham Borough Council's Borough boundary	24 hours, 7 days a week		Wokingham Borough Council
A3	Bus Lane	Old Shinfield Road from its junction with Shinfield Road to the Black Boy Roundabout (northbound)	24 hours, 7 days a week		Wokingham Borough Council
A4	Bus Link	Sustainable Link from junction with Hyde End Lane to a point 80m southwest of Martyns Crescent, Shinfield. (northeast and southwest bound)	24 hours, 7 days a week	Bus Services, Coaches, Minibuses over 9 seats, bicycles and pedestrians	Developer until such time as the link is adopted
A5	Bus Gate	Milton Road from car park access to junction with Rectory Road (southbound)	24 hours, 7 days a week	Bus services only	Wokingham Borough Council
A6	Bus Gate	A4 London Road service road to A4 London Road (northbound)	24 hours, 7 days a week	Bus services only	Wokingham Borough Council
A7	Bus Gate	Broad Hinton 9.4m south of Hubbard Close	24 hours, 7 days a week	Bus services only	Wokingham Borough Council
A8	Bus Gate	Basingstoke Road, signalised junction with A33/Mere oak Lane (northwest bound)	24 hours, 7 days a week	Bus services only	Wokingham Borough Council
A9	Bus Gate	Mere oak Lane, signalised junction with A33	24 hours, 7 days a week	Bus services only	Wokingham Borough Council
A10	Priory Traffic Signals	A3290 onto with Suttonseeds Roundabout	24 hours, 7 days a week	Bus services only	Wokingham Borough Council

Table B1: Real Time Passenger Information

Reference Number	Bus Stop Name	NaPTAN	Responsibility for Maintaining
B1	Loddon Bridge, The George	35075120001	Wokingham Borough Council
B2	Loddon Bridge, The George	35075120002	Wokingham Borough Council
B3	Drome Path	35075160002	Wokingham Borough Council
B4	Winnersh Post Office	35075220002	Wokingham Borough Council
B5	Winnersh Crossroads	35075240001	Wokingham Borough Council
B6	Mays Lane	35075020001	Wokingham Borough Council
B7	Mays Lane	35075020002	Wokingham Borough Council
B8	Earley Station	35075060001	Wokingham Borough Council
B9	Earley Station	35075060001	Wokingham Borough Council
B10	Meadow Road	35075060002	Wokingham Borough Council
B11	Emmbrook - Rifle Volunteer	35075100002	Wokingham Borough Council
B12	Emmbrook - Rifle Volunteer	35075320001	Wokingham Borough Council
B13	Wokingham Hospital	35075320002	Wokingham Borough Council
B14	Wokingham Hospital	35076100001	Wokingham Borough Council
B15	Ratepayers Hall	35076120002	Wokingham Borough Council
B16	Ratepayers Hall	35076340001	Wokingham Borough Council
B17	Shinfield - School Green	35076340002	Wokingham Borough Council
B18	Arborfield Cross - The Bull	35077120001	Wokingham Borough Council
B19	Arborfield Cross - The Bull	35077220001	Wokingham Borough Council
B20	Garrison - Langley Common Rd	35077220002	Wokingham Borough Council

Reference Number	Bus Stop Name	NaPTAN	Responsibility for Maintaining
B21	Barkham Ride - St James Road	35077280002	Wokingham Borough Council
B22	Barkham Ride - St James Road	35077520001	Wokingham Borough Council
B23	Doles Farm	35077640001	Wokingham Borough Council
B24	Shinfield Park	35084560001	Wokingham Borough Council
B25	London Road / The Drive	35090100003	Wokingham Borough Council
B26	Wokingham - Broad Street	35075400001	Wokingham Borough Council
B27	Wokingham - Broad Street	35075400002	Wokingham Borough Council
B28	Wokingham - Broad Street	35075400003	Wokingham Borough Council
B29	University of Reading Whiteknights House	39027900002	Wokingham Borough Council
B30	Meadow Road	35075100001	Wokingham Borough Council
B31	Holt Lane	35075360001	Wokingham Borough Council
B32	Wokingham Station Stop 1	35059890001	Wokingham Borough Council
B33	Wokingham Station Stop 2	35059890002	Wokingham Borough Council
B34	Bulmershe Court, Woodlands Avenue	35085080001	Wokingham Borough Council
B35	Bulmershe Court, Woodlands Avenue	35085080002	Wokingham Borough Council

Table C1: Contact Details

Service Area	Contact E-mail
Public Transport (inc. Concessionary Travel)	MyJourney@wokingham.gov.uk
Community Transport	CTU.Group@wokingham.gov.uk
Traffic Management	Traffic.Management@wokingham.gov.uk
Traffic Enforcement	Parking.Services@wokingham.gov.uk
Road Works	Streetworks@wokingham.gov.uk
Vegetation	Treemanagement@wokingham.gov.uk
Gritting	Highway.Assets@wokingham.gov.uk
Marketing and Promotion	MyJourney@wokingham.gov.uk

Table D1: Routes and Vehicles – Specification as of 31st October 2022

Route	Euro Rating	CCTV	AVL	Cashless
(3) Reading – Shinfield – Arborfield - Wokingham	Euro 5*	Yes	Yes	Yes
(4) Reading – Wokingham – Bracknell via A329	Euro 6	Yes	Yes	Yes
(13/14) Reading – Cemetery Junction – Woodley	Euro 6	Yes	Yes	Yes
(19a/c) Reading – Woodley – Earley – Reading	Euro 6	Yes	Yes	Yes
(21/21a) Reading – University of Reading – Lower Earley	Euro 6	Yes	Yes	Yes
(121) Norreys Estate – Wokingham – Tesco	Euro 6	Yes	Yes	Yes
(122) Woosehill – Emmbrook – Wokingham	Euro 6	Yes	Yes	Yes
(125) Wokingham – Finchampstead – Crowthorne	Euro 6	Yes	Yes	Yes
(129) Reading – Sonning – Twyford – Maidenhead	Euro 6	Yes	Yes	Yes
(128) Reading – Woodley – Sonning – Twyford – Winnersh – Wokingham	Euro 6	Yes	Yes	Yes
(145) Reading – Three Mile Cross – Riseley – Finchampstead – Wokingham	Euro 6	Yes	Yes	No
(151) Wokingham – Bean Oak – Bracknell	Euro 5	Yes	Yes	No
(153) Upper Wargrave – Reading	Euro 6	Yes	Yes	No
(154) Stratfield Saye – Beech Hill – Loddon Court Farm – Reading	Euro 6	Yes	Yes	No
(300) Thame Valley Park P & R - Hospital - MereOak P & R	Euro 5	Yes	Yes	Yes
(500) Winnersh Triangle P&R – Reading	Euro 5*	Yes	Yes	Yes
(850) Henley – Twyford – Reading	Euro 5	Yes	Yes	No
* Use Compressed Natural Gas, which almost to Euro 6 standard				

Definitions

AVL – Automatic Vehicle Location. Equipment in buses that allows the location to be tracked which is especially useful for Real Time Information (RTI).

BSIP – Local Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). This was first published by Wokingham Borough Council on 29th October 2021 and latest BSIP is BSIP2 dated January 2023.

Bus Franchising Area – area in which a statutory franchising scheme operates, as prescribed in the Transport Act 2000, as amended by the Bus Services Act 2017 (section 123). Bus services in the area are controlled and specified by the transport authority, with bus operators providing services under one or more contracts.

Bus Gate – short stretch of road carriageway that is restricted to use by buses and (where specified) taxis and other authorised vehicles as indicated on appropriate signage on the approach.

Bus Lane – signposted lane, designated for use by registered local bus services and (where specified) taxis and other authorised vehicles, at the times also indicated by signage.

Bus Lane and Junction Enforcement – action taken to ensure that bus lanes and bus gates are used only by authorised vehicles. This is often carried out by using enforcement cameras to record unauthorised use, with the issue of civil penalties to offenders under section 144 of the Transport Act 2000.

Bus Link – is a road or street, designated for use by registered local bus services and (where specified) other authorised modes of transport such as pedestrians and cyclists.

Priority Traffic Signals – traffic signals which provide a benefit to buses at junctions through controlled signalling, for example by extending green times or hurry calling green times.

Bus Stand – bus stop clearway as defined in accordance with paragraph 1(a) of Part 1 to Schedule 19 of The Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2002 but which will permit a local bus to stand within the clearway for as long as maybe necessary up to a maximum period of 10 minutes.

CCTV – closed circuit television system, whereby static or mobile cameras are used to record offences or for surveillance and safety and security purposes.

CVRAS – Clean Vehicle Retrofit Accreditation Scheme (CVRAS) and is a certification scheme for manufacturers of retrofit emissions reduction technology that will enable Clean Air Zone (CAZ) compliance of legacy fleet vehicles to address the air pollution emissions from buses.

DRT – Demand Responsive Transport, whereby the transport service is not tied to a fixed route or the stopping times at local bus stops. The service is a shared service which aims to operate as and when required within a defined area, during a set timeframe.

Enforcement Camera – roadside camera that records and produces suitable evidence of unauthorised use of bus lanes or bus gates for the Local Highway Authority to issue civil penalties under section 144 of the Transport Act 2000.

EP Scheme Area – area to which this EP Scheme document applies.

Euro VI equivalent standards – Euro VI diesel bus or a bus with CVRAS approved technologies retrofitted to a diesel bus to reduce NOx and PM emissions and achieve Euro VI equivalent standards.

Facilities – physical assets that are provided at specific locations along particular routes (or parts of routes) within the EP scheme area or new and improved bus priority measures. This is deemed for such purposes of section 138D(1) of the Transport Act 2000.

Measures – improvements with the aim of:

- Increasing the use of local bus service serving the routes to which the measures relate or ending or reducing a decline in their use; or
- Improving the quality of local bus service.

Local Authority – prescribed under section 23 of the Local Government Act 2003.

Local Highway Authority – Local Authority with responsibility for the maintenance of highway infrastructure in its local authority area. In the case of this EP Scheme, this means Wokingham Borough Council.

Multi-Operator Capping – common fares and ticketing product, applied across multiple bus operators, which will cap a user’s travel cost according to the lowest price available for the journey or journeys made.

Operator – local bus operator, operating registered local bus services.

Real Time Information – using technology to track the location of buses in real time. Information is transmitted to bus stops or devices to indicate to passengers the predicted arrival time at a particular point.

Registered Local Bus Service – as set out in Section 2 of the Transport Act 1985.

Wokingham Enhanced Partnership Plan – document made pursuant to section 138A of the Transport Act 2000 and which is required to be in place for an EP Scheme to be made.

Zero Emission Bus – bus that emits no pollutants at its tailpipe.

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Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) form: the initial impact assessment

1. Process and guidance

The purpose of an EqIA is to make sure that the council is meeting the needs of all our residents by ensuring we consider how different groups of people may be affected by or experience a proposal in different ways.

The council has a two stage EqIA process:

- Stage 1 - the initial impact assessment
- Stage 2 - the full impact assessment.

This form is for use at Stage 1 of the process. This must be completed when undertaking a project, policy change, or service change. It can form part of a business case for change and must be completed and attached to a Project Initiation Document. The findings of the initial impact assessment will determine whether a full impact assessment is needed.

Guidance and tools for council officers can be accessed on the council's Tackling Inequality Together intranet pages.

Date started:	11 th August 2023
Completed by:	Rebecca Brooks
Service:	Place & Growth
Project or policy EqIA relates to:	Enhanced Partnership Agreement (EP)
Date EqIA discussed at service team meeting:	16 th August 2023
Conclusion (is a full assessment needed?):	No
Signed off by (AD):	Christopher Easton 

Sign off date:	16th August 2023
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2. Summary of the policy, project, or service

This section should be used to summarise the project, policy, or service change (the proposal).

What is the purpose of the proposal, what are the aims and expected outcomes, and how does it relate to service plans and the corporate plan?

To provide a legal framework for agreeing improvements to local bus services between local bus operators and the Council, as per the Department for Transport's (DfT) National Bus Strategy document. Any improvements or changes to bus services will subject to funding being available from the DfT. Bus services link to the Corporate Plan by helping to Keep the Borough Moving, meet targets for the Climate Emergency and by reducing pollution and improving health and wellbeing through active travel.

How will the proposal be delivered, what governance arrangements are in place and who are the key internal stakeholders?

The Enhanced Partnership Agreement provides the details of the governance framework around decision making, permit members of the Enhanced Partnership Board and their associated voting rights. All decisions taken by the board are then subject to all the Council's legal and statutory duties as well as the Council's governance arrangements, as set out in the Council's Constitution. Should funding be made available to improve bus provision this may result in either improvement to services or to infrastructure. Through the Council's own governance arrangements, each improvement would be treated as a separate project with its own EqIA. The key internal stakeholders are a traffic management officer, a community transport / public transport officer and the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport & Highways.

