



**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**MINUTES OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS
FOR THE PERIOD**

4 September 2023 to 2 October 2023

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Susan Parsonage', written in a cursive style.

Susan Parsonage
Chief Executive
Published on 11 October 2023



WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

Our Vision

A great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business

Enriching Lives

- Champion outstanding 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 complement an active lifestyle.
- Engage and involve our communities through arts and culture and create a sense of identity which people feel part of.
- Support growth in our local economy and help to build business.

Safe, Strong, Communities

- Protect and safeguard our children, young and vulnerable people.
- Offer quality care and support, at the right time, to prevent the need for long term care.
- Nurture communities and help them to thrive.
- Ensure our borough and communities remain safe for all.

A Clean and Green Borough

- Do all we can to become carbon neutral and sustainable for the future.
- Protect our borough, keep it clean and enhance our green areas.
- Reduce our waste, improve biodiversity and increase recycling.
- Connect our parks and open spaces with green cycleways.

Right Homes, Right Places

- Offer quality, affordable, sustainable homes fit for the future.
- Build our fair share of housing with the right infrastructure 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 to live independently in their own homes.

Keeping the Borough Moving

- Maintain and improve our roads, footpaths and cycleways.
- Tackle traffic congestion, 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 to offer affordable, accessible public transport with good network links.

Changing the Way We Work for You

- Be relentlessly customer focussed.
- Work with our partners to provide efficient, effective, joined up services which are focussed around you.
- Communicate better with you, 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.

Minutes of meeting Wednesday, 6 September 2023 of Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee	5 - 14
Minutes of meeting Monday, 11 September 2023 of Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee	15 - 24
Minutes of meeting Wednesday, 13 September 2023 of Planning Committee	25 - 30
Minutes of meeting Tuesday, 19 September 2023 of Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee	31 - 40
Minutes of meeting Wednesday, 20 September 2023 of Personnel Board	41 - 44
Minutes of meeting Wednesday, 27 September 2023 of Audit Committee	45 - 54

This page is intentionally left blank

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON 6 SEPTEMBER 2023 FROM 7.00 PM TO 10.20 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Andrew Mickleburgh (Chair), Jane Ainslie, Ian Pittock, Anne Chadwick, Graham Howe, Phil Cunnington and Andrew Gray

Other Councillors Present

Councillors: Prue Bray (Executive Member for Children's Services)

Others Present

Rebecca Brooks, Senior Transport Planner
Neil Carr, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist
Gillian Cole, Service Manager, Schools
Adam Davis, Assistant Director, Children's Social Care and Early Help
Viki Elliot-King, Assistant Director, Strategic and Operational Delivery
Zoe Storey, School Admissions and Transport Manager
Helen Watson, Director of Children's Services
Jonathan Wilding, SEND and Safety Valve Consultant
Ming Zhang, Assistant Director, Education & SEND

Diocesan Representative

Father Richard Lamey, Church of England Representative

Community Representative

Sarah Clarke, SEND Voices Wokingham

25. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

26. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

A declaration of interest was submitted from Councillor Jane Ainslie on the grounds that she was an adviser to West End Junior School.

27. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 20 June 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair, subject to the addition of Father Richard Lamey in the list of attendees.

28. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

Amit Mehta asked the Chair the following question:

We have been visiting various schools for our 4 year old to understand method and procedure used within schools towards education.

Some of the Schools mentioned as a borough we are looking to move away from Reward System and move towards Therapeutic approach of working/teaching within Borough Primary Schools.

If above is correct, can I please request if there is a General Strategy document which I can access and understand, what does that mean at an execution/operational level or day to day in a school setting ?

Answer

The Government provides guidance for all schools nationally on Behaviour In Schools which can be found at this link : [Behaviour in schools guidance \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

It is for each individual school to interpret this guidance at a local level in a meaningful way for the community that they serve and in line with their school ethos, culture and values.

Every school should have its own behaviour policy which is available to parents and carers to help them understand the ways in which the school supports and promotes excellent behaviour in school.

As a Local Authority we do not issue schools in the Borough with a policy directive on the day to day management of pupil behaviour in their schools. This is for each school to decide.

29. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

30. EXECUTIVE MEMBER UPDATE

Councillor Prue Bray addressed the Committee on the following issues:

Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) in schools – Councillor Bray stated that, to date, RAAC had not been detected in any of the Borough's schools. One school required a survey to confirm the position. Surveys would be carried out at all maintained schools by 8 September 2023. Academies had been contacted about the situation and would be submitting information to the DfE. The Council was prepared to support any of the academies on request.

Sarah Clarke enquired about any relevant schools outside of the Borough. Councillor Bray confirmed that the Government list of affected schools did not contain any relevant schools.

Andrew Mickleburgh asked about earlier Government requests for information about schools. Councillor Bray confirmed that surveys had been carried out and responses sent to the DfE on an incremental basis.

Ian Pittock asked if there were any concerns about asbestos in schools. Councillor Bray confirmed that there was a register which detailed instances of asbestos in school buildings. The DfE had indicated that it would pay for measures to address this issue from the capital budget. The concern was whether this would mean a reduction elsewhere in that budget.

Extraordinary Scrutiny meeting on Home to School Transport – Councillor Bray referred to the extraordinary meeting of the Committee, held in August 2023, which scrutinised the draft revised Home to School Transport Policy. The Committee's recommendations had been submitted to the Executive and were agreed, with some improved wording.

Councillor Bray thanked Members for their input which had helped to improve the revised policy.

RESOLVED: That the Executive Member update be noted.

31. SOCIAL WORKER RECRUITMENT & RETENTION UPDATE

The Committee considered a presentation, set out on Agenda pages 33 to 40, which provided an update on the actions taken to improve Children's Social Worker recruitment and retention at the Council.

Children's social workers Rachel Bedford, Daisey May, Jo Salmon and Imogen Wilson attended the meeting to share their experiences and discuss their perspectives on recruitment and retention.

The presentation gave details of the structure of the Children's Services social work team and evidence of the local strategic approach to recruitment and retention. Successes included growing our own social workers, the comprehensive training offer and manageable caseloads (although workload stress was seen as an issue for some staff). The Assessed and Supported Year in Employment Programme was felt to be a particular strength for newly qualified social workers.

Ongoing challenges included the national shortage of experienced social workers (permanent and agency), salary and benefits inflation in response to the shortage and levels of staff sickness. Staff also referred to salaries at WBC compared to neighbouring authorities and the lack of car parking adjacent to the Shute End offices which resulted in time consuming trips to the Carnival Hub car park on a daily basis. Staff also highlighted the limited resources to provide support for families in the Borough.

Viki Elliot-King stated that officers were looking at the development of social work apprenticeships, with potentially four apprenticeships over two years. The development of apprenticeships was supported by the DfE.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the social workers in attendance at the meeting be thanked for their input and Members' appreciation for the efforts and dedication of the social work team be recorded;
- 2) the negative impact on the work and welfare of the team, arising out of the lack of suitable car parking adjacent to the Shute End offices, be highlighted to the Executive;
- 3) Members' concern about the pay disparity between WBC staff and staff at neighbouring authorities be highlighted to the Executive;
- 4) senior officers and the Executive Member be asked to explore options for increasing the level of support provided for families, for example through additional child mentoring and expanded family therapies;
- 5) senior officers and the Executive Member be asked to consider the provision of additional support for care leavers;

- 6) in light of the challenging resource situation facing the Council, partnership working be maximised in order to attract additional resources and support;
- 7) the Committee's support for the development of an apprenticeship scheme for Children's social workers be noted;
- 8) the Committee receive a progress report on these recommendations within 12 months.

32. CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The Committee considered the Children's Services Performance report for Quarter 1 (April to June 2023) as set out on Agenda pages 43 to 56.

Members raised the following points and questions.

Dashboard 1 – Funded Education, Health and Care Plans – 85.5% performance within 20 weeks of referral was good and showed a positive direction of travel. Was this improvement being embedded in the system? It was confirmed that this indicator related to multi-agency work, so it was important to keep building positive partnerships. The SEND team were working closely with finance and data colleagues to assess future demand. This was a key part of the Safety Valve programme. The improvement in issuing EHCPs was linked to early intervention, earlier referrals and earlier identification of needs within schools. Q1 performance was above regional and national averages and population growth – benchmarking data would help to inform the narrative around the performance figures.

Dashboard 2 – Early Help – this item would benefit from more narrative on the outcomes delivered for families – what difference was the service making for families.

Dashboard 3 – Children's Social Care Front Door – again the narrative would benefit from evidence of outcomes and any gaps in the process. Also data on contacts progressed into action.

Dashboard 5 – Children in Care – the number of children in care had fallen from 135 in Q1 2022/23 to 123 in Q1 2023/24.

Dashboard 6 – Care Leavers – it was confirmed that a monthly meeting took place during which every NEET was discussed. Was there anything more that the Council could do to support NEETs into employment? There were a number of factors involved, such as disability, anxiety, young parents, etc. Each case was addressed based on the individual circumstances. The joint housing panel was having a positive effect, but it was recognised that finding suitable placements was increasingly challenging.

Dashboard 8 – Children's Services Workforce – as discussed earlier in the meeting, the permanency of the workforce in Children's Services was crucial and the subject of continuous focus.

RESOLVED: That the Children's Services Performance Report for Q1 2023/24 be noted.

33. HOLIDAY, ACTIVITIES & FOOD PROGRAMME

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 57 to 62, which gave details of the delivery of the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme in the Borough.

The report stated that the programme was a DfE funded initiative which offered free activities and healthy meals to children and young people in receipt of benefits-related free school meals and those on the edge of eligibility, during school holidays.

For 2023/24, the Council received £306k in grant funding to deliver the HAF. The Council had the discretion to use up to 15% of the funding to provide free or subsidised holiday club places for children who were not in receipt of benefits-related free school meals but would benefit from HAF provision. Overall, the number of children accessing the HAF provision was increasing, from 620 in the summer of 2021 to between 1,200 to 1,400 this summer.

