

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE EXECUTIVE
HELD ON 30 NOVEMBER 2023 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.20 PM**

Committee Members Present

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

Executive Councillors in attendance remotely:

Councillor Prue Bray

70. APOLOGIES

Councillor Prue Bray attended the meeting remotely and as a result was not permitted to vote on any items at the meeting.

71. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 26 October 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

72. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest submitted on this occasion.

73. STATEMENT FROM THE LEADER

‘Since the last council meeting, the work of the Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel (TLIP) has been recognised at the National Housing Awards. TLIP won in the category of ‘excellence in community-led decision making’. I want to take this opportunity to thank TLIP’s chair, Steve Bowers, the other tenant volunteers, the officers in the housing department, and the elected members who serve on TLIP for their commitment to partnership working. The award is a just reward and reflects well on both the tenant volunteers and the council.

This is the last meeting of the Executive that will be attended by Councillor Clive Jones, the Executive Member for Business and Economic Development. As I explained at the last full council meeting, Clive wishes to concentrate on his role of parliamentary candidate for Wokingham.

I should like to thank Clive for his work as Executive Member for Business and Economic Development and for his leadership of the council in 2022-23, the first year of the new administration. Clive’s experience and determination helped the council greatly in the transition from one administration to another. I’m sure all my colleagues will join me in wishing Clive the best of luck with his parliamentary endeavours. Clive, as I announced at the last council meeting, will be replaced on the Executive by Councillor David Cornish, who has been shadowing Clive for the last few months and has a background in business that is ideal preparation for his new role.

Councillor Sarah Kerr, the Executive Member for Climate Emergency and residents services, is also leaving the Executive. Sarah has been offered a new job outside the council, which begins in January and she has asked to be relieved of her executive duties to focus on her new role. Sarah has been an outstanding champion for the areas of her executive responsibility and her hard work and commitment will be missed by all of us. I’m sure everyone will wish to join me in wishing her well for the future.

Sarah's executive responsibilities are wide-ranging and I have decided, in consultation with the deputy leader, that it would be unfair to ask anyone to fill the vacancy for the few months until the local elections. We have therefore asked other executive members to take on additional responsibilities and I am grateful for their all agreeing to do so. Councillor David Cornish has kindly consented to add Climate Emergency and Arts and Culture to his remit. Councillor David Hare will take on the area of Violence against Women and Girls and Domestic Abuse. Rachel Bishop-Firth will be responsible for the Website and Digital. I shall add to my own portfolio Solar Farms, Libraries, Customer Services and Residents' Engagement.'

Councillor Clive Jones expressed that it had been a privilege to work alongside Executive Members and to have been the Leader, he was delighted to hand over the mantle to Councillor Stephen Conway. He was pleased to be able to focus on his parliamentary campaign in the coming months.

Councillor Sarah Kerr thanked everyone for their efforts, she stated that it had been a very difficult decision to stand down as Executive Member. She thanked senior officers for their support during her tenure as Executive Member, it had been invaluable.

74. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

74.1 Andy Bailey has asked the Executive Member for Planning and the Local Plan the following question:

At a recent meeting with residents of Carters Hill it was stated by both a Council Officer and a University of Reading representative that Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) had requested an updated plan for Hall Farm with 3,750 dwellings, as opposed to the previous plan for 4,500. It was also stated that this figure (3,750) would not be adjusted, even if Central Government finally publishes the revised National Planning Policy Framework and the housing target for Wokingham is reduced.

Could you please confirm that this is the case and explain why the plans for Hall Farm would not be reduced as a result of any lower housing target for WBC?

Answer:

Since I took on responsibility for local plans, I have raised the concerns expressed by some residents towards the Hall Farm promotion led by the University of Reading, including the promotions scale of 4,500 homes.

In response, the University have indicated they are undertaking viability work looking at whether a lower scale of 3,750 homes would be viable, taking into account the infrastructure that would need to be provided and anticipated landowner/developer costs in delivering the garden village. This would represent a near 20% reduction.

The results of this viability work have not yet been provided to the council, with our understanding being that it is ongoing.

Turning to the anticipated revision of the NPPF, we are still waiting for the government. Whilst we are cautiously hopeful that the revised NPPF will allow past 'over delivery' of housing to be taken into account when considering future requirements, we must wait and see. If confirmed, we will need to consider implications for our strategy as a whole.

With regard to large development proposals, it is common for delivery from these to occur across a longer period. A proposal in the order of 4,500 or 3,750 homes would not fully complete by 2040, with some completions extending into years beyond this.