Who will be affected by the proposal? Think about who it is aimed at and who will deliver it.

As and when funding becomes available, all residents within the borough who current travel by bus or could do in the future, as well as any current or future visitors or employees to the borough who are existing or potential bus users. Potential bus users are those who may already want to travel by bus or those who can be encouraged or incentivised to use greener transport through behaviour change programmes. The

proposals may also affect residents who use the highway network, whose journey could be impacted as a result of a particular scheme to improve bus journeys. Any such scheme would be considered as a separate project and therefore subject to its own EqIA.

3. Data & Protected Characteristics

This section should be used to set out what data you have gathered to support the initial impact assessment.

The table below sets out the equality groups that need to be considered in the impact assessment. These comprise the nine protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act 2010 and other priority areas defined by the council.

Age	Disability	Gender reassignment	Marriage and Civil Partnership	Pregnancy/Maternity
Religious belief	Race	Sex	Sexual Orientation	Socio-economic disadvantage

What data and information will be used to help assess the impact of the proposal on different groups of people? A list of useful resources is available for officers on the Council's Tackling Inequality Together intranet pages.

Ticket machine data for passengers travelling. Tickets for young people and concessionary users help identify numbers affected by age and disability.

Annual survey data from a variety of sources including, but not limited to annual bus surveys, the National Highways and Transportation survey, Bus Open Data service and Transport Focus.

Concessionary data in relation to passes issued helps identify number of potential users by sex and disability.

Socio-economic information can be considered from the JSNA, IMD and social isolation strategy when compared to the areas served.

Experiences from members of a bus working group

4. Assessing & Scoring Impact

This section should be used to assess the likely impact on each equality group, consider how significant any impacts could be and explain how the data gathered supports the conclusions made.

Scoring impact for equality groups	
Positive impact	The proposal promotes equality of opportunity by meeting needs or addressing existing barriers to participation and/or promotes good community relations
Neutral or no impact	The proposal has no impact or no disproportionate impact.
Low negative	The proposal is likely to negatively impact a small number of people, be of short duration and can easily be resolved.
High negative	The proposal is likely to have a significant negative impact on many people or a severe impact on a smaller number of people.

Referring to the Scoring table above, please give an impact score for each group, explain what the likely impact will be, and briefly set out how the data supports this conclusion.

Equality group	Impact score	Impact and supporting data
Age	Positive Impact	As the aim and objects of the Enhanced Partnership Agreement is to improve local bus service provision by forming a closer working relationship with local bus operators and delivering improvements. It is anticipated that the outcome will be positive for every equality group. In each case when a scheme or improvement is delivered this will be undertaken as a project and each project will have its own EqIA.
Disability	Positive Impact	
Gender reassignment	Positive Impact	
Marriage and Civil Partnership	Positive Impact	
Pregnancy/Maternity	Positive Impact	
Religious belief	Positive Impact	
Race	Positive Impact	
Sex	Positive Impact	
Sexual Orientation	Positive Impact	
Socio-economic disadvantage	Positive Impact	

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5. Conclusion and next steps.

Based on your findings from your initial impact assessment, you must complete a full impact assessment if you have identified any groups as having a low or high negative impact.

If no impact, or a positive impact has been identified, you do not need to complete a full assessment. However, you must include reference to the initial assessment in any associated reports, and it must receive formal approval from the Assistant Director responsible for the project, policy, or service change.

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Annex: Statutory Consultation Responses

Consultation Period: Friday 18th August 2023 to Friday 8th September 2023

Consultation Communication: The statutory consultation was conducted with the following required consultees, distributed via email. There were no undelivered notifications and no responses received after the consultation period closed:

Category	Consultee
all operators of local bus services that would be affected by any of the proposals;	Reading Buses
all operators of local bus services that would be affected by any of the proposals;	Thames Valley Buses
all operators of local bus services that would be affected by any of the proposals;	Horseman Coaches
all operators of local bus services that would be affected by any of the proposals;	Arriva
all operators of local bus services that would be affected by any of the proposals;	Stagecoach
all operators of local bus services that would be affected by any of the proposals;	First Bus
all operators of local bus services that would be affected by any of the proposals;	Readibus
all operators of local bus services that would be affected by any of the proposals;	Keepmobile
other local authorities that would be affected by the proposals;	Reading Borough Council
other local authorities that would be affected by the proposals;	Bracknell Borough Council
other local authorities that would be affected by the proposals;	Buckinghamshire Council
other local authorities that would be affected by the proposals;	West Berkshire Council
other local authorities that would be affected by the proposals;	Hampshire County Council
other local authorities that would be affected by the proposals;	Oxfordshire County Council
other local authorities that would be affected by the proposals;	Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead
the Traffic Commissioners;	Traffic Commissioner (London and the South East)
the chief officer of police for each area to which the plan relates;	Thames Valley Police
Transport Focus [independent watchdog for transport users];	Transport Focus
the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA); and	The Competition and Markets Authority
such other persons as the authority thinks fit.	DfT
such other persons as the authority thinks fit.	NHT Foundation Trust

Category	Consultee
such other persons as the authority thinks fit.	University of Reading

Responses Received:

1. The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA): 22nd August 2023
2. Transport Focus: 4th September 2023

Summary of Responses:

1. The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA):

Response summary	WBC action
The CMA do not provide individual feedback but refer to published advice.	WBC has already reviewed the guidance and has developed the EP Plan and Scheme in accordance with it, so no further action is required.

2. Transport Focus:

Transport Focus has provided detailed feedback on the EP Plan and Scheme, expressing both praise and areas of concern. They acknowledged their agreement with many aspects of the plan however, they have raised several key points which WBC is obliged to consider before proceeding to 'make' the EP Plan and Scheme:

Response summary	WBC action
Request for a clearer link between proposed measures and the targets to be included within the EP Plan and Scheme.	No immediate action required. Use the bespoke variation mechanism to include further details after the EP Plan and Scheme have been made.
Comments and suggestions regarding the contents of the Passenger Charter.	The passenger charter is being developed alongside the EP and will be published by as soon as possible.
Suggestion to include more in the EP Plan and Scheme about improving passenger information at bus stops.	Action on this is being considered as part of planning the spending of the funding allocation. If applicable, the documents could be updated after the EP Plan and Scheme have been made, through the bespoke variation mechanism.
Request for details about requirement to consult users on how well the Enhanced Partnership is working.	Immediate action: WBC will develop its plans for how the EP Forum and Community-led groups will be involved and make these details available publicly.
Concern about use of the bespoke mechanism to vary the Scheme instead of undertaking full consultation.	Immediate action: WBC will respond to Transport Focus to reassure them that the appropriate processes will be used to engage with consultees depending on the context.

Conclusion:

During the statutory consultation period, responses were received from 2 statutory consultees: The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) and Transport Focus [independent watchdog for transport users]. The CMA provided no response specific to WBC while Transport Focus provided praise and

valuable insights into the perspectives of passengers, in the same way they have for EP Plans and Schemes of other councils.

WBC's officers and consultants have carefully considered these responses in terms of whether the EP Plan and Scheme documents need to be changed before WBC proceeds to 'make' the EP Plan and Scheme. While some actions are worthwhile to enhance the EP Plan and Scheme, the documents can be updated at a later date through the bespoke variation mechanism and therefore do not need to be changed now, thus avoiding the need to open another bus operator objection period and meaning that the EP Plan and Scheme can be made by the deadline for DfT BSIP+ funding of 30th September 2023.

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Telephone: 0778 382 8221
Email: Rebecca.Brooks@wokingham.gov.uk
Date: 18th September 2023



Transport Focus
Albany House
94-98 Petty France
London
SW1H 9EA

P.O. Box 150

Shute End, Wokingham

Berkshire RG40 1WL

Tel: (0118) 974 6000

Dear Transport Focus,

I am writing on behalf of Wokingham Borough Council to thank you for the detailed consultation response received from Transport Focus regarding the Enhanced Partnership (EP) Plan and Scheme. We appreciate the time and effort you dedicated to providing us with your insights and recommendations. We are pleased to note your praise and agreement with many aspects of the EP Plan and Scheme.

We would like to address some of the key points you raised in your response and outline how we plan to progress:

We acknowledge your recommendation to provide **greater clarity on how each commitment within the EP Plan will contribute to achieving the targets**, especially considering known funding. While this does not impact the making or running of the EP Plan and Scheme, we commit to updating these documents at a later date to make this important information clearer.

We appreciate your observation regarding **the requirement to consult users on how well the Enhanced Partnership is working**. To address this, we will establish the EP Forum and define and set up community-led working groups as we intended. We will communicate these actions publicly, including on the My Journey website, and we will keep Transport Focus informed of our progress. Future variations to the documents will amplify our actions so that it is clearer that the EP Plan meets the requirement of the Act.

The **passenger charter** is being developed alongside the EP. We appreciate the suggestions which you have made and will be pleased to consider these in discussion with the bus operators, particularly for the points which relate to what is provided inside buses, to ensure that the charter promotes the best interests of passengers.

Regarding concerns about the **bespoke variation mechanism**, we want to reassure you that mentions of the Bespoke Variation are not intended to avoid consultation where it is appropriate and/or necessary on a statutory basis. We commit to considering consulting with the organisations that are statutory consultees on a non-statutory basis as part of the process of developing measures and facilities. This will be done before considering the use of the Bespoke Variation mechanism.

We appreciate your willingness to help the partnership, and we will consider how Transport Focus can play a role in assisting us as we work towards establishing and running a live Enhanced Partnership.

Once again, we extend our gratitude for your thorough response and your ongoing support in ensuring that our bus services meet local passenger priorities.

Yours sincerely,

RBrooks

Rebecca Brooks
Community Transport Manager

TITLE	Wokingham Borough Council, Future Office Provision
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 28 September 2023
WARD	(All Wards);
LEAD OFFICER	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers
LEAD MEMBER	Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Housing - Stephen Conway

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

The purpose of this report is to consider the Council's current office provision and identify opportunities for a change in approach and provision which could bring financial and social-environmental benefits. The issue is considered in the context of the current and future financial pressures on the authority and a review of how best to use its own assets to help address these pressures.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive:

1. Agree in principle that the Council should review its office accommodation provision, including the opportunities for the relocation of its headquarters out of Shute End, to a more appropriately sized and more energy efficient building(s)
2. Agree that 28-38 Peach Street, Wokingham is the preferred alternative headquarters location and, subject to the approval of resources, will be the focus of more detailed feasibility and planning work
3. Approve a Supplementary Estimate of £175,000 within this financial year to fund feasibility, detailed design work and programme and project costs, including external consultancy support and expertise, for the alternative headquarter location
4. Note that updates and outputs from the next stage of feasibility work will be reported back to the Executive.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Through the efficient use of its own property assets, the Council can drive financial efficiencies by reducing the financial burden of maintaining its property portfolio and ensure that the assets it does hold work as hard and as flexibly as possible. This can provide opportunities to both reduce current ongoing revenue costs and provide capital from the disposal of unrequired assets. The Council's own office accommodation is one of the largest elements of its property holdings. Accommodation ranges in size from the headquarters at Shute End in Wokingham town to smaller satellite offices throughout the Borough and locations where WBC staff co-locate with partner organisations. Changes in working practices during and post the Covid-19 pandemic has meant that the demand for traditional office provision (fixed desks) has reduced significantly. This has given the authority the opportunity to review the provision in terms of type, quantity and location of office and workspace for the Council's staff. The initial primary focus of this review has

been on the Council's existing headquarters at Shute End in Wokingham town. Shute End is the authority's largest and most costly office asset, and subsequently, where the biggest opportunity to generate savings has been identified.

The office accommodation at Shute End extends to a gross internal area of circa 10,600m², is arranged over 4 floors and provides for 800 desk spaces and supporting office functions. Daily surveys of occupancy have been carried out following the cessation of Covid 19 lockdown restrictions. The survey data shows that attendance levels at Shute End are not consistent throughout the week but that the highest daily average desk occupation is 219. This demonstrates that the current desk capacity of the building of 800 represents a significant overprovision, whilst the on-going and future investment costs of the current office represent a significant capital and revenue cost to the Council.

Adapting and changing our own office accommodation is a significant opportunity for the Council to lead by example and demonstrate how it is responsibly responding to the current financial challenges and the changes in modern ways of working by amending its own working practices to meet these challenges. Executive is therefore asked to agree in principle that the Council should review its office accommodation provision, including the opportunities for the relocation of its headquarters out of Shute End, to a more appropriately sized and energy efficient building(s).