The report gave details of the activities offered in the summer of 2023. These included paddleboarding, swimming, tennis, football, archery and art, with “masterchef” and game zone activities. Specialist activities were also provided for children and young people with special needs, including trips to Camp Mohawk and forestry activities. It had become clear to officers that the relationships forged with children and young people, families and partners had the potential to deliver outcomes beyond the original remit of the programme. In order to support future development of the programme new funding sources were being pursued.

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points and questions.

In terms of inclusion, what level of additional needs were accommodated in the programme? It was confirmed that the needs of children and young people were assessed on an individual basis. Officers worked with schools to identify specific needs.

In relation to the Government grant to support the HAF programme, was this likely to increase in future years? Officers were hopeful that the level of grant would increase but were also mindful of the increasing demand for the programme. Officers stated that the new booking system would provide more data on the level of demand and the number of sessions attended by children and young people. This data could be shared with the Committee.

Was the HAF programme restricted to children and young people in receipt of free school meals – could it be extended to friends of these children and young people? Officers confirmed that the programme was still evolving, so this could be a consideration in future.

The collaboration with Camp Mohawk was welcomed. Would this be a part of a sustainable offer moving forwards? Officers gave details of the day of activities at Camp Mohawk and stated that working in this way with partners provided a win-win situation.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Lisa Hookway and Viki Elliot-King be thanked for attending the meeting to present the report and answer Member questions;
- 2) that the aims of the HAF programme, the local delivery strategy and programme take-up to date be noted;
- 3) the future plans to expand the programme’s reach, impact and links with other Council services, be supported;

- 4) further information on levels of demand, sessions attended and the range of activities provided be circulated to Members.

34. HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT - TRAINING FOR ESCORTS AND DRIVERS

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 63 to 69, which gave details of the training provision for drivers and passenger assistants involved in the Home to School Transport service.

The report stated that, when providing home to school transport, the Council was responsible for making suitable arrangements including employing appropriate transport companies and ensuring that their staff were suitably trained and experienced. Statutory guidance placed a responsibility on the Council to decide on the training to be provided and the best way of delivering it. This included training on issues such as safeguarding, pupil management techniques, challenging behaviour, autism and epilepsy awareness. All training must be refreshed at least every three years.

The report gave details of the training programme delivered and the way in which home to school transport was commissioned and monitored. As part of the continuous improvement process, Members were invited to comment on the current arrangements and make any suggestions for improvement.

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points.

What standards were there in place for potential service providers to meet? It was confirmed that providers had to be registered on the Council's procurement system. That required evidence of meeting a number of standards, including health and safety, safeguarding and manual handling, etc. Staff were also required to be trained to handle emergency situations, e.g. medical emergencies.

Did the safeguarding training cover professional boundaries? It was confirmed that the training did cover boundaries. Officers were planning additional training relating to behavioural management techniques. It was suggested that details of incident reports be circulated to Members in order to increase understanding of the day-to-day issues arising.

Sarah Clarke suggested that further consideration be given to the way in which drivers and escorts communicate with families. This was an important element in building confidence and assurance at the start of the relationship.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Rebecca Brooks be thanked for attending the meeting to present the report and answer Member questions;
- 2) the current training provision for drivers and escorts, as set out in the report, be noted;
- 3) Rebecca Brooks meet with Sarah Clarke to discuss ideas for improving the communication between drivers/escorts and families;
- 4) consideration be given to highlighting the importance of effective communication as part of the roll-out of the revised Home to School Transport Policy.

35. POST OFSTED ACTION PLAN

The Committee considered the Post Ofsted Action Plan, set out on Agenda pages 71 to 93, which had been developed following the Ofsted inspection carried out in March 2023 under the Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services Framework (ILACS).

The report stated that the Ofsted inspection report highlighted five core areas for improvement, as follows:

- The timeliness of assessments of children's needs;
- The quality, clarity and timeliness of child-in-need, child protection and pathway plans;
- The quality and impact of frontline supervision and management oversight at all levels;
- The timeliness, accuracy and accessibility of children's records;
- The response to children who were vulnerable to exploitation.

The Post Ofsted Action Plan, appended to the report, set out the key actions that the Children's Services department would be taking in response to Ofsted's findings. Progress was scrutinised via an Improvement Board which met monthly. The Action Plan was submitted to Ofsted in August 2023. It would be the subject of ongoing discussion between the Lead Inspector and senior Council officers.

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points and questions.

Would the Action Plan be updated to indicate the completion of specific tasks? It was confirmed that completed tasks would be moved to a section at the end of the plan.

In relation to the priority of preventing exploitation, what measures were under consideration? It was confirmed that a specialist post was under consideration. There would also be external audit and tracking of cases in the system and the development of relevant performance indicators.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) officers be thanked for their efforts in developing the Post Ofsted Action Plan;
- 2) the Action Plan be noted and be the subject of further regular updates to the Committee.

36. SCHOOLS UPDATE

The Committee considered the Schools Update report, as set out at Agenda pages 95 to 99, which gave details of schools which had received Ofsted inspection reports since the previous meeting of the Committee.

The report stated that the following schools had newly published Ofsted reports:

- Alder Grove Primary School – rated Good.
- Shinfield St Marys CE Primary School – remains Good.
- Waingels College – remains Good.

The report also stated that, since the reintroduction of school inspections, three of the Borough's outstanding schools had been inspected. Two of the schools had retained their

Outstanding judgement. As of August 2023, seven further outstanding schools were awaiting re-inspection.

RESOLVED: That the Schools Update Report be noted.

37. SAFETY VALVE UPDATE

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 101 to 114, which gave details of progress relating to the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Safety Valve Programme. The report included updates on special free schools, the High Needs Capital Bid and the SEND Strategy Refresh.

The report stated that the DfE was satisfied with progress made under the Safety Valve Programme. The second instalment of Government funding was due in January 2024.

In relation to the SEND Strategy Refresh, the report stated that a SEF working group had been established involving engagement with a wider group of stakeholders. The new SEND Strategy was being developed in conjunction with other key documents including the Autism Strategy. It was noted that the fast pace of the Safety Valve Programme had placed a strain on relationships with the Council's partners.

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points.

In relation to the strain on relationships linked to the pace of the Safety Valve Programme, what steps were being taken to rebuild positive partnerships? It was confirmed that there was a commitment to co-production of the SEND Strategy Refresh. This involved working closely with SEND Voices and SEND youth groups. It was confirmed that the draft SEND Strategy Refresh would be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee for scrutiny and comment.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) officers be thanked for their efforts in progressing the Safety Valve Programme and the SEND Strategy Refresh;
- 2) progress on the Safety Valve Programme be noted;
- 3) the draft SEND Strategy Refresh be considered at the next meeting of the Committee.

38. FORWARD PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its forward programme, as set out at Agenda pages 115 to 116.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) two items be added to the Agenda for the next meeting of the Committee on 1 November 2023 – SEND Strategy Refresh and the SEND Voices Annual Survey;
- 2) officers discuss the timing for an item on Early Help Provision with the Chair and Vice-Chair.

39. ACTION TRACKER

The Committee considered the Action Tracker report, set out at Agenda pages 117 to 118.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the Action Tracker be expanded to cover meetings from the past twelve months;
- 2) Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children – Members noted that a letter to the Secretary of State and local MPs, seeking an increase in the grant for UASC care leavers, had been prepared;
- 3) Members be notified of upcoming Virtual School Governing Body meetings and notify Helen Watson if they wish to attend.

40. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That, under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for Item 41, on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information, as defined by Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of schedule 12A of the Act.

41. SCHOOLS CAUSING CONCERN – PART 2

This item was considered in a Part 2 session.

This page is intentionally left blank

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE HELD ON 11 SEPTEMBER 2023 FROM 7.00 PM TO 10.00 PM

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Alistair Neal (Chair), Andrew Mickleburgh (Vice-Chair), Andy Croy, Norman Jorgensen, Pauline Jorgensen, Stuart Munro, Alison Swaddle, Chris Johnson, Caroline Smith, David Cornish and Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey

Other Councillors Present

Councillors: Prue Bray

Officers Present

Neil Carr, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist
Chris Easton, Assistant Director, Highways & Transport
Giorgio Framalico, Director, Place & Growth
Andy Glencross, Head of Environmental Services
Emily Higson, Head of Insight, Strategy & Inclusion
Louise Livingston, Assistant Director, HR
Will Roper, Customer Insight Analyst & Performance Manager
Sally Watkins, Chief Operating Officer

24. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Catherine Glover and Adrian Mather.

David Cornish and Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey attended the meeting as substitutes.

25. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 18 July 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair, subject to Minute 18 (Leader of the Council) being amended as follows:

Para 2 (Page 7) to read:

What were the other impacts of soaring inflation, e.g. on the health and wellbeing of families and recruitment and retention challenges facing the Council and its suppliers/contractors? Councillor Conway noted the impact of the cost of living crisis on the demand for services. The £11m figure discussed earlier was much higher when the impact of additional service demands was factored in. **Graham Ebers confirmed that a balanced budget for 2023/24 was set in February 2023 and included £11m for inflation. The average inflation used to reach that figure was 8.7%. Graham Ebers also confirmed that the budget was challenging, but achievable. Around £500k of staff salary increases, which happened, were not included in the £11m, but the £11m would be adequate....**

26. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

Andy Croy noted that he had chaired the Estate Infrastructure Task & Finish Group which featured in Agenda item 30.

27. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

28. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

28.1 Councillor Gary Cowan asked the Chair the following question:

As the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee is responsible for co-ordinating the Council's arrangements for holding the Executive to account which includes undertaking policy development and review performance monitoring and external Scrutiny.

Apparently, the Council's accounts have not been signed off for two years.

My question is does the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Management Committee consider that the Borough Council's audit committee is a good enough safeguard for the Borough Council's finances.

Answer

Thank you for your question. In short, my answer is yes. Let me explain why.

The Audit Committee is a sub-committee of Council with its members appointed by Council each year. The Audit Committee works assiduously to ensure its remit and processes reflect best practice.

Earlier this year, the Committee undertook a review against the latest (2022) CIPFA guidance which showed good levels of compliance but also identified further areas where practices could be improved. One of these was to update the terms of reference for the Committee which were brought to full Council in March 2023.

Full Council also receives a comprehensive annual report from the Audit Committee which offers the opportunity for any member to raise concerns. I note that this year's annual report was considered at the March 2023 meeting of full Council at which you were present.