Supplementary Question:

If 4,500 houses are to be constructed, why is it that they need to run beyond the 15 year plan?

Supplementary Answer:

If we take the current Local Plan running to 2026, there are a number of developments, one in particular that will not be completed before 2026. So when you work on getting through on the Local Plan, you cannot ever be able to be sure that developments would be completed in the 15 plus years that you have as the Local Plan period. We think it's probably best to indicate what would be the situation, I think the vast majority would be included in the period up to 2040, but there has to be some indication beyond that period that there may be houses that go into the period beyond and as we have mentioned, the current Local Plan already has that happening.

74.2 Philip Meadowcroft has asked the Executive Member for Finance the following question:

So far, during 2023, £75m has been loaned by Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) to other local authorities. This is confirmed on page 514 in the meeting's agenda report documents.

With regard to the £10m loan to Woking, the minutes of the Council meeting on September 21 show the Executive Member for Finance saying "we have a commitment from Woking that they will honour our debt of £10m plus the interest that will come back with it." That repayment is due on March 8 2024.

Three months ago, on August 23, Woking announced on its website that Section 114 was declared because of I quote: "unaffordable borrowing, inadequate steps to repay that borrowing".

The Section 114 Notice means that Woking's finances are subject to intense supervision by Whitehall-appointed commissioners in a manner similar to that in the private sector when a firm declares bankruptcy and administrators and liquidators are appointed.

Rather than relying on an undefined "commitment from Woking" can the Executive Member for Finance reply to this Public Question by exhibiting valid, straightforward, and legally enforceable paperwork evidencing that there are no circumstances whatsoever which will prevent Woking from meeting its financial obligation to pay £10,356,000 to WBC on March 8 2024 ?

Answer:

When it comes to financial commitments, councils cannot be thought of in the same way as any other organisation. This is because council's provide statutory services to the residents of this country and are underwritten by the central government. If a council is

unable to produce a balanced budget it issues what is known as a Section 114 notice, which is named after its section in the Local Government Act.

In practicality, this means that commissioners are appointed who are tasked with bringing a council's finances back under control, usually by selling assets, cutting services and raising council tax. Money is often loaned to the council in the meantime from the Treasury, to cover their immediate financial crisis, but they are still able to borrow money from elsewhere.

There are specific statutory protections that are in the Local Government Act 2003, that protect us from defaults where the counterparty to the loan is central or local government. This is also referenced in the CIPFA Code of Practice and there are additional protections in place for loans made by local government organisations.

Part of the requirement of this S114 circumstance is that all contracts and financial commitments continue to be honoured. In the case of Wokingham making a loan to Woking, there is indeed a legally binding contract in place and before the loan was made. Our respective Chief Financial Officers certainly spoke to each other to double check that the loan was indeed secured under these protocols.

I reiterate, there has never been a situation where a council in a S114 state has defaulted on its payments and other councils are one of the safest places for us to invest. A council defaulting on payment would only happen if our government was unable to cover the costs and I think we would all have much bigger problems, if that were to happen.

Supplementary Question:

Two months ago, at the September 21st Council meeting, the Executive Member for Finance answered a public question about the £10m loan saying 'all financial transactions, are also required to meet Regulations and the process is set by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA). Yesterday I contacted the FCA, they confirmed that Wokingham or any individuals connected with Wokingham are not registered with them and thus not authorised and not regulated by the FCA. It grieves me to say it, but the Executive Member for Finance has surely misled that questioner on September 21st, with the Council's connection or lack of it with the FCA, to give regulatory backing to the Council's loan or loans to distressed neighbouring councils. I'm afraid I found your reply inadequate, as I've not seen any tangible evidence of the guarantee, there is no proof as far as I can see that the Wokingham loan repayment is guaranteed either by legally enforceable paperwork or a treasury guarantee and given that there is a total of £75m of loans here to various local authorities which we will see on page 154, that's the equivalent of putting at risk more than a thousand pounds per household throughout the borough. So, because you have misled the questioner and the Council on the September 21st meeting, about the FCA, would you not be considering your position?

Supplementary Answer:

I'm not quite understanding your comments on the FCA as I don't believe that is what I said. Certainly, I can assure you that this regularly happens, it's been happening for 20 plus years, that councils are lending money to each other in this way and there has never been a problem with any council doing this. It doesn't matter to us whether a council is of Section 114 state or not, it is all underwritten by the Treasury. The principles we apply here are the CIPFA Code of Conduct principles and we are also bound to legislation set out in various Local Government Finance Acts. I believe Section 6 and 13 are probably the pertinent bits and you are welcome to review those.