A review of the opportunities and feasibility of the relocation of the Council HQ from Shute End to more appropriately sized accommodation has been undertaken to inform this Executive decision. Three opportunities for future headquarters provision have been identified and this report sets out the financial and non-financial appraisal of these options. This appraisal concludes that 28-38 Peach Street, Wokingham (the former Marks & Spencer's building) performs the best and subsequently Executive are asked to note that 28-38 Peach Street is the preferred new headquarters location and, subject to the approval of resource, will be the subject of more detailed feasibility and planning work.

Subject to the approval of Executive, more detailed feasibility and implementation work will be required to fully understand and design and plan for the relocation of the Council's Headquarters from Shute End, to 28-38 Peach Street. Executive are recommended to approve a Supplementary Estimate of £175,000 for within this year 2023-24 to enable the start of the next stage of feasibility work and the appointment of external consultancy support, including a programme manager and planning, design and valuation teams.

Executive are asked to note that updates on and the outputs of feasibility work, including planning and design, will be reported back to the Corporate Leadership Team and Executive on agreed milestones and for decision making when required.

BACKGROUND

In light of the continued significant budgetary pressures the Council faces, and in order to ensure the continued focus of investment towards front line services it is imperative that the authority is as efficient as possible in other areas of the organisation, including the use of its property portfolio. Through the efficient use of its property assets, the Council can drive both financial efficiencies by reducing the financial burden of maintaining its property portfolio and ensure that it has a multi-functional portfolio of assets aligned to future business need and which meets the needs of our communities and residents.

The Council's office accommodation where its workforce is based is one of the largest elements of the Council's property holdings. Accommodation ranges in size from the large headquarters at Shute End in Wokingham town to smaller satellite offices throughout the Borough and locations where WBC staff co-locate with partner organisations.

In line with national trends, our working practices have changed during and post the Covid-19 pandemic, with a significant proportion of staff working a greater proportion of their time from home and/or remotely from the office and significantly reducing the demand for traditional office provision (fixed desks). This has given the authority the opportunity to review the provision in terms of type, quantity and location of office and workspace for the Council's staff in order to ensure that it enables front line services to be delivered in our communities and contributes towards financial efficiencies.

The initial primary focus of this review has been on the council's existing headquarters and primary office base at Shute End in Wokingham town, where the majority of staff are based. It is the authority's largest and most costly office asset, and subsequently, where the biggest opportunity to generate savings has been identified.

The work to date has also preliminarily identified other opportunities for further satellite workspaces, potentially with partner organisations, that would all contribute to the efficient and localised based provision of services, utilising both the existing property portfolio and new and expanded opportunities. These opportunities and the outcomes of feasibility work will be reported back to Executive in due course.

BUSINESS CASE

Existing office accommodation at Shute End Headquarters

The office accommodation at Shute End extends to a gross internal area of circa 10,600m², is arranged over 4 floors and includes:

- 800 Desk Spaces
- Meeting rooms.
- Council Chamber and committee rooms
- Reception and back-office functions
- Political Offices
- Registrars Service

Desk space and meeting rooms equate for the majority (90%) of the useable floor area within the offices.

Current demand for desk space in Shute End is driven by business need and staff choice on how to work, following the cessation of any restrictions to working practices in the offices in March 2022. For the majority of officers, the Council operates a SMART working policy, with SMART working defined as “does not require a fixed desk, will use any combination of working from home, using a hot desk in the office, using a touchdown point in the office, and/or being “out and about” in various locations.” Where driven by business need, including the nature of the work undertaken, some staff and teams are required to locate themselves in the office during working hours and/or for a minimum period of hours or days per week.

Daily surveys of occupancy have been carried out following the cessation of Covid 19 lockdown restrictions. The survey data shows that attendance levels at Shute End are not consistent throughout the week but that the highest daily average desk occupation is 219. This demonstrates that the current desk capacity of the building of 800 represents a significant overprovision.

The current provision of office accommodation at Shute End, represents a significant capital and revenue cost to the Council.

In the 2022-23 financial year the property costs for the operation of Shute End (revenue) were circa £1.1m. This comprised the cost of utilities, business rates, insurance, security and planned and reactive maintenance, but excludes staffing costs.

As a way of part mitigating these operational costs, in December 2022, the office accommodation at Shute End was consolidated down into two floors, with significant areas of the building closed down and available desk numbers reduced from 800 to 405. This consolidation has reduced annual running costs (heating, lighting, cleaning etc.) by £63,000 per annum and has achieved a one-off business rates reduction of £17,000.

The Shute End offices require on-going investment to ensure they continue to meet legislative health and safety requirements and provide an appropriate quality workspace. A key area where future investment will be required at Shute End is to ensure compliance with the Modern Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES). The Shute End offices currently has an EPC rating of D. The Government confirmed in the Energy White Paper (2020) that by 2030 non-residential properties will be required to achieve an EPC rating of B. Improving the energy efficiency of Shute End to meet the necessary MEES would incur a very significant capital cost.

Despite the recent savings achieved, the ongoing revenue cost of the overprovision of office accommodation, together with future capital costs to meet legislative energy efficiency standards, indicates that the continued occupation of Shute End in its current configuration represents a significant financial burden on the authority. Occupying a more appropriately sized and more efficient accommodation could substantially reduce these costs in future years.

Adapting and changing our own office accommodation is a significant opportunity for the Council to lead by example and demonstrate how it is responsibly responding to the current financial challenges and the changes in modern ways of working by amending its own working practices to meet these challenges. The opportunity also presents an opportunity to demonstrate how the authority is utilising its own property portfolio to

ensure it occupies and uses its assets in the most energy efficient way, in line with the aspirations of our own Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP).

Therefore, for the reasons set out above the Executive is asked to agree in principle that the Council should review its office accommodation provision, including the opportunities for the relocation of its headquarters out of Shute End, to a more appropriately sized and more energy efficient building(s).

Criteria for future headquarters accommodation

When considering suitable alternative headquarters, a number of criteria have been applied.

1. Appropriate capacity and size

In view of the functions currently provided for within Shute End and an understanding of the approach to service delivery, future headquarters accommodation will be required to provide:

- 225 desk capacity (based on data from current occupancy surveys and approaches to SMART working)
- A range of work, collaboration and meeting spaces
- Provision of offices for political leadership and Corporate Leadership Team
- Reception
- Back of House support facilities
- Dedicated space for Registrar's statutory functions and safe storage of legal documents
- Appropriate provision for staff, councillor and visitor car parking

2. Availability

In order to deliver service and financial efficiencies as quickly as possible alternative premises should be available in the short-term and not encumbered by lengthy leases or potentially lengthy acquisition processes.

This has led to a focus on options already within the Council's ownership, as this minimises the time risk to the council associated with completing a new property transaction. Utilising of our own existing properties would also ensures the authority is making more efficient use of its existing assets in line with the objectives set out above.

However, options of buildings not within the Council's ownership but which could be available in the short-term to be rented by the authority will be considered in a future assessment.

3. Environmental Credentials

All options considered should be able to achieve as a minimum the requirement for Display Energy Certificate (DEC) Level B by 2030, but preferably could achieve as close as feasibly possible to CEAP ambitions of Net Zero Carbon performance.

The capital cost of investment in the building required to bring it up to these standards would be considered in the financial appraisal of the option.

4. Location

The Council's headquarters is currently located in Wokingham town, which is the largest area of population within the Borough and an accessible location for the majority of Borough residents and Council staff. Council staff also contribute to the Wokingham town centre economy and support the regeneration programme in the town, increasing footfall and spending money through purchases made in the town on lunch breaks or at the beginning and end of the working day.

Accessibility to Council services for our residents is important and therefore sites not accessible and outside of development limits (e.g in the countryside) have not been considered.

Given the criteria set out above, especially relating to size and capacity, the options for an alternative headquarters have all been identified within Wokingham town to date. However when considering opportunities for any leasing options, suitable properties outside of Wokingham town may be identified and will be assessed accordingly.

Options for re-provision of additional functions

There are two key functions currently undertaken at Shute End which need to be re-provided for and which may need to be and/or could benefit from being re-provided separately to a new Council HQ.

- *Complex and/or sensitive customer interactions.*

There are a number of customer interactions that currently occur at Shute End which are sensitive due to the nature of the issues being addressed and to individual customers. These include the 'Front Doors' for Housing enquiries, and Childrens and Adults Services clients, and Children's Services Conferencing Facility. In discussions with the relevant services, it is considered these interactions would be better served from an alternative setting to the formal and public office setting of a new HQ. Alternative options, within the council's existing portfolio and including through the development of Community Hubs in locations across the borough, have been identified to meet the requirements of these functions and the next phase of this project will review these options in greater detail.

- *Civic meeting space, including the Council Chamber*

Meeting space is required to support and enable the Council's democratic processes including committee and other statutory meetings. Currently the main meeting rooms used for these purposes are:

- The Council Chamber comprising of a fixed seating area for councillors with a capacity of 55, as well as desks and seating for officers and a viewing gallery. The core function of this space is to accommodate Full Council meetings which

- occur 10 to 11 times a year in the evenings. Although this is the core function of the Chamber, it is also used regularly for meetings with a large capacity requirement, including Planning Appeals and internal departmental meetings
- David Hicks 1 and 2 committee rooms which have capacity to accommodate meetings for up to 22 and 16 people (seated) respectively. The rooms host a variety of committee and statutory meetings including the council’s Executive, Planning Committee, and various Overview and Scrutiny meetings. Most of these meetings occur outside of normal office hours in the evening

Given the need to ensure our assets work as efficiently and as flexibly as they can, a like for like replacement of the current Council Chamber, with fixed furniture and IT provision for use at full capacity 10/11 times a year, does not fit this ethos. In addition, the alternative headquarters buildings (see below) will not be able to accommodate a dedicated Council Chamber of a similar size. A number of other similar local authorities have approached the provision of a Council Chamber in a flexible and at times innovative way and we have used these as examples of how else the Council Chamber could be provided for. Alternative options to meet this accommodation need have been identified, including the use of other buildings currently owned by WBC, and will be considered in further detail as part of the next phase of this project.

Given that the majority of the committee meetings held in David Hicks 1 and 2 are held outside of normal office hours, it is considered that meeting rooms within a new HQ could accommodate this requirement whilst still being available for use during normal working hours.

Potential Alternative Accommodation Options

Based on the specification set out above, the options identified for a future HQ within the Council’s existing property portfolio were:

1. Shute End but with consolidated floorspace
2. 28-38 Peach Street (Former Marks and Spencers store)
3. Rubra 2, Mulberry Business Park.

A fourth option was considered comprising a ‘campus’ arrangement including the former Wokingham Library, Resource House and Seymour House on Denmark Street, Wokingham. However, an opportunity was identified to secure a letting of Resource House to the NHS in partnership with our own Adults Services team, that letting has now progressed and the residual properties are not of sufficient size to meet the needs of a headquarters provision.

Option 1, Remain at Shute End, is based on the existing layouts and desk capacities currently in place on the Lower Ground and Ground floor levels at Shute End. Options 2 and 3 were reviewed by external consultants Arup to give an indicative view of capacity and understanding of how far they could meet the design specification.

The estimated capacity of each of the options is shown in the table below.

Property	Gross Internal Area (m2)	Estimated Capacity
Shute End – Consolidated to lower and ground floors only	5714	348 (existing desk numbers at lower & ground floor)

28-38 Peach Street	2557	253
Rubra 2, Mulberry Business Park	1901	177

Rubra 2 does not have sufficient capacity to meet the required 225 desk capacity plus other floorspace requirements. However, it has been retained as an option for consideration in case its performance in the financial and non-financial assessments warrant its further consideration if capacity requirements can be reduced.

Assessment of Options.

The three options were assessed and scored from both a financial and non-financial perspective.

Financial Assessment.

A financial analysis has been undertaken reviewing the revenue and capital costs and incomes and values associated with each of the options.

Capital works cost

Costs to convert and/or refurbish the building that would become the new headquarters have been estimated, on a build cost /m2 with reference to BCIS tender price indices, inclusion of an assumption that the new headquarters will achieve a DEC rating of B as a minimum under the MEES legislation, and the required re-provision of Information Management Technology systems and infrastructure.

Capital receipts from surplus assets

For each of the three options it has been assumed that the competing/alternate properties are surplus to the Councils requirements and would be disposed of to generate a capital receipt (based on residential land value). Valuations of the assets were undertaken by an external consultant in January 2023.

Executive will note that, subject to the approval of Executive of this paper, the Shute End site is included in the WBC Sites Promotion paper to be considered later in this agenda for residential development.