You will have noted that the annual report covered the issue of the Council's accounts and the reasons for the delay in sign-off. However, I am pleased to note that the Council's Statement of Accounts for 2020/21 were signed off in July 2023 and work is proceeding on the 2021/22 accounts. If you read the minutes of the Audit Committee you will see that at each meeting of the Committee, members are appraised of the latest position including the opportunity to seek assurances from officers and our external auditors.

The current delays in the signing off of accounts are in the main beyond Wokingham's control and are problems being experienced nationally. To give context the National Audit Office (NAO) published a report earlier this year found that just 12% of 2021-22 local authority audits were completed at that time.

As well as national matters such as the recent technical issues around infrastructure which required the accounting body to work up "clarifications" to the accounting code, locally whilst our own accounts were complete, we had not been able to close 2020/21 until the Pensions body's accounts had been audited (The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead are the administering body for the fund and these delays affect all Berkshire authorities), which as stated previously is now resolved for that year.

Work on 2021/22 Accounts continues in tandem with our External Auditors and progress will be reported to the Audit Committee in the same way as previous years Accounts.

Supplementary Question

As the number of Councils going bankrupt has increased, the LGA and CIPFA have raised serious concerns about the management of Council finances. This is over and above the usual routines we carry out. They point out that not enough attention is paid to the complexity of commercial plans and the risks surrounding them. They also add that the skills and professional capabilities of officers must be balanced by the skills of elected Members who must be engaged and financially literate in order to understand the financial aspects of the issues that come before them. How can that be achieved if, when elected Members challenge decisions, they can be denied the information requested? One example is the Dementia Care Home which has been cancelled, costing the Council £1.14m to date. These costs may or may not be recovered as the project is now cancelled.

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee must have a view on the cultural secrecy written into the Council's Constitution which allows quite large financial decisions to be made without consultation. For example, write-offs up to £25k can be agreed by specific officers. Virements can be £150k to £300k depending on the officer involved. The list of these obscure numbers is endless. With the Constitution written in a manner that encourages secrecy in finance, my question is: beside the £1.14m spent to date at Toutley, what other sums of money has the Council paid out which Members have not been aware of?

Supplementary Answer

Firstly, I can assure you the Council's finances are under constant review and monitoring and whilst it faces significant challenges the position is robust and the medium term financial plans are deliverable. Effective monitoring is in place through the Executive and further challenge and assurance is undertaken through the Audit Committee. The Council's commercial investment performance is reported regularly, along with performance against key prudential indicators, as part of the Treasury Management reports through to Council and these remain positive.

The Council's Constitution is set and agreed by Members and balances ensuring the appropriate governance and transparency with providing officers with the opportunity to run services effectively and, where appropriately or required, flexibly. A

number of controls are in place to ensure the Constitution is adhered to and Members have sight of key decisions. You will be aware there is currently a process to review the Constitution to ensure it remains

fit for purpose and meets the organisation's needs. Members will play a key role in reviewing and agreeing any changes.

You have quoted the example of the care home. However, I understand that this scheme is not "cancelled", but is rightly undergoing further financial and market analysis to ensure the right decision both financially but also in providing key facilities to the community. The spend to date was critical to understand the right approach and, in fact, has already added value in increasing the value of the land should a care home provision not be decided as the best future approach and investment.

29. Q1 2023/24 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT

The Committee considered the Quarter 1 Performance Monitoring Report (April to June 2023) as set out at Agenda pages 13 to 64.

Councillor Prue Bray (Executive Member for Children's Services) attended the meeting, supported by officers, to present the report and answer Member questions in the absence of Councillor Sarah Kerr (Executive Member for Climate Emergency and Resident Services).

The report stated that Quarter 1 showed good overall performance in the face of significant challenges to service delivery, including high inflation and interest rates and increasing demand for key services. The current projected revenue monitoring position for the end of 2023/24 was an overspend of approximately £2.9m.

As part of the annual performance cycle, Directors had met with Executive Members to review KPIs and targets to ensure that they focussed on performance in the key areas of the Council's activity. Some new KPIs had been introduced whilst others had been retired. In line with the discussions at the previous meeting, charts in the report had been reviewed and leisure centre KPIs had been developed.

The report stated that four KPIs had reported as Red in Quarter 1, as follows:

- PG8 – Total household tonnes (waste);
- PG11 – All recorded crime in Wokingham Borough (excluding fraud);
- AS1 – Social work assessments allocated to commence within 28 days of the request;
- AS4 – New permanent admissions to residential or nursing care homes (65+).

The report gave details of the background to the KPIs reported as Red in Quarter 1 and the corrective action being taken to bring them back on track.

In the ensuing discussion. Members raised the following points and questions.

In relation to the projected £2.9m overspend, what steps were being taken to bring the Budget back on track? It was confirmed that work was ongoing to identify savings and potential increases in revenue. The annual Budget Scrutiny round was due to start in October via the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Measures included a focus on recruitment and retention of staff, thereby reducing spend on agency and interim staff. The process for removing the latter, once permanent staff were in place, to be discussed outside the meeting.

RA 7 – Return on investment portfolio – Property Investment Fund - It was noted that the activities linked to this KPI (including the properties invested in) would be reviewed as part of the Budget scrutiny process, commencing in October 2023.

PG6 and PG8 – Percentage of waste, composted and reused/Total household tonnes – It was noted that more data was required in order to assess the performance of the service. Government guidance was awaited on future recycling measures – this would inform discussions on additional items to be included in the recycling process.

PG6 – Percentage of waste recycled, composted and reused – Was the target for this KPI consistent with the target included in the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan

(CEAP)? The target in the CEAP was 70% compared to 52% for PG6. It was confirmed that the move to alternate weekly collection was estimated to deliver a 10% increase in recycling which would be a big step towards the 70% target in the CEAP. Officers agreed to review the target in the CEAP compared to the current KPI target.

PG8 – Total household tonnes – how many new households were there and what was their impact on the increase in total household waste? Officers undertook to provide further information on the number of new households contributing to the waste stream.

RA3 – Completion to time and budget of regeneration projects (Residential works – What was the current situation with the flats adjacent to the Carnival Hub? It was confirmed that a new contractor would be appointed shortly to complete the works. A date for occupancy would be confirmed in due course.

RA4 – Occupancy rate of WBC-owned Regeneration units – what proportion of the units were currently rent bearing? It was confirmed that this information would be checked and provided for Members.

CEX9 – Proportion of Wokingham resident pupils eligible for Free School Meals in Wokingham Borough schools – Would this indicator be more useful if it set out the number of pupils eligible for FSM and the percentage who actually received them? It was confirmed that officers would look at the presentation of this KPI. However, it may be difficult to determine the actual number of eligible pupils who were eligible for FSM.

RA2 – Participation in leisure activities to support those who may be experiencing social isolation – The service narrative referred to increasing levels of demand, but the target for Q3 and Q4 was decreasing. What were the reasons for the reducing target? Officers undertook to investigate this issue and provide further information for Members.

AS4 – New, permanent admissions to residential or nursing care homes (65+) – This KPI was reported as Red, yet the service narrative indicated that the Council was performing well compared to other local authorities. It was suggested that officers and the Executive Member consider the presentation of this indicator. KPIs which were Red over a sustained period should include contextual narrative which explains the background, actions undertaken and impacts for residents.

CEX6 – Channel shift – The report referred to an actual of 87.3%. What did this 87.3% refer to? Officers agreed to look at the service narrative to provide more clarity and to consider the relationship between channel shift and improved satisfaction.

PG9 – All recorded crime in Wokingham Borough (excluding fraud) – It was noted that the majority of crime categories had seen an increase in Quarter 1. Recent news stories about shoplifting were worrying. It was confirmed that officers were working with local businesses to discuss measures to prevent shoplifting. Although the KPI reflected activities outside WBC's control, it was felt to be a useful KPI as the data helped the Council in discussions with partners through the Community Safety Partnership.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Prue Bray and supporting officers be thanked for attending the meeting to present the report and answer Member questions;

- 2) performance against the KPIs relevant to the Committee be noted;
- 3) further information/clarification be provided to Members, as set out above;
- 4) officers be thanked for the improved content and clarity of the performance monitoring report.

30. ESTATE INFRASTRUCTURE TASK & FINISH GROUP

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 65 to 134, which gave details of progress against the recommendations made by the Estate Infrastructure Task & Finish Group, which reported in 2020.

The Task & Finish Group had been set up to investigate complaints from residents about delays and frustrations in the adoption of new roads, drainage and open space linked to new housing developments.

Chris Easton (Assistant Director, Highways and Transport), Andy Glencross (Head of Environmental Services) and Alan Lewis (Highways Development Manager) attended the meeting to present the report and answer Member questions.

The report reminded Members that, as developers built new homes, they were required to build supporting infrastructure to support new communities. Each type of infrastructure (roads, open space, play areas, etc.) was controlled by different legal and contractual frameworks, and local or national standards. Housing development usually took place on private land and, as developers were private organisations, there was no obligation for them to seek that the Council adopt new roads and open spaces. If, for example, a new road was not adopted, the Council had no powers to undertake works on that road. That obligation fell to the relevant management company or individual property owners.

Appended to the report was a Local Government Ombudsman report into alleged maladministration by Teignbridge District Council and Devon County Council. The Ombudsman investigation and report referred to the alleged failure of the two councils to secure the completion and adoption of a new estate road. The Ombudsman report highlighted a number of issues addressed in the Task & Finish Group's recommendations.

The 12 recommendations made by the Task and Finish Group were set out in the report along with a summary of progress. The recommendations included increasing public awareness of the infrastructure adoption process, improved maps on the Council website, improved information and briefings for Town and Parish Councils, improved S106 agreements, training for Members and retention of key staff involved in the process.

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points and questions.

In relation to the Task & Finish Group's first recommendation – the Council considers measures to increase public awareness about the adoption of new infrastructure – It was noted that the Frequently Asked Questions did not appear on the "New Residents" section of the website. Housebuyers needed to be aware that, on occasions, estate infrastructure was not adopted and, as a result, there could be financial consequences. It was noted that, frequently, house buyers were not aware of the type of questions to ask. The Council could not force the adoption process to take place. Officers agreed to review the information provided for residents on the relevant website pages. Officers also agreed to

consider the potential for including information on the adoption process in the new residents' packs circulated to people moving into the Borough.