74.3 Ian Scott has asked the Executive Member for Environment, Sport & Leisure the following question:

Costs/values that should be considered

1. land asset – value Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) suggest £1.5m – ‘modest’ to say the least for 1.32 acres.
2. present value total loss of revenue for the 20 years life of the existing building (the centre profit) - not specified.
3. costs connected with equalisation payment to PFP for other Leisure facilities - not specified.
4. cost of closure - not specified.
5. future cost of re-providing the (4?) teaching spaces within the Leisure building which has a 20 year life compared to a 60 year life new-build scenario. Not specified.
6. The £1m dowry to Circle Trust
7. People for Places Social Value Calculator estimates the social value of a typical centre to be a further £1.56m.

A simple addition of the WBC /PFP figures - even without the missing figures requested above - gets perilously close to disproving the WBC ‘good value’ argument. With full information requested Cllrs could make the judgement with confidence.

Why has a full analysis of the economic and social value being transferred still not been shown to Cllrs to allow them to make a properly informed judgement?

Answer:

Thank you for your question, I can assure you that this is a good value proposition and need to correct some of your assertions. The Leisure centre site has a theoretical land value of £1.5m but due to planning restrictions, in reality, has a value of community use only and that is what we would be seeking to protect through a legal agreement with the Circle Trust. Indeed, Circle Trust expressed their keen intent to continue the community provision offer at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee earlier this week. So there is no loss of value here.

The Leisure facility no longer operates at a profit, and therefore running Leisure facilities out of this centre over 20 years of more will not be financially beneficial to a contractor or the Council.

The cost of works needed for refurbishment to provide the Education Facilities, whilst protecting community provision will be in excess £1m and therefore WBC are only making a fixed capped contribution with Circle Trust funding all other costs. This is therefore the total cost to WBC to secure the vitally needed education places for our year 7 children, amounting to 330 places over our 6 year forecast but will no doubt be needed indefinitely. This is an incredibly reasonable price to pay given the costs associated with school builds and school extensions. This is clear in the Executive paper that states a modular building required to provide for this number of children would be in excess of £5m and up to £8m depending on the site location in the borough.

Given places leisure and Circle Trust between them can accommodate all current users of St Crispins Leisure centre, with the exception of squash usage during the day, the number of people with no continued offer is very small. These squash players could book further

out of school hours sessions through Circle Trust, as I understand they already book out of hours as well as daytime, or can use other squash facilities in the location. It is hard to think that with any stretch of the imagination that this inconvenience, although regrettable, compares with the social value attributable to the significant provision of Education places and the impact on the life opportunities of those children and the wellbeing of all the families involved.

75. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

75.1 Councillor Gary Cowan has asked the Executive Member for Planning and the Local Plan the following question:

In the wake of Cop 26 a leading academic predicts that if the climate emergency continues at it's current rate our area will see an increase of 1.4C by 2040 compared to the average temperature between 1981 and 2000.

He added that this means we are expected to live through two heatwaves a year and 35 days where roads are at risk of melting. The river flood risk could increase by as much as 7.5 per cent and wildfires are projected to be a risk for 37 days of the year.

With the Local Plan update for Wokingham planning 2300 houses at Hall Farm close to the Loddon River what actual guarantees can the Borough Council provide now that this development planned to begin in 2040 can be developed safely.

Answer:

Before turning to the specifics of your question, I need to correct you in that development proposed in the new local plan will by in large be completed within the period to 2040. It is of course correct that some of the new homes from any large proposal might be delivered in years beyond this. This is recognised in national planning policy, and such circumstances are not uncommon.

Moving to the specifics of the question, and as you are already aware, Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) supports the new local plan. SFRA takes account of the projected impact of climate change by applying allowances advised by the Environment Agency to flood modelling. It is prepared in accordance with national policy and guidance and involves close review by the Environment Agency.

Whilst work on the new local plan continues, the Hall Farm proposal included within the Revised Growth Strategy Consultation in 2021 showed no homes in areas at risk of flooding, which included taking account of the forecast impacts of climate change. All of the new homes were shown as being located on land uphill from the River Loddon and other watercourses.

In addition to the consideration of flooding in local plan process, and as you are aware, detailed flood risk assessment is required to support individual planning applications. These assessments will also need to take account of the impacts of climate change.