Net Capital Position

The Net Capital Position outlined below therefore assumes the generation of a capital receipt from the disposal of the alternate options, minus the estimated capital works for the refurbishment of the new HQ building.

Operating costs (revenue)

Costs of operating the building as the headquarters have been estimated including utilities (assuming DEC rating of B), business rates, maintenance, cleaning and insurance.

Potential for income generation

Specific to the Shute End Consolidation option, the estimated revenue costs assume the letting of the unused floors of Shute End following consolidation of Council office accommodation down to Lower Ground and Ground Floors of the building.

Prevailing market conditions at the time will determine whether this is viable. However, an external review undertaken in early 2023 indicated that the office market in the town is somewhat depressed, with most agents citing a substantial amount of vacant office space available at the time. Failure to let the empty 'surplus' space at Shute End would result in the Council continuing to incur the running costs of the whole building.

In the event surplus space is let to a third party the costs could be mitigated (and potentially an income generated) for the duration of the letting only. This option therefore represents a significant and ongoing financial risk.

The above considerations have been incorporated into a full financial analysis, with an option appraisal based on a ten-year cashflow and net present value. A financial summary of the options is set out in the table below with a financial analysis based on cost per desk. All assumptions are relevant as at the date of the valuations (July 2023).

Property	Capacity	Net Capital Released (£,000)	Net Revenue Costs (£,000) pa	Cost per desk (£)	Cost of oversupply* (£,000)
Shute End Consolidated	348	1,090	450	1,292	159
28-38 Peach Street	253	5,470	245	970	27
Rubra 2	177	8,240	178	1005	UNDERSUPPLY.

* Cost of oversupply assumes demand of 225 desk provision.

This analysis shows that Rubra 2 offers the best net capital position, due to the more limited capital costs of refurbishing the building for Council use compared to the other options, and the two alternative assets (Shute End and 28-38 Peach Street) having higher capital values and the ability to generate larger capital receipt upon disposal. Shute End offers the lowest net capital position as the Shute End site has the highest capital value and that value is foregone if the site remains in office use and is not developed.

This analysis shows that the total running costs of Shute End are by far the highest of all options even if one assumes the unlikely scenario of income being generated from unused floors. And even in this case, on a unit (per desk) basis it is the highest. The other two options have a lower on-going revenue cost.

NON-FINANCIAL ASSESSMENT (PESTLE ASSESSMENT)

Each of the 3 options has been subject to a non-financial assessment (PESTLE review – political, economic social, technology, legal, environmental), assessing how far the options deliver against the Council's key objectives in the Council Plan. The table below summarises this scoring (1 poor to 5 good).

Corporate Objective	Measure	Shute End	28-38 Peach Street	Rubra 2
Being the best we can be	"Fitness for purpose of office" - how suited is the building to providing a more modern office?	3	4	4
Being the best we can be	Split site "inefficiency" - logically better to operate from a single site than from two separate locations	5	5	2
Delivering the right homes in the right places	Release of housing land/units to the market - ability of the option to release land for housing	2	5	5
Provide safe and strong communities	Town centre regeneration – organisation at the centre of the town - opportunity to enhance the town centre and keep spending power in the town centre	2	4	1
Enjoying a clean and green borough	Carbon / net zero impact - ability to contribute to carbon reduction	3	3	3
Being the best we can be	Value for money - deliverable cost:benefit	2	4	5
Enriching lives	Staff wellbeing – most suitable working environment for staff	4	4	3
Being the best we can be	Civic decision making in the community – potential for a more distributed workforce and Council meetings	2	5	5
Changing the way we work for you	Driving organisational change – helping support the wider transformation of the Council	2	5	4
		2.78	4.33	3.56

The PESTLE review demonstrates that alternative headquarter sites can deliver an improved office environment, potential housing units from a released site, better value for money, good staff wellbeing and help drive organisational change

Overall performance

The table below takes the above two sections (financial and non-financial assessments) and combines them into one table to give an overall "cost benefit" assessment. It shows the key metrics used in the assessment, financial and non-financial, and ranks the three options against each other using a Red, Amber, Green (RAG) rating. Green is the best option in each category and red the worst option.

Financial summary with PESTLE scores

Property	Capacity	Net Capital Released (£,000)	Running Costs (£,000) pa	Cost per desk (£)	PESTLE Score
Shute End Consolidated	348	1,090	-450	1,292	2.78
28-38 Peach Street	253	5,470	-245	970	4.33
Rubra 2	177	8,240	-178	1005	3.56

Shute End with four red ratings suggests that it is not fit for purpose into the future. Whilst Rubra 2 has a similar RAG rating to the 28-38 Peach Street it is a much smaller and an under-capacity building. 28-38 Peach Street comes out as the best option when considering the overall PESTLE and per desk cost.

Based on the above assessment, Executive are asked to note that 28-38 Peach Street is the preferred new headquarters location and, subject to the approval of resources, will be the subject of more detailed feasibility and planning work.

Next Steps

Subject to the approval of Executive, more detailed feasibility and implementation work is now required to fully understand and design and plan for the relocation of the Council’s Headquarters from Shute End, to 28-38 Peach Street, Wokingham.

Further assessment will also be undertaken of any opportunities for the leasing of a property in third party ownership and a cost-benefit analysis of these opportunities will be undertaken to enable a comparison with the current preferred option of relocation to 28-38 Peach Street.

This work will require the establishment of a dedicated cross-departmental project team, supported by external consultancy support. An indicative project plan has been drafted which shows the duration of this project over the next three years, with a new headquarters opening in January 2027.

An initial bid has been made to the Medium-Term Financial Plan for capital budget for this project for years 2024-25 and 2025-26, but this will not be confirmed until the budget setting process concludes in February 2024. In the interim, Executive are recommended to approve a Supplementary Estimate of £175,000 for within this year 2023-24 to enable the start of the next stage of feasibility work and the appointment of external consultancy support, including a programme manager and planning, design and valuation teams.

Executive are asked to note that updates on and the outputs of feasibility work, including planning and design, will be reported back to the Corporate Leadership Team and Executive on agreed milestones and for decision making when required.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£175,000	Funding sought though Supplementary Estimate (part of this decision being taken)	Capital

Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£3,075,000	Funding bid has been made to MTFP (to be confirmed)	Capital
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£3,000,000	Funding bid has been made to MTFP (to be confirmed)	Capital

Other Financial Information

The financial implications of the Council's current headquarters provision and future alternatives are set out in the main body of the report.

Ensuring best value for money from the councils property assets is an important element towards being able to set a balanced budget as the Council continues to face significant budgetary pressures. The realignment of the current provision potentially provides opportunities to significantly reduce ongoing revenue costs and release scarce capital funds.

Monies spent on feasibility and planning and design work are spent at risk until the financial savings are realised on completion of the project. If the project does not complete, then monies spent in the interim will be a non-recoverable revenue cost

Legal Implications arising from the Recommendation(s)

Agreed that this is within Executive's power and that no Part 2 papers are needed. Otherwise Legal implications are contained within the Report.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

Key stakeholders in this project include staff, councillors and residents, particularly those who access WBC services face to face. Appropriate opportunities for consultation with stakeholders will be identified through the planning and implementation process. A Staff Change Group will be established to feed into the programme and feasibility and design work.

Public Sector Equality Duty

An initial assessment has been undertaken. Further assessment and appropriate mitigation measures will be identified throughout the project.

Climate Emergency – *This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030*

All development will need, as minimum, to meet the Council's relevant planning policies as at the date of the grant of any planning permission and national Building Control legislation. In addition to this, the development of the Council's office accommodation, gives the authority the opportunity to demonstrate how the authority is utilising its own property portfolio to ensure it occupies and uses its assets in the most energy efficient way, in line with the aspirations of our own Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP).

Reasons for considering the report in Closed Session

List of Background Papers
None

Contact Sarah Morgan	Service Commercial Property
Telephone Tel: 0118 908 8371	Email sarah.morgan@wokingham.gov.uk

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TITLE	Violence Against Women & Girls Strategy 2023-26
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 28 September 2023
WARD	(All Wards);
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Place and Growth - Giorgio Framaliccio
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Climate Emergency and Resident Services - Councillor Sarah Kerr

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

The Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) draft strategy requires Executive approval as it sets out how the Wokingham Community Safety Partnership, of which Wokingham Borough Council is a key partner, will tackle such violence.

The strategy aligns with the strategic outcomes of the Council Plan 2022 - 'Providing safe strong communities' and the Wokingham Community Safety Strategy 2021-2024.

The Domestic Abuse strategy and Serious Violence & Exploitation strategy will sit alongside the VAWG strategy with key aims of tackling domestic abuse and serious violence which are key pillars of VAWG.

The Executive is requested to consider and approve the VAWG Strategy 2023 – 2026. The Wokingham Community Safety Partnership (WCSP) will then be asked to adopt the strategy and take responsibility for the development, monitoring and delivery of the VAWG Action Plan. The WCSP will also be asked to take responsibility for reviewing and refreshing the VAWG Strategy as necessary on an annual basis.

RECOMMENDATION

The Executive is requested to:-

- 1) Formally approve the Wokingham Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy 2023-2026;
- 2) Agree that the strategy be presented to the Health & Wellbeing Board with any amendments to be made by the Director for Place & Growth in consultation with the Lead Member;
- 3) Request that the Wokingham Community Safety Partnership (WCSP) adopt the approved VAWG Strategy with the WCSP taking responsibility for the further development and oversight of the VAWG Strategy and Action Plan.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Executive was informed that in July 2021, the Government published a 'Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)' strategy followed by a National Statement of Expectations in March 2022, to highlight crimes which disproportionately affect women and girls.

Following the approval of the Executive to develop a Wokingham VAWG Strategy using the national guidance and National Statement of Expectations as a framework, the draft strategy has been produced. It was agreed that this would place the borough in a strong position to develop better processes and work in partnership with the community we serve. It would also help to strengthen the understanding of where there are differences in reporting, responses, risks and outcomes to individuals experiencing VAWG and where improvements can and should be made.

The indicative action plan attached shows a wide range of activity and this will be refined and focussed on the needs and requirements of the local communities across the borough. This will include the development of a strategic needs assessment that will be based on the analysis of local data by VAWG crime type and by exploring best practice. The strategy will also focus on targeting prevention of VAWG through changing attitudes and behaviours.

BACKGROUND

At the September 2022 meeting of the Executive, members were informed that the safety of women and girls across the country is important for everyone and that crimes of violence against women and girls including rape, other sexual offences, stalking, domestic abuse, 'honour-based' abuse (including forced marriage and 'honour' killings), 'revenge porn', 'upskirting' and many others are increasing nationally.

These crimes can affect women and girls for a long time. It is not always easy to get help and support and that needs to change. Women and girls should be safe and equally they should feel safe. If they don't, they can't have the same chances in life as men and boys.

The Executive was also informed about the public profile and awareness of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) that had been raised in recent years by a number of well publicised murders, especially that of Sarah Everard, who was kidnapped and killed by a serving Metropolitan Police Officer. VAWG related crimes are taking place every day and have a long-lasting impact on victims, including mental and physical health problems, not doing well at school or work, becoming homeless, and children being harmed and not feeling safe.

Whilst Wokingham Borough Council has taken important steps towards improving its response to VAWG, for example through the WBC Anti-abuse Charter, Domestic Abuse Strategy and Serious Violence & Exploitation Strategy, more needs to be done.

A local Wokingham VAWG strategy is therefore essential in drawing together data, best practice, and experiences of victims who are affected by crimes which disproportionately affect women and girls, creating a robust response and a drive to reduce prevalence of these crimes.

This strategy would sit alongside existing community safety workstreams, including the domestic abuse and serious violence response, which addresses key crime types within VAWG.

The strategy will contribute towards making Wokingham a safer and healthier place for all. Victims/survivors will feel supported to seek help and empowered to lead safe lives, free from abuse. Perpetrators will know that their behaviour will not be tolerated and where they can seek support for abusive behaviour.

The draft strategy has been shared with a wide range of partners through the Community Safety Partnership, Domestic Abuse Board and Networking Group, Serious Violence & Exploitation Board, Health & Well Being Steering Group and the Voluntary Sector. The Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee received an update in July 2023 and were invited to comment on the priorities and content.

Members of the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee supported the draft strategy and priorities contained therein and stressed the importance of hearing from women and girls in whatever format that participants, including but not exclusively victims and survivors, preferred (for example focus groups, one-to-one's). This would help to ensure the action plan is based on local needs and concerns. The committee also stressed the importance of having an action plan that contains key performance indicators (KPI's) that will show targets and achievements year on year.