In relation to recommendation 2 – the Council considers measures to improve and expand the current interactive maps on its website – The maps did not indicate the roads which were not adopted and the reasons why they were not adopted. If this information could not be included in the interactive maps, Members suggested that there should, at least, be a list of affected roads. Officers agreed to look at ways to incorporate these suggestions on to the interactive maps on the website.

In relation to recommendation 3 – more regular briefings for Town and Parish Councils – Members noted that Town and Parish Councils were often the first point of contact for residents, so it was essential that they received accurate, up-to-date information to assist them. This would then assist Borough Members in their roles.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Chris Easton, Andy Glencross and Alan Lewis be thanked for attending the meeting to present the report and answer Member questions;
- 2) the original 12 Task & Finish Group recommendations be reaffirmed and progressed, as enhanced by the points raised by Members at the meeting;
- 3) a further update report be submitted to the Committee in 2024/25.

31. SCRUTINY IMPROVEMENT REVIEW ACTION PLAN

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 135 to 140, which gave details of progress following the Scrutiny Improvement Review (SIR), carried out by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny in 2022.

The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny concluded that conditions for successful scrutiny were clearly present at Wokingham; there was a shared understanding from Members and officers that good governance involved scrutiny and, when used effectively, scrutiny could add value to decision-making.

All of those interviewed as part of the SIR believed that improvements could be made to make scrutiny more effective and to add greater value. Members recognised the benefits of change and improvement, and this presented a good opportunity for the Council to further develop the way in which scrutiny operated. Strengthening the role of Overview and Scrutiny could also aim to elevate the status of scrutiny, so that it was recognised as a strategic function and was fully utilised as a resource to support continuous improvement.

Following the review a SIR Action Plan was developed in order to ensure that key recommendations were implemented and reported back to Members. The Action Plan was appended to the report for Member discussion and comment.

The report stated that the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny would be arranging a feedback session later in the year (probably at the end of 2023) in order to explore Member views about progress following the SIR and opportunities for further development of Overview and Scrutiny at WBC.

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points and questions.

It was noted that opportunities for improving the Overview aspect of Overview and Scrutiny had been discussed with the Leader of the Council at the previous meeting. This could be supported by early sight of the strategic forward plan, currently being developed by officers. The five Scrutiny Chairs should seek regular discussions with the relevant Executive Members and Directors to “horizon scan” and identify items for early consideration by the relevant Committees.

Members highlighted the need for more effective/streamlined reports to Members. Reports should aim to describe the issue under consideration, the options considered, the proposal, risks and financial implications, timeline, proposed outcomes/benefits for the community and measures of success. It was agreed that the Overview and Scrutiny Committees should also consider feedback reports on the actions taken and any outcomes from previous recommendations.

The importance of Member training was emphasised. This would be important in 2024, when the all-out elections may result in a larger than usual intake of new Members. Budget Scrutiny training was especially important in the current climate. It was noted that a Budget Scrutiny training session was scheduled for 10 October 2023. Members were asked to submit comments on any specific issues they wished to cover in the Budget Scrutiny training session. The training should include analysis of the different roles of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees and the Audit Committee.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the Scrutiny Improvement Review Action Plan be noted and amended to reflect the points raised by Members at the meeting;
- 2) officers be requested to produce reports to Overview and Scrutiny in line with the requirements agreed by the Committee;
- 3) Members submit suggestions for topics to be covered at the Budget Scrutiny training session on 10 October 2023;
- 4) the proposed SIR feedback session with the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny be noted.

32. CONSIDERATION OF THE CURRENT EXECUTIVE AND IEMD FORWARD PROGRAMMES

The Committee considered a copy of the Executive Forward Programme and Individual Executive Member Decision (IEMD) Forward Programme, as set out on Agenda pages 141 to 152.

Members referred to the item on WBC Future Office Provision, due to be considered at the Executive on 28 September 2023. It was agreed that a report on this issue be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee on 4 October 2023.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the Executive and IEMD Forward Programmes be noted;

- 2) a report on the proposed Executive item - WBC Future Office Provision, be requested for the Committee's next meeting.

33. O&S COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMMES

The Committee considered its forward work programme and that of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees as set out on Agenda pages 153 to 172.

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points.

- An item on the Borough-wide Sports Pitch Strategy be added to the Committee's work programme;
- An item on WBC Future Office Provision be added to the Agenda for the Committee's next meeting on 4 October 2023;
- Representatives from Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks be invited to a future meeting of the Committee;
- Items on SEND Strategy and SEND Voices be added to the work programme for the Children's Services O&S meeting on 1 November 2023;
- A special meeting of the Community and Corporate O&S Committee be held on 9 October 2023 to consider Local Transport Plan 4;
- A Budget Scrutiny Member training session be held on 10 October 2023.

RESOLVED: That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programmes, as amended, be approved.

34. ACTION TRACKER

The Committee considered the regular Action Tracker report, as set out on Agenda pages 173 to 174.

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points.

- Officers be requested to provide an all-Member briefing on the Children's Services Safety Valve project;
- Follow-up information on progress relating to the Committee's recommendations on the Bus Enhanced Partnership, be circulated to the Committee.

RESOLVED: That the Action Tracker, as amended, be approved.

This page is intentionally left blank

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
PLANNING COMMITTEE
HELD ON 13 SEPTEMBER 2023 FROM 7.00 PM TO 7.45 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: David Cornish (Chair), Andrew Mickleburgh (Vice-Chair), Alistair Neal, Wayne Smith, Michael Firmager, Stuart Munro, Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey, Tony Skuse and Bill Soane

Councillors Present and Speaking

Councillors: Gary Cowan

Councillors Present

Councillors:

Officers Present

Gordon Adam, Principle Highway Development Control Officer
Neil Allen, Head of Legal Services
Brian Conlon, Operational Lead – Development Management
Callum Wernham, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist

Case Officers Present

Tariq Bailey-Biggs
Baldeep Pulahi

23. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

24. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 9 August 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair, subject to the correction of a typographical error with regards to one spelling of Councillor Michael Firmager's name.

At the cessation of the meeting, the Chair proposed a vote of thanks to Callum Wernham, who was leaving the Council after nearly 6 years of service. The Committee thanked Callum for his service to the Council, and specifically his clerking of the Planning Committee for over 5 years. The Committee wished Callum well in his future endeavours.

25. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Alistair Neal declared a personal interest with regards to agenda item 27, application number 231869, on the grounds that he was a member of the Earley Town Council Planning Committee. Alistair added that he was not present at the meeting where this application was discussed, and came to the meeting with an open mind and would listen to and consider all representations prior to forming a judgement.

Andrew Mickleburgh declared a personal interest with regards to agenda item 27, application number 231869, on the grounds that he was the Chair of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which had responsibility for scrutinising the delivery of Children's Services in the Borough. Andrew added that he came to the meeting with an open mind and would listen to and consider all representations prior to forming a judgement.

26. APPLICATIONS TO BE DEFERRED AND WITHDRAWN ITEMS

No applications were recommended for deferral, or withdrawn.

27. APPLICATION NO.231869 - MAIDEN ERLEGH SCHOOL, SILVERDALE ROAD, EARLEY

Proposal: Full application for the proposed change of use of building to educational use, including internal and external alterations (part retrospective).

Applicant: Wokingham Borough Council

The Committee considered a report about this application, set out in agenda pages 15 to 32.

The Committee were advised that updates contained within the Supplementary Planning Agenda included:

- Comments from Earley Town Council, received after the publication of the Committee agenda;
- Officer commentary with regards to the query from Earley Town Council regarding the absence of a Transport Statement;
- Officer commentary regarding potential wording for a BREEAM (or equivalent) 'Excellent' condition.

Andrew Mickleburgh commented that he had reservations with the implications of installation of a gas boiler, however the wording within the Supplementary Planning Agenda regarding potential BREEAM 'Excellent' satisfied his concerns.

Michael Firmager queried whether the building would be insulated to an exceptional standard, given that historically the building had lacked such insulation. Baldeep Pulahi, case officer, stated that the internal works did include insulation, and there was a Building Control application which was pending a decision. Michael Firmager asked that a copy of the Building Control report be circulated to the Committee once it was finalised. Brian Conlon, Operational Lead – Development Management, stated that it depended if the school was using the Council owned Building Control Service. In addition, accommodation of children was required to meet other certain standards separate from the Planning or Building Control requirements.

Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey queried whether the school contained any asbestos or RAAC. Baldeep Pulahi stated that the school did not have any asbestos or RAAC to her knowledge, however this was a Building Control matter

Alistair Neal noted that this would be the second community facility lost in the locality since 2018, neither of which had any proposals to be replaced. Alistair added that he understood that this was not a Planning matter.

Wayne Smith raised concern that as this was a part retrospective application, it would be very difficult to achieve a BREEAM 'Excellent' standard, given that the roof had already been completed. Brian Conlon stated that it may be advisable to defer to officers to confirm if such a condition was able to be achieved given the current wording within the

Supplementary Planning Agenda. Brian added that officers could seek a compromise in the event that such a condition was not possible. Brian noted that similar conditions had been applied to other schools which had completed refurbishment of historical parts of the site. Wayne Smith reiterated that it was very easy to achieve such standards when building from scratch, however fulfilling them when retro-fitting was an entirely different matter.

David Cornish proposed that officers be delegated, in conjunction with the Chair, Vice Chair and Wayne Smith, to assess whether a condition requiring BREEAM 'Excellent' was able to be achieved given the current wording within the Supplementary Planning Agenda. This was seconded by Andrew Mickleburgh.

Alistair Neal proposed that the application be approved in line with the officer recommendation and delegation of assessment of potential BREEAM 'Excellent' condition as outlined above. This was seconded by Bill Soane.

RESOLVED That application number 231869 be approved, subject to conditions and informatives as set out in agenda pages 24 to 25, and delegation to officers in conjunction with the Chair, Vice Chair and Councillor Wayne Smith, to assess whether a condition requiring BREEAM 'Excellent' was able to be achieved given the current wording within the Supplementary Planning Agenda.