Lastly, and to comment more widely on climate change and the local plan, we will be including a suite of new policies which reflect best practice in responding to the challenges of climate change, including requiring zero carbon development. New homes are required

to ensure people have a place to live which is essential for life chances, however our ambition is to enable this whilst mitigating the impacts of climate change.

Supplementary Question:

The report was written by a Professor at Reading University, and actually relates to this specific area, our area. Last month the Lib Dem Leader rightly said that the government tells councils how many new homes to build and must plan to accommodate and give Planning permission for them in a 15 year Local Plan period. In this weeks, Wokingham Today, the Leader of the Council did expand on the strategic partnership agreed with the borough and Reading University. The agreed Board consists of the Vice Chancellor and the Head of Community Engagement at Reading University and the Council Leader and the Borough Chief Executive supported by four workstreams each led by unnamed senior academics and senior council officers. Perhaps this might explain why 4,500 houses at Hall Farm over a 30 year period on the side of a river that floods has Lib Dem support. It's odd when the government is only asking for a housing plan for 15 not 30 years. The Lib Dem Administration maintains they are fighting excessive housing numbers yet this 2,300 houses in my question and not legally required by the government, should the Administration apologise to residents for misleading them on housing numbers? It also makes one wonder if other developers involved in the evolving Local Plan process have been left with an unfair disadvantage by this strategic partnership.

Supplementary Answer:

If I remember correctly, you were lead on the Local Plan, our current Local Plan that runs to 2026. I think you were instrumental in putting all the Strategic Development Locations (SDL's) together, built on large spaces of green land space across our borough, some of which run very close to rivers. I would wonder as to the issue you raise on that because I have been working very hard and I gave the answer to the last public question, where the first part I said: Since I took on responsibility for local plans, I have raised the concerns expressed by some residents towards the Hall Farm promotion led by the University of Reading, including the promotions scale of 4,500 homes.

In response, the University have indicated they are undertaking viability work looking at whether a lower scale of 3,750 homes would be viable, taking into account the infrastructure that would need to be provided and anticipated landowner/developer costs in delivering the garden village. This would represent a near 20% reduction.

We are still awaiting the results of this viability work. You are accusing us of not reducing our numbers, we are waiting for the government to come up with the National Planning Policy Framework, which included in the draft proposals an allowance for over provision. That over provision from the Local Plan that you put together, numbers nearly 2,000 homes so that the 2,000 extra homes in our borough at the moment are now currently in the Local Plan that have been provided by the one you put together.

In addition, we still have developments which are going to go well beyond the 2026 period. Whilst in your Local Plan, you didn't indicate anything beyond the 15 years by actual work activity taking place you go beyond the 2026 period because of the developments either not progressing at the pace you wanted or extra Planning approval occurs. I think it is much more appropriate to be open and honest as to what has happened. I would also like to advise you that the draft Local Plan which is in the current scheme was not put together by this Administration. It was by the Administration that you were part of, certainly at some point. I think you need to apologise to quite a lot of residents for spouting around things that are irrelevant.

76. ST CRISPIN'S LEISURE CENTRE

The Chair advised that there were some supplementary papers circulated following the publication of the agenda and these should be considered with the main agenda pack for this item. He also welcomed the Chair of the Community & Corporate Services O&S Committee, Councillor Chris Johnson who would be presenting the recommendations of the O&S Committee.

The Executive Member for Children's Services reported that there had been a consultation exercise in the summer months, this had identified some concerns around the leisure use and safeguarding. A significant level of activity had taken place since this consultation including two very robust O&S Committees which had considered and scrutinised this area in great detail. The outcome had been that the O&S Committee had endorsed the view that the leisure centre should be transferred to the Circle Trust to enable St Crispin's school to expand and offer an additional 330 school places across a number of years.

It was recognised that these school places were much needed in order to accommodate all children in the borough. It was noted that other schools in the borough were also being expanded to assist with the pressures on secondary school places in the borough.

The Executive Member expressed her thanks to everyone who had worked hard to ensure that all leisure provision currently provided by the leisure centre would continue to be provided, bar the use of the Squash courts in the daytime.

She thanked O&S for their time and input and for the value they had added to this work. She supported the additional recommendations that had been added to this report as a result of the work of the O&S Committee and stated that the Administration would be working to ensure that O&S continued to play a full role in scrutinising decisions in the future ahead of decisions being taken by the Executive. The recommendations before the Executive today, had been thoroughly explored and scrutinised as a result of the work of the O&S Committee. It had become clear that none of the alternative options put forward were viable.