The Community Safety Survey (April 2023) showed that the majority of respondents supported the priorities set out in the draft strategy. Several respondents commented on the importance and need for more education around VAWG. Comments were also made about violence that also affects men and boys, and not just women and girls. Violence against any member of the community is abhorrent and is addressed through work across a range of community safety workstreams and in particular Domestic Abuse and Serious Violence and Exploitation. The reason for focusing on women and girls is that much of the violence that it categorised as VAWG disproportionately affects women and girls.

In summary, the priorities upon which the Action Plan will be focused are:-

1. Putting the victim/survivor at the centre of service design and delivery;
2. Taking a strategic, system-wide approach to commissioning;
3. Having a clear focus on perpetrators and holding them to account;
4. Safeguarding and supporting individuals and victims at every point with a strong emphasis on early identification and help;
5. Raising local awareness of the issues and involve, engage, and empower communities to seek, design and deliver solutions.
6. Changing inappropriate attitudes and behaviours of men and boys.

There will be resource implications for delivering activity in support of the abovementioned priorities but financial and staff costs will not be known until the action plan has been developed. The Community Safety Team already lead on tackling Domestic Abuse and Serious Violence and Exploitation and there is capacity within the team to lead on the delivery of the VAWG strategy and action plan.

Resource implications for activity and initiatives that may emerge from the VAWG Action Plan will need to be considered and costed by the Wokingham Community Safety Partnership. Any requirement for financial support from Wokingham Borough Council will be set out in the medium term financial plan.

In order to achieve successful outcomes, input and support will be required from a broad range of other services across the council. Whilst the strategy has been produced by

WBC, successful delivery will be dependent on multi-agency support and input from partner organisations including Thames Valley Police, Probation Service, NHS and the Voluntary and Not for Profit Sector.

Multi-agency work already contributes significantly to tackling VAWG but there is much more to do. The strategy and action plan will help to identify where and how improvements can be made so that we can ensure that women and girls in our communities are safe, feel safe and have equal opportunities alongside men and boys.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	Nil	N/A	N/A
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	Nil	N/A	N/A
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	Nil	N/A	N/A

Other Financial Information
There may be resource implications for delivering activity and initiatives in support of the above-mentioned priorities. However, costs will not be known until the action plan has been developed by the Wokingham Community Safety Partnership. Any financial implications for the council will be set out in the medium-term financial plan. Every effort will be made to identify alternative sources of funding that may include the Community Safety Fund provided by the Polie and Crime Commissioner and project specific government grants.

Legal Implications arising from the Recommendation(s)
There are no legal implications.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation
Consultation has been carried out with partner organisation through a range of boards including the Community Safety Partnership. The community were invited, through the Community Safety Survey that ran between February and April 2023, to consider the priorities set out in the draft strategy.

Public Sector Equality Duty
An Equalities Impact Assessment has been approved by the Inclusion Team.

Climate Emergency – This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030
None

Reasons for considering the report in Closed Session
The report is not being considered in closed session.

List of Background Papers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft VAWG Strategy 2023 - 2026. • An indicative Action Plan that will be used by the Community Safety Partnership as the basis for a Wokingham specific and focussed action plan.

Contact Philip Stoneman	Service Place and Growth
Telephone 0118 237 9187	Email philip.stoneman@wokingham.gov.uk

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Wokingham Violence Against Women & Girls (VAWG)

Strategy 2023 - 2026



Foreword



Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) is a fundamental human rights violation, which harms the lives of millions.

It is recognised as a worldwide issue of epidemic proportions. In the UK, one in four women experiences domestic abuse in their lifetime,¹ two women a week in England and

Wales are killed by a current or former partner,² in England and Wales 1 in 4 women have been raped or sexually assaulted (6.54 million women total),³ there are an estimated 137,000 women and girls affected by FGM living in England and Wales,⁴ and two thirds of girls report having experienced sexual harassment from other students at school.⁵ These and other forms of abuse stop hundreds of thousands of women and girls living the lives they would choose for themselves.

VAWG is happening here in Wokingham borough and in many instances remains hidden and under-reported, but it is not inevitable. Collectively we can put a stop to it. This strategy sets out the priorities and approach in ending VAWG as part of our coordinated community response and will be supported by a robust action plan which will outline the steps we will take as a partnership to achieve our objectives.

Ending VAWG requires a system-wide approach that puts victims/survivors front and centre, along with prevention through ending the culture of misogyny and sexism within society. The strategy recognises that men and boys are also affected by crimes classified as VAWG and that whilst there is a lot of good work going on in tackling VAWG, we can and must do more.

I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the development of this strategy and to our ongoing partnership working to realise our vision of stopping Violence against Women and Girls.

Councillor Sarah Kerr

Executive Member for Climate Change and Resident Services Wokingham Borough council

¹ [Domestic Abuse Statistics UK - NCDV](#)

² [Data Matters – Every Woman Matters – Femicide Census](#)

³ [Rape, sexual assault and child sexual abuse statistics | Rape Crisis England & Wales](#)

⁴ [Prevalence of Female Genital Mutilation in England and Wales: National and local estimates | Trust for London](#)

⁵ [girlguiding-research-briefing_girls-experiences-of-sexual-harassment_june2021.pdf](#)

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1. Introduction

The Wokingham Community Safety Partnership (WCSP), of which Wokingham Borough Council is a key partner, is determined to STOP Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) in all its forms, and to help achieve this a long-term strategic approach is being taken.

Consultation with the community and the WCSP has identified six key priorities and these will underpin the essential work necessary in achieving our shared vision.

1. Putting the victim/survivor at the centre of service design and delivery;
2. Taking a strategic, system-wide approach to commissioning;
3. Having a clear focus on perpetrators and holding them to account;
4. Safeguarding and supporting individuals and victims at every point with a strong emphasis on early identification and help;
5. Raising local awareness of the issues and involve, engage, and empower communities to seek, design and deliver solutions.
6. Changing inappropriate attitudes and behaviours of men and boys.

This strategy takes an integrated approach to help deliver the cultural and behavioural shift that is needed to change attitudes to women and girls. The strategy does not seek to demonise men and boys, the vast majority of whom are respectful and rightly treat women and girls as equals. There are however men and boys who engage in violence and abuse at all levels towards women and girls simply because of their gender, and this strategy is aimed at targeting and stopping such behaviour through awareness, prevention, tackling and bringing perpetrators to account, and supporting and keeping victims safe.

It is further recognised that men and boys are also affected by crimes classified as VAWG and this was articulated by several respondents to the community safety survey carried out in April 2023.

VAWG is a global problem that takes place in local communities, often unseen and unreported. To effectively tackle VAWG within the Wokingham Borough area, we need our own strategy and the full engagement and support of a wide range of stakeholders from the public, private, and voluntary sectors if we are to ensure that women and girls can live free from the fear of violence and other crimes.

The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act that received Royal Assent on 28 April 2022 places new duties on a range of agencies to work collaboratively to prepare a strategy for preventing and reducing serious violence including sexual offences and domestic abuse.

Strategies relating to domestic abuse and serious violent crime have already been produced by the Wokingham Community Safety Partnership, in collaboration with a wide range of partner organisations. Whilst domestic abuse is one element of VAWG, this strategy reflects the need to ensure there is a clear focus on tackling the full range of crimes which disproportionately affect women and girls.

Crimes of violence against women and girls include rape and other sexual offences. Stalking, domestic abuse, 'honour-based' abuse (including forced

marriage and 'honour' killings), 'revenge porn', 'up-skirting' and many others are increasing nationally which is unacceptable, and measures to reverse this trend and tackle the crimes robustly must be a high priority.

Through its work on domestic abuse and serious violence and exploitation, the Wokingham Community Safety Partnership recognises the wider context of VAWG and how elements of it sit within a range of workstreams. It is for that reason that a focused strategy has been written specifically for VAWG.



2. Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) defined



VAWG describes a range of violent and abusive acts and behaviours which are disproportionately directed against women and girls. It can take several forms including physical, sexual, psychological, or economic.

The United Nations definition of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), defines VAWG as: *“Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.”*

The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (also known as the “Istanbul Convention”), defines VAWG as: *“a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women and shall mean all acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life” (Article 3).*

VAWG takes place in communities across the UK and can happen within current or previous relationships, in families, with friends, colleagues, people in positions of power and strangers. The violence and abuse can take place in familiar locations, often behind closed doors, including homes, workplaces, leisure facilities and outdoor locations including streets, open spaces and on public transport. This is not an exhaustive list but serves to highlight why women and girls often feel vulnerable and scared if safe places are not available to them.

The abuse is not always in person. Some forms of violence, abuse and coercive behaviour take place in the virtual world of the internet and social media. This could include internet stalking, porn revenge, sexual harassment, bullying or trafficking.

Violence against women and girls describes violent and oppressive patterns of behaviour and practises, which may seek to achieve power and control over women and girls. It impacts on the physical safety, health and emotional well-being of individuals and can lead to victims taking their own lives and may well impact on families, carers, children and the community as a whole.

Women and girls are targeted because of their gender and examples of the types of violence and abuse made against them includes:

- Sexual violence, including rape, abuse and exploitation
- Sexual harassment and bullying
- Stalking
- Revenge Porn
- Up skirting
- Trafficking
- Domestic violence and abuse
- Coercive and controlling behaviour
- Female genital mutilation (FGM)
- Forced marriage
- Crimes committed in the name of 'Honour'

These acts can take place regardless of ethnicity, faith, sexuality or age and whilst these have a disproportionate effect on women and girls, we recognise that men and boys are also victims of violence and abuse. Whilst the focus of this strategy is on VAWG, the Wokingham Community Safety Partnership is committed to providing support for all victims of such abuse regardless of gender.

3. The causes of VAWG

Whilst evidence has shown that gender inequality is a key driver of VAWG, there are many other factors including substance use (alcohol and/or drugs), mental ill health, anger issues, growing up in an abusive household, cultural practices, break up of relationships, revenge, jealousy, sexual gratification, and peer pressure.

The Council of Europe has identified a range of factors which lie at the root of the problem including:-

- Sexist views, and the idea that men can have more power over women and children, results in abuse being used to maintain this power. Gender stereotypes reinforce this inequality and creates an acceptance of violence and abuse. The belief that men must be tough, strong, and always in control can result in them exerting control over a partner.
- Although abuse is illegal, sadly we see many victims blamed for the abuse and low sentences for abusers. This results in low reporting and abuse being allowed to continue. For example, rape convictions remain low and have got worse in recent years that could potentially send a message that offenders can evade justice.
- The under-representation of women and minority groups in power and politics means they have fewer opportunities to shape the discussion and to affect changes in policy, or to adopt measures

to end VAWG. It is because of the lobbying by women's groups that, in the UK, rape in marriage became a criminal offence in 1991 and coercive control became a criminal offence in 2015.

There are increasing concerns about how the internet and social media platforms (Twitter, WhatsApp, TikTok etc.) are being used for the promulgation of the ideology around misogyny, incel, inequality and extremism. These platforms are being increasingly used by social media 'influencers' many of whom who have thousands of 'followers' and who are mainly targeting an audience of young men and boys.

Whilst the freedom of speech is an important principle allowing an individual or a community to articulate their opinions and ideas without fear of retaliation, censorship, or legal sanction there are concerns that on-line content being posted by individuals and influencers can have a negative impact particularly on impressionable young and vulnerable people that will potentially fuel VAWG and as such freedom of speech does not equate to freedom from consequences.

4. Why have we produced a Wokingham VAWG strategy?

The strategy has been designed to provide context and focus around VAWG, including defining what VAWG is, the impact it has on women and girls and society more widely, what is being done to tackle it, and what our priorities and actions are to address these concerns, behaviours and crimes.

VAWG is abhorrent behaviour and should not be accepted in any form in our community. The Wokingham Community Safety Partnership will work with stakeholders, producing a clear plan of action to underpin the activity that will drive improvements to root out such violence and abuse.

The Wokingham Community Safety Partnership will ensure that awareness of VAWG is raised among local agencies and the wider community. Perpetrators will be robustly pursued, victims and survivors will be supported and multi-agency approaches will be used to understand and meet the needs of victims, survivors and family members to support a process of recovery and to achieve positive life outcomes.

The effects of being a victim of these crimes can last indefinitely. That can include mental health problems, physical health problems, not doing well at school or work, becoming homeless, children being harmed and not feeling safe.

Women and girls should be safe and feel safe. If they don't, they can't have the same freedoms and chances in life as men and boys.

An important element of tackling VAWG will be hearing from women and girls that have been subjected to violence. From hearing about those experiences, the community safety partnership can better understand what it can do to prevent such violence. A lot can also be learnt from women and girls that, whilst they may not have been victims themselves, are nevertheless fearful of becoming victims. Their views on what measures can be taken to improve not just the risk of actual harm but also helping to improve feelings of safety can therefore be heard.