28. APPLICATION NO.231148 - LAND AT MOLE ROAD, SINDLESHAM, BERKSHIRE

Proposal: Full application for the creation of a vehicular access including erection of boundary wall features and gates. (Retrospective)

Applicant: Mr Gareth Jones

The Committee considered a report about this application, set out in agenda pages 33 to 52.

The Committee were advised that there were no updates contained within the Supplementary Planning Agenda.

Gareth Jones, agent, spoke in support of the application. Gareth stated that the application sought provision of access including a gate and fence, which would provide access to the sub divided site. Gareth added that the wider site remained as agricultural use. Gareth stated that the fallback position would allow the vast majority of the scheme to be built under permitted development. Gareth noted and appreciated the concerns raised by the local Ward Member, however added that the development was of high quality and constructed from brick and timber which was consistent with the character of the area. Gareth added that the fallback position would place no limit on the materials used, whilst a landscaping condition softened the visual appearance of the development and respected the rural setting. Gareth stated that the Highways officer felt that the development was sufficiently setback from the junction and would not impact on the highway or public right of way. Gareth thanked officers for their work and for the Committee report, and asked that the Committee approve this appropriate and considerate development.

Gary Cowan, Ward Member, spoke in objection to the application. Gary stated that the case officer used the word vernacular and suggested that there were several examples of brick walls and gates within the locality. Gary felt that this was misleading as the only other

example was situated in advance of a Grade 2 listed building from the 17th century. Gary noted Wokingham Borough Council's Statement of Community Involvement consultation document stated that a material consideration was a matter that had to be taken into account when deciding a planning application, which could include previous planning decisions. Gary was of the opinion that approval of this application could therefore be used as a precedent anywhere in the Borough, and any similar application which was refused would be lost at appeal with cost awards made against the Council. Gary felt that this application was not typical of a usual agricultural operation, and noted that the Council's trees and landscape officer felt that the boundary wall was out of keeping with the character of the area. Gary asked that the application be refused to stop such a damaging precedent being set, thereby protecting the countryside.

Wayne Smith noted that the Committee had been given 3 plans to consider, whilst the photographs indicated that the wall had not been finished. Wayne sought clarity as to how the dimensions had been measured and whether the drawings had been scaled off, and if so, how. Tariq Bailey-Biggs, case officer, stated that the wall had been measured on site whilst the front elevation drawings had been used to confirm that the heights matched. Wayne Smith raised concern that as the wall had not been finished, the Committee may not necessarily know what they were actually granting approval of.

David Cornish stated that he had visited the site and had noticed that the wall did not appear to be completed. David raised concern that approving this application could prove problematic as it could give officers a lack of information in the event of future enforcement.

Brian Conlon, Operational Lead – Development Management, stated that permission was being sought for the details as set out on the plan on agenda page 43. Brian added that the plans replicated what was currently on the site, and whilst the finish may not be to the standard expected by the Committee this was not a planning consideration. Should the wall change in height, a further planning application would be required whereby officers could consider if that caused harm.

David Cornish stated that it was difficult to class the development as overbearing given the fallback position, and he would be minded to approve the application if the Committee could be assured as to the specifics of what they were approving.

Wayne Smith stated that he had the greatest of sympathies for the case officer who had carried out a considerable amount of work to provide answers for the Committee, however he expected more from the agent with regards to specifics and dimensions.

Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey queried what dimensions would be allowed under permitted development. Tariq Bailey-Biggs stated that a gate of up to 2m in height would be allowed, whilst the wings of the structure would be allowed up to 1m in height. The application before the Committee included a small portion of the gate, 20cm, in excess of the permitted development limits. The boundary wall would be in accordance with permitted development apart from the small section outlined in red on agenda page 37.

Tony Skuse questioned the need for such a structure for the entrance to an agricultural field, and queried whether a condition could be applied to prevent an application for a change of use of the wider site. David Cornish clarified that the Committee were not allowed to presuppose any future planning application, or application for a change of use.

Brian Conlon clarified that the plan on page 43 included a small black line on either side of the wall close to the gate, which indicated the point that the wall must not exceed 1m in height in the direction of the highway. Brian added that the applicant would be fully aware of the risks should they deviate from what was on site, as officers could scale from the drawings provided.

Bill Soane stated that the 1:100 scaling of the structure on pages 37 and 43 could not both be correct. Tariq Bailey-Biggs confirmed that the scale was only for illustrative purposes.

Andrew Mickleburgh stated that he did not see any planning reasons why this application should be refused. Andrew asked that the minutes reflect the concern of the Committee with regards to the very advanced stage of this retrospective application.

David Cornish stated that in future he would expect clearly defined detail on submitted plans.

Andrew Mickleburgh proposed that the application be approved in line with the officer recommendation. This was seconded by David Cornish.

RESOLVED That application number 231148 be approved, subject to conditions and informative as set out on agenda page 40.

This page is intentionally left blank

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON 19 SEPTEMBER 2023 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.05 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Adrian Mather (Chair), Beth Rowland, Phil Cunnington, Rebecca Margetts, Jackie Rance, Tony Skuse and Caroline Smith (substituting Alistair Neal)

Others Present

Alice Kunjappy-Clifton, Healthwatch Wokingham Borough
David Hare, Executive Member Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services
Madeleine Shopland, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist
Wesley Hedger, Assistant Director Adult Social Care Strategy, Commissioning and Performance
Ingrid Slade, Director Public Health
Hugh O’Keeffe, Senior Commissioning Manager, Dental NHS England
Nilesh Patel, Chair Thames Valley Local Dental Network

22. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Alistair Neal and Shahid Younis.

Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey attended the meeting online.

23. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 5 July 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

24. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

25. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

26. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

27. UPDATE ON DENTAL SERVICES IN WOKINGHAM BOROUGH

The Committee received an update on dental services in Wokingham Borough.

During the discussion of this item, the following points were made:

- Hugh O’Keeffe commented that patients attending over a two year period had fallen dramatically over the pandemic. Improvements were being seen but had attendance levels had started to plateau since early 2023.
- Members were provided with information regarding commissioned activity in January and June 2023. In April the Beanoak surgery had handed back its NHS contract of around 10,000 units of activity. It was one of approximately 15 practices that had handed back its contract since 2021. Temporary activity had been put in place to cover this, and practices in Woodley and Bracknell were providing cover currently. A plan for recommissioning this activity on a permanent basis, from April 2024, was being developed.

- With regards to delivery of activity, practices had to deliver a certain percentage of activity that had been commissioned in order to retain a level of funding. Performance had dropped significantly during the pandemic, and then improved in 2021-22. Forecasted activity had been exceeded by the end of the year. During 2022/23 the overall activity delivered in BOB was 80.34% of that commissioned. Berkshire West and Wokingham had performed slightly better.
- Those who had not attended a dentist for some time often had more complex dental needs and required lengthier treatments.
- Many access challenges remained, particularly for those who had not visited a dental surgery for some time. Often these were from vulnerable groups. Much of the recovery of access had related to practices recalling patients who had previously attended.
- It was noted that a third of the queries with the NHS England contact centre regarding dental practices, between January and December 2022, had come from the Earley area.
- The Committee was updated on action being taken to improve access.
- Changes had been made to the national contracts. These were designed to improve dentist remuneration in terms of more complex treatments, expand capacity by allowing practices to deliver more contracted activity, and to provide more information for patients. Further changes to the contract were anticipated over the next few months.
- Some practices had provided additional access sessions. Take up in BOB had been quite low.
- Members were reminded of Flexible Commissioning. The pilot would run June 2023 to March 2024. Under this up to 10% of contracts could be flexed and activity targets converted to additional access sessions. It was hoped that this would help to support more vulnerable groups. 30 practices had signed up in BOB (2 in Wokingham) and it was planned for 3,000 sessions to be delivered (148 in Wokingham). Between June and August 2023 18 sessions had been held in Wokingham and 62 patients seen.
- There had been investment in the referral services to try to recover the pre pandemic position and progress was being made.
- A Member commented that several practices had left the NHS and questioned if these practices were asked their reasons for leaving and what might make them wish to stay with the NHS contract. Hugh O’Keeffe stated that when a practice left the NHS an ‘exit interview’ was undertaken. Rural and coastal areas were experiencing greater challenges around workforce retention and recruitment, leading to increased loss of practices in these areas. Locally, the flexible commissioning scheme was being designed in conjunction with dental professionals. Nilesh Patel added that it was becoming harder to work in the confines of the system. Nationally inflation was increasing, however, the government had announced that they would increase the uplift dental practice expense by only 3%. Whilst he believed that flexible commissioning was beneficial it was still difficult.
- Members asked how vulnerable groups were being made aware of additional access sessions. Hugh O’Keeffe stated that information had been provided to Healthwatches to make available but there had not been a big advertising campaign. Whilst it was important that vulnerable service users’ needs were met, it was also important that practices were not overwhelmed. He hoped that more practices would sign up to the flexible commissioning pilot.
- In response to a question Nilesh Patel indicated that there were Local Dental Committees in Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Berkshire West. With regards to

the pilot, he felt that other practices may come on board if they saw it working well in other areas.