It was noted that the leisure centre would continue to be utilised as a Polling Station.

The Executive Member for Environment, Sports & Leisure reported that since the early summer it was becoming clear that St Crispin's alone amongst our leisure centres, was not recovering post pandemic, evidenced by footfall. This had significantly decreased in all aspects of the leisure centre's activities. In addition, the pressure on school places had continued to grow and as a result a consultation exercise was undertaken on the future use of this Council asset.

He advised that the outcome of the consultation had identified two main overarching points these were that if the leisure centre was transferred to the school, there would be a significant loss to the Squash players and a significant loss to some of the older residents of the local area who use some of the classes. Having said this, it was becoming increasingly difficult to maintain the leisure facility class schedule as the school itself was requiring a greater use of the leisure centre for examination periods and other uses. This had made the sustainability of the leisure class schedule increasingly less sustainable.

He reiterated the point made by the Executive Member for Children's Services that all classes would be re-provided, including at the leisure facility itself, in the town centre or at Montague Park community centre. The only loss would be the daytime use of the Squash courts. He fully supported the recommendations to be considered by the Executive.

The Chair of the Community & Corporate Services O&S Committee reported that this had been a very emotive issue for the community and that he had had a lot of contact with local residents outside of meetings. In the first O&S meeting there was recognition that there was some resentment at the loss of a community asset. Having asked for further information at the second O&S meeting and the attendance of a representative of the Circle Trust at the second meeting, an in depth and detailed discussion was possible at the second meeting with some very pointed questions. The O&S Committee were appreciative of the work and liaison that had been put into this as it helped the Committee to consider how the community could be best supported and how their recommendations should be shaped.

The O&S Committee had fully recognised the marked need for school places, some 1045 over a five year period. This particular project would only accommodate 330 places, but that this would be in addition to other activity at St Crispin's which would create a further 179 school places. The Committee also recognised that the conversion of an existing building would allow the school places to be realised much more quickly than a new build. In addition, the cost differences were substantial.

The O&S Committee were also mindful that the transfer of the leisure centre facility to the Circle Trust did not equate to a loss of that facility, it would be leased. The Trust would then take responsibility for the maintenance and development of the facility. The Committee also discovered a flaw with the block booking system currently being deployed at the leisure centre which did not account for who was in the building, this gave rise to safeguarding issues for the school.

There had been some constructive comments from the Circle Trust around their intentions and aspirations for the facility. There was much work yet needed to develop the facility such as Planning permissions and design work, before the facility could be fully utilised. The Circle Trust had made a commitment that all current out of hours activity would be re-provided, this included the Squash courts out of hours. The Squash courts could not be accommodated during school hours.

Following all of the discussion and engagement and the evidence provided by witnesses at the two O&S Committees, the Committee had arrived at three additional recommendations which they wished to propose to the Executive for endorsement, these were listed in the supplementary agenda papers.

The Executive Member for Children's Services stated that the landscape around education was changing and this report had highlighted the need to look at the bigger picture for schools more generally and the co-location of leisure centres and other facilities and the possible implications for safeguarding and other issues that this might raise. It would be useful for Scrutiny to review this area. In terms of Montague Park, its financial viability would need to be assessed as a first step.

The Chair thanked the O&S Committee and all Members involved for their work and contributions on this difficult issue. This qualitative input had helped pushed this process forward and added considerable value to the process. He thanked the three witnesses,

Ginny Rhodes, Andrew Hinchcliff and Tony Penge who had all attended the O&S Committee meeting and added a great deal to the deliberations and working through the issues. He also thanked the officers who had worked hard on this and the tremendous amount of work delivered across the two O&S Committee meetings. It would now be for the Executive to consider the benefits of the proposals as well as any disbenefits.

Executive Members commented that if the facility was to be restored, this would require significant refurbishment and cost. The most viable option was to lease the centre to the Circle Trust.