Tackling VAWG cuts across several of the CSP's workstreams including Domestic Abuse (DA), Serious Violence and Exploitation (SVE) and Substance Misuse. The strategy for tackling Domestic Abuse was adopted in 2021, and the Serious Violence & Exploitation Strategy is expected to be adopted later this year.

5. What the government is doing to tackle VAWG



The Government's ambition is to reduce the prevalence of VAWG, recognising that at a local level we all have a key role to play in achieving this aim.

The scale and prevalence of VAWG has been brought to the nation's attention in recent times following a number of tragic cases. Thousands of women and girls have also shared their personal experiences of abuse and harassment online via the 'Everyone's Invited' website and the Government's Call for Evidence on VAWG received more than 180,000 responses.

Reports to helplines increased during the COVID-19 pandemic and predictably extended periods of lockdown fuelled violent and oppressive patterns of behaviour.

In addition to passing the Domestic Abuse Act in 2021, the governments VAWG Strategy is clear about the need to support victims and survivors, prevent offending and strengthen the systems in place to address all forms of VAWG. The expectation is that local strategies and services should include:-

1. Putting the victim/survivor at the centre of service design and delivery;
2. Having a clear focus on perpetrators in order to keep victims and survivors safe;
3. Taking a strategic, system-wide approach to commissioning, acknowledging the gendered nature of VAWG;
4. Being locally led and safeguard individuals at every point;
5. Raising local awareness of the issues and involve, engage and empower communities to seek, design and deliver solutions to prevent VAWG.

6. What are Thames Valley Police doing to tackle VAWG

Thames Valley Police produced a [VAWG strategy \(2022/23\)](#) that complements the National Police Chief Council (NPCC) strategy recognising the many forms of violence against women and girls.



7. What is being done locally to tackle VAWG



A lot of positive work is already being carried out by the Wokingham Community Safety Partnership and in particular Wokingham Borough Council, Thames Valley Police, Probation Service, schools and colleges, charities and social enterprise and commissioned service providers including Cranstoun.

Cranstoun Wokingham has been commissioned by Wokingham Borough Council to provide a domestic abuse service and a drug and alcohol service. It is important to recognise that whilst domestic abuse is a pillar of VAWG, it doesn't just affect women and girls, but we know that it does disproportionately affect them.

The Cranstoun Domestic Abuse Service brings together an integrated range of programmes and interventions to support victims and survivors of domestic abuse. Programmes and services are delivered by highly experienced and skilled staff with unique skills in domestic abuse. They are dedicated to delivering the best support possible for the Wokingham community, and do so by providing the following:

- Assessment and support for victims and children
- Assessment and support for perpetrators in order to address and change their behaviours
- Support related to domestic abuse for children and young people in schools
- Targeting services to the most vulnerable and hard to reach groups
- Working with health providers to establish referral pathways
- Outreach victim/survivors case work
- Support to children including both one to one and group support
- Domestic abuse awareness including PSHE support and professional training
- 'Seeking Safety' and 'Freedom' programmes, groups for victims and survivors

There are several charitable and not for profit organisations that are based in and around Wokingham including Kaleidoscopic, SupportU, and Berkshire Women's Aid (BWA) and these all provide valuable support to our communities.

Wokingham Borough Council has shown its commitment, through the Wokingham Anti-abuse Charter, to make a difference by raising awareness and changing cultures within the organisation and aim to further achieve that through accreditation to White Ribbon.

White Ribbon is the internationally recognised symbol for ending male violence against women that was founded in Canada in 1989. It encourages everyone, especially men and boys to make the White Ribbon Promise to never commit, excuse or remain silent about violence against women and girls. It's purpose is to remove the requirement of women and girls to change their behaviours to avoid violence against them and put that onus onto eliminating the violence in the first place.

The aforementioned list demonstrates a very real commitment to tackling VAWG but that's not enough. More could and should be done and that is why this strategy has been produced and key partners have agreed to deliver the priorities and actions contained herein.

Importantly, the strategy clearly articulates how VAWG will be tackled and what difference it will make. It also provides the opportunity for the community to take ownership through sharing concerns, views, ideas and suggestions that can feed into the action plan and review process.



8. Needs Assessment

We know that violence against women and girls exists within our communities, some of the violence is reported whereas much of the violence remains unreported.

The priorities for eliminating VAWG are shown in the next section and how these priorities will be delivered is detailed in the action plan.

Whilst organisations including Thames Valley Police, probation, service providers, charities etc. all collect data, that will be obtained and analysed to inform a VAWG Needs Assessment. This will help to provide a more detailed understanding of the extent of the problems and in turn that will enable the Wokingham Community Safety Partnership to focus resources in the most effective way.

The Needs Assessment will also help to ensure that where additional funding is required it can be justified on the basis of clear evidence. This is not to suggest that concerns, for which there may be limited tangible evidence, will not be tackled as that would not be the case. It is for example not possible, or indeed desirable, to try and account financially for how safe people feel. It is well known that feelings of safety are very important and can impact mental health, influence the places people visit, the routes they take to travel to and from work and venues, the people they meet, the way they dress and many other considerations.

The Needs Assessment would therefore need to take account of all the facets of VAWG, prioritise them where appropriate, and ensure that we clearly show the desired outcomes.



9. The Priorities

The priorities for the Wokingham Community Safety Partnership VAWG Strategy compliment those set out in the National VAWG Strategy, and the strategy produced by Thames Valley Police and the Police and Crime Commissioner:

1. Putting the victim/survivor at the centre of service design and delivery;
2. Taking a strategic, system-wide approach to commissioning;
3. Having a clear focus on perpetrators and holding them to account;
4. Safeguarding and supporting individuals and victims at every point with a strong emphasis on early identification and help;
5. Raising local awareness of the issues and involve, engage, and empower communities to seek, design and deliver solutions.
6. Changing inappropriate attitudes and behaviours of men and boys.



10. Turning strategy into action

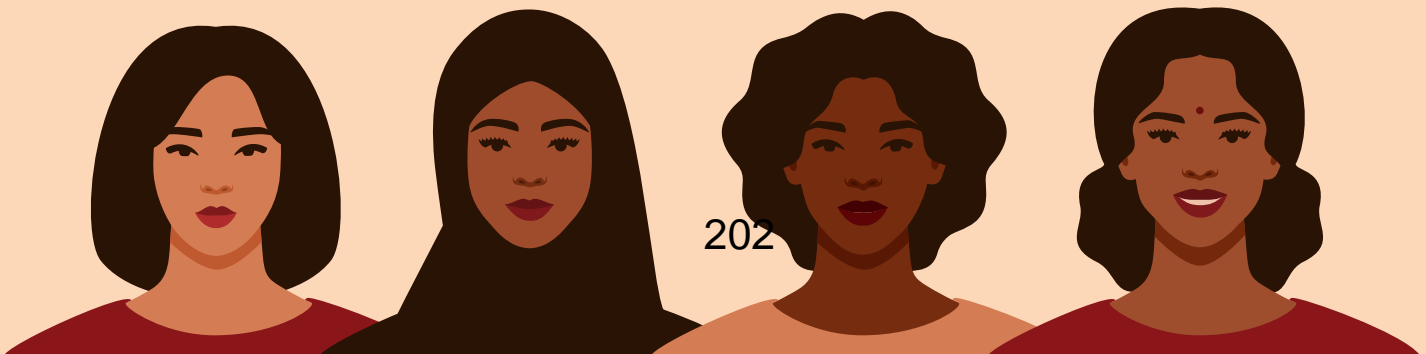
The success of this VAWG strategy is dependent on the buy-in and support of the entire community. That means that the public sector (local authority, police, probation, education, health services), private sector (businesses, service providers), voluntary sector (charities, not for profit organisations, social enterprises) must work collaboratively to achieve the goal of eliminating violence against women and girls.

For the strategy and action plan to make a real difference it will be important to understand the experiences of victims and survivors. That will help the partnership to provide focussed services to tackle the broad range of offences that make up VAWG and to identify a range of methods to tackle the causes and perpetrators.

11. Governance

The Wokingham Community Safety Partnership (WCSP) is responsible for developing and updating this strategy and action plan. The WCSP, through the Performance Management Group (a sub-group of the WCSP), will have responsibility for monitoring

and refreshing the strategy and action plan at the appropriate times with input from the Domestic Abuse Board and the Serious Violence & Exploitation Board.



12. Summary

We know violence against women and girls exists in our community, even if we don't see or experience it personally.

We know that it can seriously affect levels of confidence, independence, health (physical and mental) and life chances.

We know that many women and girls live in fear of violence and abuse and perhaps shrug it off as inevitable and not worth reporting.

We know that in order to address these issues, we need to achieve a cultural shift and change attitudes and behaviours to ensure Wokingham

Borough is a safe place for our residents, visitors and commuters that live, work, study and enjoy visiting our towns and countryside.

Activity designed to tackle VAWG already exists within a range of workstreams and strategies, including Domestic Abuse, Serious Violent Crime, Hate Crime, Exploitation and Anti-Social Behaviour, and this work is delivered on a daily basis by a wide range of partner organisations. This is important work but given the seriousness and impact of VAWG, a dedicated strategy with the single aim of STOPPING VAWG is an absolute necessity and will remain as one of our highest priorities.





TITLE	Bohunt Wokingham School Sixth Form: Options and Recommendations
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 28 September 2023
WARD	(All Wards);
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Children's Services - Helen Watson
LEAD MEMBER	Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Children's Services - Prue Bray

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

The report provides an option appraisal, timescale, costs and value for money tests, making recommendations to inform the Executive's decision.

The outcome is that students in the rural southwest (Finchampstead, Arborfield, Swallowfield and Barkham) will be able to take A level courses locally while there will be additional local Year 7 – 11 school places and that the new sixth form will be part of local inclusion system contributing to preparation for adulthood for the SEND cohort, both with and without EHCP.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive

- 1) Notes the additional feasibility work undertaken and the assessment of options to bring 6th form education to Bohunt with timescale and costs/value for money tests
- 2) Adopts the recommended option of delivering the provision of 300 sixth form places and 150 extra Year 7-11 school places by the construction of an extension to the existing school building (Option 1), while the new sixth form being part of local inclusion system contributing to preparation for adulthood for the SEND students, both with and without EHCP.
- 3) Approves a capital budget up to £5.25m funded through borrowing towards the school extension, subject to the Bohunt Education Trust (BET) match-funding current cost estimates and sharing risks related to increased building costs and their commitment to the provision of the additional required school places
- 4) Delegates authority to the Director of Children's Services and Director of Resources and Assets, in consultation with the Executive Member for Children's Services and the Leader of the Council, to enter into an agreement with the Bohunt Education Trust (BET) to secure the provision of additional school places and the commitment of match-funding and shared liabilities for the school extension.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Council has been working hard with its school partners to plan and ensure the appropriate level of sufficiency of secondary school places for the next five years. This

level of sufficiency has not yet been secured whilst uncertainty exists in certain schools' offers of extra places. The securing of additional year 7-11 school places at Bohunt, as well as sixth form provision, would contribute positively to achieving the optimum level of sufficiency in secondary school places across the Borough.

On 7th March 2022 the Council's Executive approved a proposal to part fund a scheme to create a new sixth form, create additional Year 7 places and enhance inclusion at the Bohunt Wokingham School. At the time, the project was intended to provide a 300 place sixth form, opening in the near future (2022 or 2023) with a total scheme budget of £5.7M. Costs were to be split between the council (£3.7m) and the Bohunt Education Trust (BET) (£2m).

A further report in July 2023 reported that the estimated costs for a school expansion, including sixth form provision, had risen to £10.5M.

In light of these increased costs, and the risks of further cost increase (particularly due to inflationary pressures) WBC are seeking from BET a commitment to the match-funding (50:50) of the budget required to provide the increase floor area to provide sixth form provision and additional year 7-11 places. In addition WBC are also seeking from BET a commitment to the sharing of the risk if prices do increase. Immediately prior to the July 2023 Executive meeting, the BET Board confirmed their willingness to contribute £5M to the project. Whilst this commitment of funds is very welcome and significantly contributes to the required budget provision, it is short of a 50:50 match funded position by £0.25M.

Three options were considered in the July 2023 report as ways of addressing the increased costs and identified funding gap. These were:

1. To maintain WBC's current financial contribution and build a smaller building
2. To increase WBC's financial commitment recognising the decision of the Bohunt Trust to contribute £5m and subject to the affordability of the capital programme
3. To explore alternative existing accommodation to cover the period until the new accommodation is ready or to make it a permanent sixth form site.