- Members asked if more could be done to stop practices handing back their NHS contracts. Hugh O’Keeffe indicated that locally work was being undertaken within the confines of the contract. He reminded Members of the investment in referral services to help wait lists recover. There was also a recommissioning programme of primary care.
- The Committee questioned when pre covid levels of attendance were likely to be achieved. Hugh O’Keeffe stated that this would be more difficult in areas where workforce was a greater challenge. There also continued to be issues with patients who had had gaps in their treatment because of the pandemic, leading to more complex and greater treatment needs.
- Members referred to the new minimum indicative UDA value of £23. Hugh O’Keeffe commented that a review had been long overdue. Nilesh Patel added that whilst the minimum had been raised, £23 was still not very attractive to dentists. He wanted to see access levels improve above pre pandemic levels so that those who did not fit into the categories of vulnerable groups or regular attendees could also be seen.
- Nilesh Patel suggested that it would be helpful if the patient representatives sought information about the budgets, how money was spent on dentistry, how much was allocated to dentistry, what was not spent, and how that money which was not spent on dentistry, could be spent.
- The Chair questioned whether dental services had a relief fund for those who might struggle to afford their treatment. Hugh O’Keeffe indicated that some patients were exempt from charges. Alice Kunjappy-Clifton commented that pregnant women were exempt for 1 year, but some had not been able to make use of this eligibility as they had been unable to access treatment whilst eligible. Hugh O’Keeffe commented that flexible commissioning was helping to address this.
- The Committee requested a further update in the future, including information around the flexible commissioning pilot.
- A Member questioned what percentage of patients were private patients. Hugh O’Keeffe stated that approximately 50% were NHS, 30% private and 20% did not attend. A higher proportion of private service users was more common in more affluent areas.
- The Committee briefly discussed budgets. Members were informed that not all the budget was spent, and that money could be recovered should a practice not achieve its targets. The recovery in BOB this year was around £14,000,000.
- Members asked how Wokingham could improve with regards to children under 5 experiencing dental decay. Hugh O’Keeffe commented that Slough was one of the worst areas for oral health in the country and the Starting Well programme which focused on getting under 2’s to see a dentist was being rolled out in this area prior to the pandemic. It was hoped that this would restart and be extended.
- In response to how children with special needs were treated, Members were informed that so far as possible they would access high street dental services, but community dental services could be used if this was not appropriate.
- A Member commented that some professions were losing colleagues to abroad where they could earn more and have a lower cost of living. They queried whether this was an issue in dentistry. Nilesh Patel responded that this was not a big issue. However, more dentists were moving from NHS to private services.

RESOLVED: That the update on dental services in Wokingham Borough be noted and Hugh O’Keeffe and Nilesh Patel thanked for their presentations.

28. ASC SPECIALIST ACCOMMODATION PROJECT

The Committee received a presentation on the ASC Specialist Accommodation Project.

During the discussion of this item, the following points were made:

- Wesley Hedger outlined how the programme had come to be. Reflecting on the Learning Disability Community Wokingham Borough Council's Learning Disability Strategy 2019, and how the Council could support people to live independently as possible in the community, it was considered that the number of adults with learning disabilities, supported in Wokingham, was higher than many other parts of the country. As the local population increased the number of those with learning disabilities needing support was also likely to increase. In addition, a number of people had been living in accommodation which was now considered to be unsuitable.
- A strategic aim was to maximise independence and the opportunity for people to stay in their own home through a strength based approach to care and support.
- Aims of the programme included –
 - Reducing residential care placements, especially for those with learning disabilities;
 - Providing support within the local Borough where possible and developing provision including alternatives to traditional residential care, through greater use of supported accommodation, shared lives etc;
 - A greater use of technology to increase efficiency and improve outcomes throughout;
 - Increasing partnerships with care providers and neighbouring authorities to address unmet needs, especially around complex disabilities and challenging behaviours.
- There had been various sources of funding including WBC Capital Programme bid, NHS funding, Homes England Grant, S106 developer contributions, Housing Revenue Account and utilising borrowing through Loddon Homes.
- Optalis and Specialist Mental Health and complex needs providers had been involved in the care commissioning process.
- Whilst the programme had been led by Adult Social Care, it involved and brought together a number of different Council departments, such as Property Services.
- Phase 1 of the project had been delivered and 36 people had now been accommodated. The percentage of people living in their own home was steadily increasing.
- The Committee viewed a video regarding the ASC Specialist Accommodation Project.
- The Council had been successful in getting a LGA Housing Advisor Programme grant which would help with understanding what was needed next for the project. Phase 2 was due to begin. One of the most difficult elements was the matching of people with accommodation.
- The Council had won a Municipal Journal Award for Best Practice for the programme.
- A Member asked how Adult Services worked with Children's Services to identify those who would be transitioning between the services, to help them become more independent. Wesley Hedger stated that there was a Transition Team which began engaging at age 16.
- A Member queried whether consideration was being given to the allocation of new build properties given the level of development within the Borough, and was

informed that the programme helped to move away from registered provision. The programme had enabled close working between Adult Services and Property Services, enabling conversations around developer contributions in schemes identified.

- In response to a question about lessons learnt from Phase 1, Wesley Hedger stated that traditionally houses had been considered as accommodation and the LGA Advisor programme advised that cluster flats were now best practice. In addition, there was a need to work with and have ongoing conversations with developers to ensure a continued supply of accommodation.
- Wesley Hedger confirmed that a mix of accommodation would be used and that there would not be a total move away from houses.
- A Member stated that the Highwood Bungalow was situated in her ward, and she had received only praise in relation to it from residents.

RESOLVED: That the presentation on the ASC Specialist Accommodation Project be noted and Wesley Hedger thanked for his presentation.

29. HOME CARE

Wesley Hedger provided a presentation about Home Care (Domiciliary Care).

During the discussion of this item, the following points were made:

- Domiciliary care services provided regulated activity of 'personal care' for people living in their own homes. The needs of service users varied greatly but care packages were targeted to individual circumstances.
- Domiciliary care services were regulated by the Care Quality Commission.
- Service users were usually aged 65+. They would be visited at various times of the day, or in some cases care would be provided over the full 24 hours.
- Support could include help with washing, bathing, cleaning themselves, and toileting.
- The Council had a duty to maintain the market and to ensure that care provided was safe and affordable and that there was sufficient choice in the local area.
- The market was a mixture of local authority commissioned domiciliary care and self-funders. Wokingham's market also included neighbouring local authorities and some providers who were registered in those areas but provided services to Wokingham residents.
- Capacity in 50 providers registered for domiciliary care was monitored through the NHS capacity tracker.
- Care was delivered to 2,100 people, not all of whom lived in the Borough.
- Approximately 7,100 hours of care were commissioned per week.
- Members were informed that there were 507 clients who were funded by WBC and approximately £7million was spent per annum.
- A Care and Support Framework was used to commission care. This was an initial 5 year arrangement – an initial 3 year arrangement until 31 October 2024 with an option to extend for a further 2 year period. The Council commissioned off framework if required.
- The rates paid by the Council for care had been supported by an independent cost of care exercise which had included provider input.
- The Council sought to minimise the use of 15 minute calls.
- As the local population grew the number of people requiring care was likely to increase and be required for longer periods.

- There were in the region of 619 self-funders in the Borough, however, self-funders were not required to inform the Council that they were paying for their own care.
- A high number of providers in and around the Borough worked exclusively with the self-funders market.
- How quality was ensured included –
 - Competitive process to join the Care and Support Framework;
 - Finance checks, insurance checks, health and safety, safeguarding and a demonstration of an ability to deliver the services;
 - Current CQC ratings;
 - Advice, support and monitoring provided by the Quality Assurance team;
 - Contract managing visits undertaken by Commissioning.
- Provider failure was monitored and over the last 24 months only 3 providers had exited the market and ceased trading for a number of reasons.
- Additional support available to home care providers was highlighted.
- Members questioned whether workforce shortage was an issue. Wesley Hedger indicated that recruitment, rates of pay and funding available were issues across the whole sector. However, there was not a struggle to find care.
- In response to a question about complaints, Wesley Hedger responded that complaints would be looked at through the complaints procedure. There were recruitment struggles and providers would seek to find a level of funding that they believed to be sufficient. Under the annual uplift process there was an appeals process around money related complaints. However, there was not a high level of complaints received.
- A Member commented that recent inflationary pressures were causing peoples' savings to deplete quicker, potentially increasing the number of those who would require support from the local authority. Providers were also experiencing inflationary pressures. They went on to ask whether the Council was able to fully fund the care packages required by residents. Wesley Hedger responded that in addition to inflation, the National Living Wage had an impact on the sector, and any increases in this also impacted rates paid. In terms of rates paid, last year a 7% uplift was provided for the sector as a whole. There was not currently an issue commissioning care under the framework, but individuals needs changed over time. Annual reviews and monitoring were undertaken.
- Members asked about future planning. Wesley Hedger commented that the market was volatile in terms of the National Living Wage. It was believed that there was sufficient budget to meet demand in the next year. It was important to have the best mechanisms for procurement in place to ensure best value.
- In response to a question regarding provider failure, Wesley Hedger indicated that it was the responsibility of the host local authority to support in the transition to a new service. If the service user was funded by the local authority, it was also the responsibility of the local authority to source alternative provision.
- Members felt that it was encouraging that the use of 15 minute calls was being minimised. The population was ageing with increasingly complex needs and 15 minutes was often too short to meet individuals' needs sufficiently.
- The Committee requested a more detailed update on domiciliary care at a future meeting, and that this include information regarding budgets, actuals, and the different providers. Wesley Hedger indicated that the detailed annual Market Position Statement could also be provided and information regarding the cost of care exercise.

RESOLVED: That the presentation on home care be noted and Wesley Hedger thanked for his presentation.

30. UPDATE FROM HEALTHWATCH WOKINGHAM BOROUGH

The Committee received an update on the work of Healthwatch Wokingham Borough.

During the discussion of this item, the following points were made:

- Members were informed that the Enter and View Report for Wokingham Medical Centre had been published and would be discussed at a future meeting.
- In April Healthwatch had asked the public what three health and social care priorities they would like Healthwatch to look at. Access to GP appointments had been identified as an area of concern and focus groups would be undertaken in September to November, around patients' experiences of booking GP appointments. New ways of working would also be shared at these workshops as many people were unclear about new ways of working. Vulnerable groups would also be asked about their experiences. A report would hopefully be brought to the Committee in March.
- Healthwatch was still looking at dentistry. Information about the experiences of pregnant women and people with learning disabilities had been sought. Alice Kunjappy-Clifton indicated that she had had conversations with Hugh O'Keeffe as to how the experience for these cohorts could be improved.
- Last year NHS England had published a report around maternal mental health which indicated that 1 in 4 women were not receiving mental health checks at their surgeries during their 6 weeks post-natal checks. GPs would be asked to look at this service again. It was noted that 18% of women who committed suicide were in the first year of childbirth.
- The BOB Healthwatches would be supporting the All Age Transformation Continuing Healthcare Programme.
- Members were informed that communities were becoming more ethnically diverse and that some people were struggling with information standards. Healthwatch would be looking at information for those whose first language was not English, and also for those who were deaf.
- Alice Kunjappy-Clifton referred to work relating to asylum seekers' experiences.
- Many were struggling with the cost of living of crisis. People had raised difficulties in travelling to appointments because of transport costs, and also the cost of prescriptions.
- A Member questioned why some GP surgeries were not offering Covid booster vaccinations. Alice Kunjappy-Clifton indicated that people could use the national booking service to locate the nearest appointments.