RESOLVED that the Executive:

1. Noted the findings of the public consultation on the Future use of St Crispin's Leisure Centre.
2. Noted the Council's legal responsibility in securing sufficient school places for local residents.
3. Approved in principle the closure of St Crispin's Leisure Centre and transfer of the land to St Crispin's School (The Circle Trust) to fulfil the school placement requirements and to continue to deliver 55 extra place each year in the next five years; subject to detailed agreement with the trust with lease arrangement under relevant Academy regulations.
4. Noted that the revenue impact of ending the Council's Leisure contractors' utilisation of the premises will be funded through the Leisure Management Equalisation Fund.
5. Noted that the capital expenditure of £1m for works is funded from the secondary school's expansion budget already approved as part of the 2023/24 capital programme.
6. Noted the Circle Trust is keen to work with the Council and Local Communities to continue the local squash provision in addition to the current community activities the school provide.
7. Noted that any repurposing of the school must also include the requirements of the Council to deliver a polling station at the site for elections as per requirements set out.
8. Delegated authority to the Director of Resources and Assets and Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure, the Executive Member for Children's Services and the Leader of the Council, to enter into negotiation with Places Leisure to facilitate the closure of St Crispin's Leisure Centre and with The Circle Trust to secure the provision of additional school places and the transfer of the land and buildings from the Council to The Circle Trust.
9. Delegated authority to the Director of Resources and Assets and Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure, the Executive Member for Children's Services and the Leader of the Council, to enter into negotiation with Places Leisure with regards to the running of leisure activities at Montague Park Community Centre or elsewhere

which will be subject to a financial viability test.

10. Noted the attached Appendix that provides additional information to support the proposal, following the consideration by Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 14 November 2023.
11. Officers be requested to progress the financial viability assessment relating to the Montague Park Community Centre;
12. Progress on the agreement between the Council and the Circle Trust, along with all other agreements involving schools and leisure facilities, be the subject of a report to the Committee within 12 months.

77. LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN 4 - DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION

The Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport & Highways thanked Rob Curtis and his team for all their work hard work on this Plan. The Plan would replace the existing Plan which covered 2011 to 2026 and cover a 10-15 year period. The adoption of the final Plan would be at a Council meeting in summer 2024.

He thanked the Community & Corporate Services O&S Committee for the value they has added by acting as a critical friend.

RESOLVED that the Executive agreed to publish the draft Local Transport Plan 4 for public consultation with the intention in summer 2024, subject to approval of full Council, for the council to adopt the plan as the council's strategic plan for transport over the next 10-15 years.

78. TREASURY MANAGEMENT MID-YEAR 2023-24 REPORT

The Executive Member for Finance reported that this report updated the Executive on the status of the Council's investments and loans and the overall management of the Council's treasury funds within the first six months of this year. It also allows the Executive to consider whether the Council is meeting all the requirements set out in the Treasury Management strategy.

The Executive Member stated that she wished to highlight a number of standout points, the first of which was the Council's net indebtedness. This had risen as a result of the Council using internal funds as opposed to borrowing externally to pay high interest rates. At present, this was positive as it helped with funding pressures. The Executive were confident that the level of cash balances could support this level of internal borrowing. The average interest rate on the Council's external debt was forecast to be 3.68% across the year. This was expected to rise in the next year. The impact of this was being monitored.

The treasury investment returns were forecast to be £3m over this year. On page 154 of the agenda papers, a list of investments that the Council had made was detailed, this included loans to nine other local authorities.

Overall, the Council was managing debt and working to get the most from investments in the interests of the Council's residents.

It was raised by Executive Members that a response should be made to Mr Meadowcroft to clear up any misunderstanding that had arisen relating to the Council's finances and

loans, which had been raised in his public question, earlier in the meeting. The Chair noted that he had offered to have a discussion with Mr Meadowcroft outside of the meeting.

RESOLVED that the Executive endorsed the Treasury Management Mid- Year Report 2023-24 and recommended it to Council and noted:

1) that all approved indicators set out in the Treasury Management Strategy had been adhered to; with the exceptions of;

- Ratio of financing costs to net revenue stream – General Fund.
- Capital financing requirement – Housing Revenue Account.
- External borrowing – Housing Revenue Account

2) As at the end of September 2023, the forecast for the total external General Fund debt was £129m at March 2024, which reduced to £110m after taking into account cash balances.

79. COUNCIL PLAN EXTENSION 2024-25

The Chair reported that the Council was working with key stakeholders in the voluntary and charitable sector, town and parish councils, business, faith groups, health providers, police, the fire service, the Youth Council, schools, the University of Reading, and the wider public on a jointly authored Community Vision, which would establish the priorities of the borough for the years to come.

Whilst drawing up a new Council Plan based on the Community Vision, the gap between the expiry of the current Council Plan and the completion of the work on the Community Vision by extending the life of the current plan for a further year, needed to be bridged.

RESOLVED that the Executive:

- 1) Agreed to extend the current Council Plan for one year (2024-25)
- 2) Accepted the amendments to the plan as set out in the report and
- 3) Recommended submission to Full Council for approval.