This report provides the results of further feasibility work on these options, with an option appraisal, project timescale, costs and value for money tests. Option 1 was discounted following further assessment as the size of building that could be constructed within current approved budgets would not provide the capacity required to accommodate sixth form provision, additional year 7-11 spaces and SEND provision.

Following this further feasibility work, it is recommended that the Council progresses with an extension to the existing school building, as this is the most deliverable plan in the required timescales and ensures that WBC can meet previous commitments given to 6th form provision, provide additional capacity in the borough for year 7 – 11 places and provides an opportunity for collaboration between the BET and WBC for the new sixth form to be part of local SEND preparing for adulthood solutions.

BACKGROUND

School place provision

In planning for secondary school places, the provision of 5% quality school place surplus is considered the optimum level of sufficiency in terms of value for money school place planning. In other words, having a 5% surplus would achieve value for money by avoiding costly last minute crisis management of school place shortage. The Council has been working hard with its school partners to plan and ensure the appropriate level of sufficiency of places for the next five years. This level of sufficiency has not yet been secured whilst uncertainty exists in certain schools' offers of extra places. The ability to secure additional year 7-11 school places at Bohunt, as well as sixth form provision, would contribute positively to achieving the optimum level of sufficiency in secondary school places.

Previous approval for Bohunt school expansion

On 7th March 2022 the Council's Executive approved a proposal to part fund a scheme to create a new sixth form, create additional Year 7 places and enhance inclusion at the Bohunt Wokingham School. At the time, the project was intended to provide a 300 place sixth form, opening in the near future (2022 or 2023) with a total scheme budget of £5.7M. Costs were to be split between the council (£3.7m) and the Bohunt Education Trust (BET) (£2m).

In July 2023 Executive considered a report which updated on the proposals for the provision of a sixth form at Bohunt. This report set out that the estimated building costs had increased significantly, reflecting the impact of high inflation rates, the necessity to ensure the building proposals fully reflect the Department for Education premises standards and design, costing, supervisory and project management costs. It was reported that the current expansion option was now estimated to cost circa £10.5m. This is an increase of £4.8m, above the current agreed project budget of £5.7m (£3.7m from WBC and £2m from the Bohunt Education Trust).

In light of these increased costs, and the risks of further cost increase (particularly due to inflationary pressures) WBC is seeking from BET a commitment to the match-funding (50:50) of the budget required to provide the increase floor area to provide sixth form provision and additional year 7-11 places (currently valued at £10.5M total). In addition WBC is also seeking from BET a commitment to the sharing of the risk if prices do increase. Immediately prior to the July 2023 Executive meeting, the BET Board confirmed their willingness to contribute £5M to the project. Whilst this commitment of funds is very welcome and significantly contributes to the required budget provision, it is short of a 50:50 match funded position by £0.25M.

Three options were considered in the July 2023 report as ways of addressing the increased costs and identified funding gap. These were:

1. To maintain WBC's current financial contribution and build a smaller building
2. To increase WBC's financial commitment recognising the decision of the Bohunt Trust to contribute £5m and subject to the affordability of the capital programme
3. To explore alternative existing accommodation to cover the period until the new accommodation is ready or to make it a permanent sixth form site.

Option 3 related to a potential opportunity identified of providing sixth form accommodation in an alternative building adjacent to the existing school, namely the former garrison building, owned by the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (part of the Ministry of Defence). The Executive report identified a number of constraints and risks associated with this option, and the Executive requested further feasibility work to be carried out to a conclusion (either feasible and affordable, or not deliverable) and to be reported back to the Executive in the Autumn.

This report provides the results of that feasibility work.

Timescales

The need for certainty on the timescales and deliverability of the option for sixth form provision is a key driver in making a decision on how to proceed. While BET could provide sufficient accommodation for the first year of the 6th form in the current facilities, they need certainty over the delivery timescales of an extension to accommodate both the first and second years. Physical provision of additional floorspace for sixth form provision needs to be place and operational by September 2025, to enable 6th form entry for the first year in September 2024 within the current facilities.

BUSINESS CASE

Following the July 2023, further feasibility work has been carried out by the Council's Commercial Property Team in conjunction with the Council's Education and SEND Services.

Option 1 "To maintain WBC's current financial contribution and build a smaller building" considered in July 2023 has been discounted, as the size of the extension that could be built within existing approved budgets would not be big enough to accommodate sixth form provision and additional year 7-11 places and SEND provision. This would therefore not represent value for money as the extension would not be fit for purpose.

Therefore 3 new options were considered in this latest round of feasibility work:

- New Option 1: School Expansion
This requires an extension to existing school building to provide additional floorspace
- New Option 2: Utilisation of MoD building.

The MoD building has outline planning consent for a community use within the outline planning consent for the development. The provision of community facilities within the district centre of the Arborfield development is in line with the Council's Core Strategy (Policies CP18; Appendix 7) and the Supplementary Planning Document for Arborfield, which states the district centre should provide a range of community facilities and services. The current planning application (ref:230872) currently being determined by the Local Planning Authority, includes provision within the MoD building for a community facility which could include Barkham Parish Council offices, community facilities for hire, library provision and a nursery (currently operating from the current Arborfield Community Centre). The planning application is expected to be determined in October 2023.

In discussions with the MoD, they have indicated that they are not willing to make the MoD building available for other uses (including education/6th form provision) due to the impact it will have on the delivery of the community infrastructure, and the wider Arborfield Green programme. Unless the Council has a clear and deliverable plan for how the community facilities could be delivered elsewhere within the community then the MoD would retain the building for community uses as per the planning consent and policy requirements.

Therefore as part of this feasibility work, officers have looked at the opportunities and costs for the re-provision of the planned community facilities which could meet the requirements of the MoD for an alternative delivery plan.

The MoD building has a bigger floor area that required for a 6th form, but it is not big enough to accommodate both the sixth form and all the community facilities listed above. The design team have therefore looked at potential options and configurations of the building which would be the most efficient in terms of most uses accommodated. Three options have been identified:

- a) Bohunt 6th form only: Refurbishment of MoD building for 6th form use (note this provides an over-supply of floorspace of circa 300m² (out of a total floor area of 1600m², building more than what a 6th form requires)
 - b) Bohunt 6th form & community parish office (shared use): Refurbishment of MoD building for educational use & community parish office and self-serve library. Includes remodelling & new side extension and front entrance
 - c) Bohunt 6th form & nursery (shared use): Refurbishment of MoD building for educational use – both sixth form and nursery. Includes remodelling & new side extension and front entrance.
- New Option 3: As a default consideration that WBC do nothing: No further expansion works at Bohunt school funded by WBC.

Option appraisal

(See table 1 – option appraisal)

Table 1 – Option Appraisal – Summer 2023 Feasibility Work

Options		Pros	Cons	Cost to WBC & Value for Money	Timescales
1	Bohunt School expansion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - meets WBC commitment to build the 6th Form provision. Beneficial for longer term needs - provides additional capacity in the borough for year 7 – 11 places - opportunity for collaboration between the BET and WBC for the new sixth form to be part of local SEND preparing for adulthood solutions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Within WBC and BET control so deliverable (subject to budget) and will be ready for 2025 admissions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - - Requires additional budget provision from WBC 	<p>£5.25m - Using 50% from WBC= £35k cost per place – (DfE benchmark £26k per place)</p>	<p>Sept 2025</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Extension would need to be operational by September 2025 for Bohunt to meet their aspiration for 6th form opening Sep 2024.
2	Utilising the MOD Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - meets WBC commitment to build the 6th Form provision. Beneficial for longer term needs - provides additional capacity in the borough for year 7 – 11 places - opportunity for collaboration between the BET and WBC for the new sixth form to be part of local SEND preparing for adulthood solutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Requires new planning approvals (change of use). - Requires identification of and commitment to alternative site(s) and additional capital budget for reprovision of community facilities. - when required community facility reprovision included this option has higher costs than school expansion option (1) - contingent on identification & commitment to alternative site & budget and negotiations with MoD (not in WBC control) so delivery not guaranteed 	<p>Costs (include 6th form provision and community facility provision):</p> <p>a) = £6.6m b) = £7m c) = £9.6m</p> <p>VfM (50% from WBC):</p> <p>a) = £44k b) = £46k c) = £64k (DfE benchmark)</p>	<p>Uncertain (identification of alternative community facilities not guaranteed)</p>

				£26k per place)	
3	Do nothing	- avoids circa £5.25m expenditure	- Fails to secure a 5% quality school place surplus which is considered by the industry as optimum VfM level to avoid costly last minute crisis management of school place shortage. - Ending of several years' joint endeavours of building a new sixth form carries reputation risk	0	N/A

Recommendation

New Option 1 “School Expansion: 2-storey side extension to existing school building” is recommended.

This option will realise the following benefits:

- additional capacity in the borough for year 7 – 11 places
- opportunity for collaboration between the BET and WBC for the new sixth form to be part of local SEND preparing for adulthood solutions
- value for money if Year 7-16 extra places and SEND preparing for adulthood commitment are secured as well as sixth form places.
- Delivers on WBC commitment to build the 6th Form provision
- Is a deliverable option, subject to budget, as site is within WBC control
- Deliverable within required timescales

New Option 2 “Utilisation of MoD building” is not recommended.

This option is not recommended because it:

- would need new planning approvals (change of use);
- introduces some potential delay and uncertainty while negotiations over the building and its use take place; these affect the delivery of the community facilities as well as the 6th form
- would need identification of and commitment to alternative site(s) and additional capital budget for reprovision of community facilities;
- has higher costs than school expansion option and does not represent value for money.

These uncertainties and disadvantages of Option 2 negate the benefit of having a new sixth form in the borough and present a significant risk to the Council’s budget.

New Option 3 “Do nothing and no further expansion works at Bohunt school to be funded by WBC” is not recommended. In planning for secondary school places, the provision of 5% quality school place surplus is considered the optimum level of sufficiency in terms of

value for money school place planning. In other words, having a 5% surplus would achieve value for money by avoiding costly last minute crisis management of school place shortage. Excluding an extension of provision at Bohunt, the current proposals that WBC and other schools have been working on have not yet secured this optimum level of sufficiency for next five years while uncertainty exists in certain schools' offers of extra places. Therefore an option of not expanding Bohunt would not contribute positively to achieving the optimum level of sufficiency in secondary school places within the Borough.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
	Option 1 – School extension		
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£0.5M	The expenditure would be funded through borrowing	Capital
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£3.4M	The expenditure would be funded through borrowing	
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£1.25M	The expenditure would be funded through borrowing	

Other Financial Information

As noted above BET have increased their contribution to £5m. This does not quite equate to a match-funding 50:50 split of scheme costs. This principal will be sought in a formal agreement between WBC and BET. It is anticipated that future running costs of the expanded school will be provided for in line with the current lease arrangements.

Further budget (£0.05M) will be required in financial year 2026-27 for retention monies for the construction contractor.

Legal Implications arising from the Recommendation(s)

This is matter is within the financial limits of the Executive under 5.1.9.4, and Recommendation 4 is empowered by 5.4.3(a) of the Constitution.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

No consultation required

Public Sector Equality Duty

Equalities assessment to be appended

Climate Emergency – This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030

The school expansion project will, as minimum, comply with statutory policy requirements regarding energy efficiency.

Reasons for considering the report in Closed Session

Not applicable

List of Background Papers

Report to Executive on 22nd March 2022 and 27 July 2023

Contact Ming Zhang	Service Education and SEND
Telephone Tel: 0118 974 6084	Email piers.brunning@wokingham.gov.uk

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TITLE	Promotion of Wokingham Borough Council Assets
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 28 September 2023
WARD	(All Wards);
LEAD OFFICER	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers
LEAD MEMBER	Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Housing - Stephen Conway

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

The purpose of this report is to consider the promotion of Council owned land into the local plan process.

Additionally it seeks approval from the Executive to include further Council owned assets for promotion to the local plan process.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive.....

1. Approve the list of Council owned assets in **Appendix A** to be promoted to the Local Plan process for the land uses identified, delivering circa 405 dwellings and with an estimated land value of £41.750m (as set out in Part 2 of the report).
2. Agree that the Council owned assets in **Appendix B**, which were previously promoted to the local plan process be withdrawn, and in turn forego the delivery of circa 352 dwellings and the estimated land value of £27.7m (as set out in Part 2 of the report).
3. Delegate authority to the Director of Resources & Assets, in consultation with the Leader and Executive Member for Assets, to promote the sites to the Local Plan and partake in the Local Plan process, including the submissions of any further representations to the process.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report gives the Executive an update on the Local Plan process and seeks approval to promote a number of Council owned assets to the Local Plan process.