RESOLVED: That the update from Healthwatch Wokingham Borough be noted and Alice Kunjappy-Clifton thanked for her presentation.

31. ADULT SERVICES KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The Committee received the Adult Services Key Performance Indicators Q1.

During the discussion of this item, the following points were made:

- It was noted performance against AS9 a and b 'Annual measure: Increase in healthy life expectancy at age 65 (males/females)' had worsened for females. Ingrid Slade explained that whilst there had been a decrease this was not an area of concern, and Wokingham was not out of step with other local authorities. The focus was now more around disease free years and increased quality of life.

- Performance against AS1 'Social work assessments allocated to commence within 28 days of the requests (counted at point of allocation)' had improved for August. A redesign of the pathway and how allocations were undertaken under this using more specialised teams, had been completed in the last few months. It was anticipated that performance against AS1 would improve in the next quarter.
- Whilst performance against AS4 'New permanent admissions to residential or nursing care homes (65+) (ASCOF Measure 2A2)' had reduced, performance was still better than other neighbouring local authorities, and reflected increased volume and complexity of cases. A Member questioned whether this increased complexity and volume meant that performance against this indicator was likely to remain red. Wesley Hedger indicated that the increase in referrals was high, but that the redesign of the pathway, moving away from a more generalised approach, would enable the signposting to more appropriate specialist teams, and help ensure that referrals were made quicker.
- A Member commented that performance against AS1 'Social work assessments allocated to commence within 28 days of the requests (counted at point of allocation)' was often red. They questioned the reason for this. Wesley Hedger stated that as people approached the 28 day period a risk assessment was carried out through a risk matrix, and if a risk was identified, people were signposted appropriately. Adult social care as a whole remained under pressure, and that retention and recruitment remained a challenge. The Council had a Workforce Strategy in place. He agreed to provide a more detailed written response.
- With regards to AS10 'Annual measure: Percentage of adults classified as overweight or obese', Ingrid Slade commented that performance was similar to national trends and also a post pandemic trend. There was a lack of physical activity generally across the pandemic. Public Health was working with Sports and Leisure to deal with the effects of this in a strategic way. Whilst there was a lot of initiatives available, they were not currently well joined up. Further consideration needed to be given to developing an offer for those who were obese or overweight, which was broader than that, that had been previously available.

RESOLVED: That the Adult Services Key Performance Indicators be noted.

32. FORWARD PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the forward programme for the remainder of the municipal year.

During the discussion of this item the following points were made:

- The Committee requested that a more detailed update be provided on home care, linked to the Market Provision Statement.
- The Chair indicated that he had met with the Woosehill GP Surgery PPG. It had been suggested that a business case would be required around an additional GP Surgery to cover Wokingham.
- A Member suggested that the currently unscheduled items on GP access and communicating different ways of working be scheduled as two separate items. Councillor Hare indicated that Healthwatch was undertaking work around these areas and could update as their work progressed.
- A Member asked about GP provision for the Arborfield area. Councillor Hare agreed to follow up on this.

- It was agreed that maternal mental health be scheduled for the first meeting of the 2024 municipal year, and that this include training for midwives around mental health.

RESOLVED: That the forward programme be noted.

This page is intentionally left blank

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
PERSONNEL BOARD
HELD ON 20 SEPTEMBER 2023 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.15 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Rachel Bishop-Firth (Chair), Prue Bray (Vice-Chair), Pauline Helliar-Symons, Pauline Jorgensen, Stuart Munro and Lindsay Ferris

Officers Present

Madeleine Shopland, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist
Louise Livingston, Assistant Director HR & OD (until item 40)
Sally Watkins, Chief Operating Officer
Sally Halliwell, Head of HR & OD

32. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Stephen Conway.

33. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 14 August 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The Chair requested that it made clear that the cost of the proposal relating to the Director of Children's Services was £198,000 gross figure and oncosts.

34. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Prue Bray declared a Personal Interest in Item 37 Domestic Abuse Policy refresh on the grounds that she was a trustee of Kaleidoscope uk, a domestic abuse charity.

35. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

36. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

37. DOMESTIC ABUSE POLICY REFRESH

The Board considered the Domestic Abuse Policy refresh.

During the discussion of this item, the following points were made:

- Louise Livingston indicated that the Council had had a Domestic Abuse Policy in place for some time. It had been reviewed to highlight support for those experiencing domestic abuse, and also how the Council would deal with perpetrators of domestic abuse. Guidance was provided for managers.
- Statistics stated that approximately 5.5% of employees (around 74 people) could be experiencing domestic abuse.
- The refresh was in line with the Council working towards accreditation for the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance. Whilst HR had produced the policy, support had been received from Community Safety.
- Pauline Helliar-Symons commented that no reference was made to posters being used to publicise the policy and guidance. In addition, the advice to managers did not indicate how to support people moving out of their home and how to do so. Sally Halliwell confirmed that posters would be part of the campaign. Louise Livingston

added that the policy signposted employees living both inside and outside of the Borough, to support that they could access.

- Rachel Bishop-Firth commented that people could be at their most vulnerable when they were looking to leave or had initially left their abuser.
- Pauline Jorgensen praised the document and indicated that it had also been presented to Overview and Scrutiny. She suggested that it would be useful to split up the guidance and to send links to Members, so that they could best support residents who may be experiencing domestic abuse. Sally Watkins suggested information could be provided which could be included in the Member Development Programme for new Members and also circulated to current Members. The Board agreed that Members should be reminded not to leave the information with people, potentially putting them in danger.
- Pauline Jorgensen went on to ask how much the accreditation would cost and what benefits the Council would receive from it. Louise Livingston agreed to provide a written answer.
- Prue Bray was pleased to note that the policy stated that managers should not encourage staff experiencing domestic abuse to leave their situation and that this must be their own decision. She went on to state that post separation abuse and trauma from abuse were also issues that managers needed to be aware of and be able to address.
- Rachel Bishop-Firth commented that the policy and guidance would be publicly available, and asked what could be done to boost understanding with partner organisations. Sally Watkins indicated that the Voluntary Sector Action Group would consider the policy and work had been undertaken in conjunction with the Community Safety team. Residents could also access the Cranstoun service.
- Members questioned whether support phone lines were available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Sally Watkins indicated that officers would look into this and update the information.
- Rachel Bishop-Firth commented that the scope used was quite generic to HR policies and questioned whether this could be revisited.

RESOLVED: That the revision to the Domestic Abuse Workplace Policy for line managers and staff be approved so that the Council can progress its accreditation with the DAHA (Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance).

38. WORKFORCE EQUALITIES MONITORING REPORT

The Board considered the Workforce Equalities Monitoring Report.

During the discussion of this item, the following points were made:

- The Workforce Equalities Monitoring Report was presented annually to the Personnel Board.
- Information was requested as part of the recruitment process, but it was not mandatory that it was provided. Nevertheless, data collection was improving.
- Louise Livingston highlighted an action plan. Dates would be added actions and there would be a 6 month review of performance against these actions.
- Data was shared with staff networks and these networks were asked for other initiatives where further improvements could be made.
- Prue Bray asked what was being done to address the lack of data around disabilities.

- Prue Bray went on to ask about the spread of ethnicity and gender in the salary ranges. She commented that there seemed to be more men in higher salary ranges but more female employees overall. Prue Bray suggested further analysis of the gender pay gap and how this would be addressed. Louise Livingston commented that the Council was looking at using the Disability Confident Scheme around recruitment, sharing the learning around that, and becoming a Disability Confident employer. The Neuro Divergent Staff Network was assisting around training for staff and managers. Members were informed that further analysis work was being undertaken around the gender pay gap, and also around ethnicity and pay.
- Sally Halliwell indicated that there were some gaps in the data. A lot of data had not yet been transferred on to the system. Officers were looking at employees could share this information via forms and the information then inputted. Work was being undertaken around encouraging more people to share their data.
- In response to a question as to when a change was likely to be seen in data collection, Sally Halliwell commented that it was hoped this would be seen by the end of the financial year. HR met with staff networks on a monthly basis and were improving relations with them. The networks were helping to encourage staff to provide their data.
- Stuart Munro felt that achievements needed to be highlighted early in the report.
- Lindsay Ferris felt that the reports had improved over the years.
- The Board discussed job evaluation by job families. Louise Livingston confirmed that if you were doing the same or a similar type of work, you would be paid at a similar level for that work. An equitable job evaluation system was important.
- Rachel Bishop-Firth questioned whether all salaries quoted were full time equivalents and were informed that they were.
- Prue Bray commented that it would be useful to receive information about the percentage of males and females in each pay band. She also suggested that reference be made to those who identified as neither male or female.
- Rachel Bishop-Firth questioned whether information regarding ethnicity was broken down further than White British and Ethnic Minority Groups, and was informed that this information was collected at recruitment stage, but the information presented was simplified for reporting purposes.
- Rachel Bishop-Firth suggested that reference be made to the possible effects of age on some elements such as disability, and comparisons with the Borough.
- In response to a question regarding the bands for pay, Sally Halliwell confirmed that those used were standard groupings, used to enable benchmarking.
- Members questioned what more could be done to encourage employees to disclose their sexual orientation. Sally Halliwell stated that there may be some long standing employees who may not have been asked to update their data for some time. Pauline Jorgensen indicated that some companies asked employees for information on an annual basis.
- Louise Livingston agreed to check that the correct terms regarding sexual orientation were being used.
- Rachel Bishop Firth noted that there was a gap between the number of White British applicants and Ethnic Minority Group applicant being shortlisted for roles. She questioned whether numbers were skewed by applicants applying outside of the UK who did not currently have the right to work in the UK. Pauline Jorgensen felt that applicants should be asked if they had the right to work in the UK and if the answer was no, then that individual not be included in the figures.