The new Local Plan will guide where and how growth and development in the Borough will happen over the next 20 years. It will contain the allocation of sites for development purposes. The Local Plan is due to be submitted to Government in the spring of 2024 with adoption by the Secretary of State envisaged by 2025.

Wokingham Borough Council owns several assets that we believe are suitable for development, including residential development.

A list of the Council owned assets which it is recommended to promote to the Local Plan Update for the land uses identified, delivering circa 405 dwellings and with an estimated land value of £41.750m (as set out in Part 2 of the report) is in **Appendix A**.

A list of the Council owned assets which were previously promoted but are recommended to be withdrawn from promotion to the Local Plan Update and in turn forego the delivery of circa 352 dwellings and an estimated land value of £27.7m (as set out in Part 2 of the report) is in **Appendix B**.

These assets, if included in the Local Plan process, will help in achieving the Council's housing delivery targets, optimizing the utilisation of Council assets, obtaining optimal land value, promoting sustainable and affordable housing and facilitating the growth of local communities. Any such value obtained will be considered when appropriate into the financial budget setting process (Medium Term Financial Plan).

The key issue around the decision is the extent to which the Council wishes to promote its own assets to assist the Local Planning Authority in: 1) achieving a sustainable pattern of development for the borough; and 2) meeting the housing delivery targets of the emerging local plan. In the absence of any Council promoted sites, the LPA would be wholly reliant upon privately owned land to meet the development needs of the borough.

The decisions around whether to promote a site to the Local Plan Update need to be taken in the context of seeking to secure best value from the Council's assets – the value that could be introduced into the Council's annual budget to help fund other Council services/projects; weighed against site specific circumstances that may otherwise indicate that a site is not suitable or conducive to development. The promotion of these sites will also deliver on non-financial corporate objectives such as the delivery of affordable housing and the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) ambitions.

BACKGROUND

Local Plans are documents that guide and manage development. They direct where new development should be located – including new homes and places to work – and ensure that buildings and spaces are of a high quality and supported by infrastructure.

An understanding of where land might be available and suitable for development is key to understanding what realistic choices exist for managing development.

The Council is in the process of preparing a new Local Plan – the Local Plan Update. The new Local Plan will replace the Core Strategy and Managing Development Delivery Plans which were intended to manage development to 2026. The new Local Plan will ensure that the Council’s planning policies remain effective.

To understand land might be available for development, calls and were made to landowners to promote land. Through this process, the Council as a landowner promoted several areas of land across the borough which were then surplus to operational requirements and considered potentially suitable for a range of uses, including housing and leisure.

Given the passage of time, and potential for changed operational requirements, it is important to review and confirm what areas of land are available.

BUSINESS CASE

The Council owns several assets that are considered by the Council’s Commercial Property Team to be potentially suitable for development, including residential development. The promotion of the Council’s assets to the Local Plan process brings a number of benefits to the authority:

Housing and infrastructure need

National planning policy requires the Council to delivery housing. By promoting Council-owned assets for housing development, the Council itself can contribute to meeting housing requirements and locally specific housing needs. Moreover, providing more housing options can lead to a healthier property market, helping to address affordability and availability challenges for local people.

In the absence of any of Council owned land being promoted and thereafter included for housing, the Local Plan will be wholly reliant upon privately owned and promoted sites to meet development requirements. It will also mean that that the Council will have less direct influence in housing delivery rates.

Delivering value for money

By promoting land into the Local Plan process, the Council can capitalise on its assets, obtain the best possible land value and generate additional revenue. This is dependent on the land being suitable and chosen as part of the future Local Plan.

The allocation of land for development increases the value of the land. This is particularly the case for greenfield land, which otherwise would hold little or no value associated with development. The income generated from any realised increased value

can be reinvested in public services, infrastructure development, and community projects, enhancing the overall well-being of residents.

Through competitive bidding and development partnerships, the Council can negotiate terms for the development of its land that prioritise community benefits such as affordable homes, green spaces and sustainable design principles (including Net Zero Carbon). This ensures that the development of the Council's assets not only maximises the financial return but also aligns with the Council's long-term vision.

Some of the Council's assets are recommended to be promoted for supporting infrastructure uses, such as Sustainable Alternative National Greenspace (SANG) and leisure uses. These uses will support new communities by contributing the necessary infrastructure to ensure sustainable, high-quality growth.

The promotion process

The Council can decide which of its assets could be available for development and promoted to the Local Plan process.

Some of the Council's assets are previously developed or brownfield land and are already within the settlement boundaries where development is supported in principle. The promotion of these assets is not necessary to realise their development potential.

Although the Council's Property Team can promote any of its assets to the Local Plan process, this does not guarantee that they will be supported by the new Local Plan.

The Local Plan process is independent and will objectively consider all land promotions – both those made by the Council and those from private landowners - against relevant planning factors. The new Local Plan will be examined by an independent Planning Inspector who will test if the plan meets national planning policy.

It should be noted that the Council, acting as landowner, has no obligation to promote all or any of its land into the Local Plan process and may elect not to do so if it considers that specific circumstances dictate against. Such circumstances need not constitute material planning considerations. However, it should be noted that in circumstances it would forego any potential uplift in value related to a reallocation of the land for development purposes – value that could be introduced into the Council's budget to help fund other Council projects/services. Such financial considerations need to be carefully weighed in the balance.

A list of the Council owned assets which it is recommended to promote is attached as **Appendix A**. It is estimated that these sites could accommodate circa 405 dwellings in total and, with planning consent, the assets would be worth circa £41.705m.

A list of the Council owned assets which were previously promoted but are recommended to be withdrawn from the Local Plan process is attached as **Appendix B**. It is estimated that these sites could have accommodated circa 352 dwellings in total and by withdrawing them from promotion to the Local Plan Update will mean the Council will forego the estimated land value of £27.7m.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	Nil	N/A	
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	Nil	N/A	
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	Nil	N/A	

Other Financial Information

Should the promotion of land lead to its allocation through the Local Plan process, the value of any land will be increased. The value implications of these assets are set out in Part 2 of the report. These values are realised at the point of development or disposal of the sites. Any such value obtained would help the Council fund other projects and services and will be considered when appropriate into the financial budget setting process (Medium Term Financial Plan).

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

The Local Plan process is subject to statutory consultation obligations.

Public Sector Equality Duty

An initial equalities assessment has been carried out and it has not identified any potentially negative impact upon persons with protected characteristics. Initial Equalities Impact Assessments will be undertaken for each of the sites as part of the approval process to proceed with the development of the asset.

Climate Emergency – *This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030*

All Council owned sites adopted into the Local Plan update will in turn need to be subject to individual planning applications which demonstrate compliance with the wider development plan policies. Those policies have been drafted to reflect both national requirements and the Council's priorities under the Climate Emergency Action Plan. In addition, as landowner/developer of these sites, the Council will be afforded greater control over the subsequent development of those sites to ensure that they align with wider corporate priorities above and beyond minimum planning requirements.

Reasons for considering the report in closed session:

By Virtue of Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972:

Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

List of Background Papers
Part 2 – The Council's assets and their estimated land value LPU Revised Growth Strategy Consultation 2021

Contact Sarah Morgan	Service Commercial Property
Telephone 07801 664 394	Email sarah.morgan@wokingham.gov.uk
Contact Katie Meakin	Service Commercial Property
Telephone 07715238500	Email katie.meakin@wokingham.gov.uk

Appendix A

A list of the Council owned assets which are to be promoted to the Local Plan Update.

Site Ref.	Address	Ward	Size (ha)	Published Revised Growth Strategy (Nov 2021)	Latest position (2023)
5WK051	Land east of Toutley Depot	Emmbrook	7.4	Site included in the RGS as a draft allocation for 130 dwellings and a 68 bed care home.	Continue to promote the site for Housing (C3 Planning Use Class) and Residential Institutions (C2 Planning Use Class).
5WK046	Land at Wellington Road, Wokingham	Emmbrook	0.16	Site included in the RGS as a draft allocation for 21 dwellings.	Continue to promote the site for Housing (C3 Planning Use Class).
5WK048	Suffolk Lodge	Norreys	0.75	Site included in the RGS as a draft allocation for 20 dwellings	Continue to promote site for Housing (C3 Planning Use Class).
5WK050	Site of Former M&S Building, Wokingham	Wescott	0.34	Site included in the RGS as a draft allocation for 15 dwellings.	Promote site in LPU for Town Centre Uses (E). Confirming that the site is not available for Housing (C3 Planning Use Class) – resulting in a loss of 15 dwellings.
5WO004	Land at Sandford Mill Pumping Station	Loddon	0.6	Site included in the RGS as a draft allocation for 15 dwellings.	Continue to promote site for Housing (C3 Planning Use Class).
5HU037	Dinton Pastures, Sandford Lane, Davis Street	Hurst	16.5	Site included in RGS as a draft Local Green Space designation.	Promote site in LPU for Leisure and Country Park.
5WI012	Land to the rear of Bulldog Garage, Reading Road	Winnersh	2.28	Site included in the RGS as a draft allocation for 25 dwellings.	Continue to promote site for Housing (C3 Planning Use Class).
5WI011	Wheatsheaf Close	Winnersh	0.73	The site is allocated for housing under the adopted MDD local plan.	Continue to promote site in LPU for Housing (C3 Planning Use Class).

				Site included in the RGS as a draft allocation for 24 dwellings.	
5WW006	Grays Farm, Heathlands Road	Wokingham Without	25.9	The site was included in RGS as part of amendments to the South Wokingham SDL allocation with the land being identified for Sports and Leisure and Community use.	Promote site for Sports and Leisure and Community use.
N/A	Barkham – Mortimer Lodge Farm and Brook Farm - extension to existing SANG	Barkham	33	The site has not been promoted to date.	Promote site for strategic Suitable Alternative Natural Green (SANG) provision.
N/A	Mere oak – land adjacent to existing Park and Ride	Shinfield South	1.9	The site has not been promoted to date. The site is safeguarded for strategic transport infrastructure in the adopted local plan.	Promote site for Highways and/or ancillary commercial use for Highways.
N/A	Rubra I, II and Alba	Evendons	1.2	The site has not been promoted to date. The site is located within the Molly Millars Core Employment Area, an area safeguarded for employment under the adopted local plan. The RGS proposed to retain the Core Employment Designation.	Promote site for Housing (C3 Planning Use Class). (circa 70 dwellings)

N/A	WBC Council Offices Shute End	Embrook	1.4	The site has not been promoted to date.	Promote site for Housing (C3 Planning Use Class). (circa 100 dwellings)
N/A	Area DD	Hillside	1.38	The site has not been promoted to date. Site included in the RGS as a draft Local Green Space designation.	Promote site for Local Green Space.
N/A	High Barn Farm, Commonfield Lane	Barkham	4.2	The site has not been promoted to date.	Promote site for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) site. (circa 15 - 20 pitches)

Appendix B

A list of the Council owned assets which are to be withdrawn from promotion to the Local Plan Update.

Site Ref.	Address	Ward	Size (ha)	Published Revised Growth Strategy (Nov 2021)	Latest position (2023)
n/a	Pinewood, Nine Mile Ride	Wokingham Without	9.77	Site included the RGS as a draft designation for self funded regeneration – which may include ‘facilitating development’.	Withdrawn the promotion of the site. Site to be retained for local community use.
5BA033	Rooks Nest Farm	Barkham	39.3	Site included in the RGS as a major part of a draft allocation for 270 dwellings – of which circa 250 dwellings were anticipated on land owned by WBC and the residual allocation was for land outside of WBC's ownership.	Withdrawn the promotion of the site for Housing (C3 Planning Use Class). Site to be used to deliver the 2 new SEND schools and the Covid Memorial Wood.
5WK047	Wokingham Library, Denmark Street,	Wescott	0.16	Site included in the RGS as a draft allocation for 15 dwellings. Currently occupied by WBC/charities as part of cost of living response.	Withdrawn the promotion, as future plans for this asset are not yet clear.
5WI010	Winnersh Farm, Watmore Lane	Winnersh	2.12	Site is included in the RGS as a draft allocation for 287 dwellings – of which circa 87 dwellings were anticipated on land owned by WBC and the residual allocation was for land outside of WBC's ownership.	Withdrawn the promotion for Housing (C3 Planning Use Class). Part of the site has been used to provide the new SEND School (Oak Tree).

The following Council assets were promoted to the local plan process previously but are not covered in this report for the following reasons:

- Toutley Depot – this asset is no longer available for promotion as the Depot is being retained at this site and works are currently underway to improve the facilities.

- Wokingham Youth and Community Centre – this asset is no longer available for promotion as in operational use.
- Foxwood – this asset is no longer available for promotion as in operational use.
- Berkshire Sports and Social Club – this asset is no longer available for promotion as in operational use.

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By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
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