- Prue Bray commented that the Council was looking to recruit from abroad for some roles such as social workers.
- In response to a question Louise Livingston confirmed that an e-learning module on unconscious bias had recently been introduced.
- Lindsay Ferris felt that the information provided in relation to employees with disabilities was vague. He wanted assurance that any legacy issues experienced had been addressed.

RESOLVED: That the workforce equalities monitoring report be approved and published.

39. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED: 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 Paragraphs 1 and 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act (as amended) as appropriate.

40. CHANGES TO OPERATING MODEL OF CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S OFFICE

The Board considered a report regarding changes to the operating model of the Chief Executive's office.

RESOLVED: That the recommendations in the report be agreed.

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
AUDIT COMMITTEE
HELD ON 27 SEPTEMBER 2023 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.40 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Rachel Burgess (Chair), Mike Smith (Vice-Chair), Sam Akhtar, Peter Harper, Stephen Newton, Jordan Montgomery, Mike Drake and Sandeep Vig (online)

Also Present

Madeleine Shopland, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist
Graham Cadle, Assistant Director Finance (online)
Susan Parsonage, Chief Executive
Mark Thompson, Chief Accountant (online)
Catherine Hickman, Head of Internal Audit and Investigations
Andrew Moulton, Assistant Director Governance
Paul Ohsan Ellis, Governance and Risk Manager
Janet Dawson, EY (online)

23. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillor David Davies.

24. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 19 July 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The Chair introduced Sandeep Vig, a new Independent Member of the Committee. CIPFA guidance recommended that Audit Committees have two independent members.

The Chair also questioned whether all Members had responded to the skills audit, and was informed that there was still some responses outstanding.

25. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor Stephen Newton declared a Personal Interest in item 33 Corporate Risk Register on the grounds that he and his wife were foster carers.

26. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no Public questions.

27. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

27.1 Gary Cowan asked the Chairman of the Audit Committee the following question. Due to his inability to attend the following written answer was provided:

Question:

With more councils going bankrupt the Local Government Association and the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy have serious concerns on the management of Councils finances point out that.

The note that the skills and professional capabilities of officers must also include the skills of elected members.

They add that internal audit requires good financial management reinforced by a culture that encourages responsibility and transparency.

Examples that might cause concern are Council spending of £1.14 Million on one project at Toutley and current consultants Staff increased costs. No doubt there are others.

My question is, in these very difficult times what urgent transparent actions has the Audit Committee added so as to guard against increased risks to Wokingham Borough Council going bankrupt?

Answer:

Thank you for your question.

Whilst the arrangements for the Audit Committee to review and challenge the Council's financial position and associated governance have been robust and comprehensive, we continue to review and develop how the Committee can add further value.

As you will know, the Committee already receive the full detail of the Council's annual accounts and extensive reports from our external auditors on the progress and outcomes of their work, matters arising and any issues or concerns. Council Officers and external auditor representatives attend committee meetings and will provide further detail and where appropriate written responses and amendments to issues raised.

To further enhance the current arrangements and provide confidence, over the past year we have introduced:-

- a) A clear action log to ensure all questions and issues raised are addressed fully.
- b) An independent member has been introduced to the committee to add to the breadth of experience and knowledge on the committee. We also recently added a second independent member to the Committee.
- c) The Committee have considered and reviewed officers' assessment of arrangements against the CIPFA code of financial management practice. A number of actions have been identified from this and members will receive ongoing updates on progress against these actions.
- d) The committee regularly reviews the Council's corporate risk register, which continues to develop to provide further detail and understanding of mitigations. This includes a number of key risks in respect of the Council's financial position and governance.
- e) In February 2023 the Committee considered a CIPFA report on those authorities who had published a Section 114 notice. This provided the Committee with assurance that the factors leading to those authorities' financial difficulties were not present at Wokingham BC.
- f) We have reviewed and improved the level of information provided to committee in respect of internal audit reporting, including further understanding of actions required from audit findings.
- g) We are introducing more informal meetings directly with external and internal auditors to build the relationship and understanding and an opportunity to further explore current issues or pressures.
- h) The Council's Local Code of Corporate Governance was considered by the Committee in June 2023 before full Council approved the Code in July 2023.

- i) The Committee also reviews the Council's Annual Governance Statement which sits alongside the Statement of Account. This is a comprehensive statement covering the Council's governance arrangements providing assurance to councillors and the public.
- j) Each year full Council receives a report on the work of the Committee providing assurance to all members as well as an opportunity for members to question any areas of concern. Full Council received our latest report in March 2023.

28. EY 2020/21 AUDITORS ANNUAL REPORT

Janet Dawson, EY, presented the EY 2020/21 Auditors Annual Report.

During the discussion of this item the following points were made:

- The report summarised the work undertaken by EY on the 2020/21 audit, which had been completed over the summer.
- Appendix A detailed EY's assessment of the Value for Money arrangements that had been in place against the criteria and sub criteria that EY were required to test the Council against. No exemptions had been found to report.
- Appendix B detailed all the recommendations made across the financial statements.
- Appendix C set out the proposed fees for the audit. The PSAA would determine what they felt was a fair fee for the work submitted.
- Councillor Newton noted that the element relating to the Berkshire Pension Fund had now been completed. He questioned whether the Pension Fund auditors were on track to complete for the following audit in a timelier manner. Janet Dawson indicated that assurance had been provided that the pension element for the following audit would be provided by the calendar year. Whilst this was timelier this was still a delay. Officers and EY would continue to monitor this.
- Councillor Newton commented that the report stated that the Council could improve its governance arrangements to oversee working with charities, and questioned whether this had improved. Janet Dawson indicated that this would be picked up under the current audit.
- Councillor Newton referred to adjustments which the Council had accepted improvements were needed in these areas. He asked whether this had been progressed. He went on to note the recommendation that the Council should ensure that sufficient information was retained to support payments made, including documentation supporting any judgements made by the Council and the authorisation process that payments had been through, and questioned whether this had occurred. Again, Janet Dawson indicated that this would be picked up under the current audit.
- The Assistant Director Finance believed that improvements had been made. Resources had increased in the Finance team, and he would expect EY to find improvements in the 2021/22 audit.
- Councillor Newton asked whether service levels were built into contracts.
- Councillor Newton questioned whether EY were satisfied the breach of the Rents Standards had been satisfactorily addressed.
- In response to a Member question regarding procurement business cases, Janet Dawson indicated that EY had been satisfied with the arrangements that had been operating at the time of the audit.
- In response to a question from Mike Drake regarding material adjustments, the Assistant Director Finance commented that whilst adjustments had been identified

- they were not so significant as to impact the bottom line and did not have an ongoing impact. The Committee was reminded that the audit related to 2020/21.
- Mike Drake asked about the assessment of costs and borrowing in relation to value for money. Janet Dawson responded that EY would look at that when looking at a particular scheme and understand how information was being used, presented, and analysed to support any decision made by the Council. The return on borrowings and refinancing would be looked at a Council level.
 - Councillor Burgess asked how the PSAA validated the additional fees. Janet Dawson explained that EY were required to set out their fees, and the hours and work that they had undertaken. The PSAA set rates across audit teams. The PSAA undertook benchmarking across organisations by type.
 - Members questioned whether the Audit Committee could receive the regular update from the Contract Management Learning and Support Group. Officers indicated that this was an internal, operational officers' groups, and suggested that the Chair of the Group provide an update to the Committee on its role.
 - Councillor Akhtar referred to an anonymous whistleblowing allegation. The Assistant Director Governance indicated that two recommendations had made in relation to this whistleblowing allegation and that he was satisfied that the appropriate controls had been put in place, and that internal controls had been strengthened.
 - Councillor Harper expressed concern regarding unexplained differences between the accounting records and the statement. Janet Dawson stated that bank reconciliations were a key control, so this had been highlighted even though the amount was below the reporting threshold. Nevertheless, EY would have satisfied themselves that this was not hiding a bigger issue. The Assistant Director Finance added that at the time of the work there had been some delays and a pressure on resources. However, this was not a current risk and there were now no discrepancies.
 - In response to a question from Councillor Newton regarding the monitoring of the value for money of projects, Janet Dawson indicated that EY did look at decisions to enter into arrangements or contracts but also the risks to the organisation on an ongoing basis. The work on Value for Money was risk based. The Assistant Director Finance commented that the business case would set out the investment, the anticipated level of interest to be paid over a period, and the returns. This would be monitored internally.
 - Councillor Smith commented that the word 'Council' was used both to describe the organisation and Full Council, and asked that there be more consistency in the terminology.

RESOLVED: That the EY 2020/21 Auditors Annual Report be noted.

29. EY - PROGRESS REPORT ON 2021/22 AUDIT

The Committee considered the EY Progress Report on the 2021/22 audit.

During the discussion of this item, the following points were made:

- The report outlined the progress made against the 2021/22 audit and the expected timeline.
- Whilst the audit was dependent on the Pension Fund element it was anticipated that assurance would be provided by the end of year.
- Once the audit was complete attention could turn to the 2022/23 audit.

RESOLVED: That the EY Progress Report on the 2021/22 audit be noted.

30. 2023/24 INTERNAL AUDIT AND INVESTIGATION QUARTER 1 PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee received the 2023/24 Internal Audit and Investigation Plan – Quarter 1 Progress Update (up to 30 June 2023).

During the discussion of this item, the following points were made:

- The report highlighted audit activity for the first three months of the financial year.
- Appendix AI detailed all the audits for the year and the status as at the end of June.
- The report highlighted the key corporate risks that would be audited this year.
- There were no audits that had an outstanding management response.
- It was noted that regular follow up activity was undertaken around high risk concerns.
- In the first quarter, one audit has been finalised (2022/23 Right to Buy Scheme), that had attracted the third category of audit opinion, and this has been shared with the Chair of the Audit Committee.
- Mike Drake commented that there were a number of recommendations to be implemented by 30 September.
- Councillor Smith noted that an agreed management countermeasure for a high risk concern relating to the Debtors audit, was that the Council consider further innovation in its methods for receiving income, and that this was due by 30 September. He questioned whether this would be achieved within the timescale. The Assistant Director Finance highlighted different ways of interacting with customers and the use of different collection techniques. Whilst work was quite advanced it was unlikely to be finished by 30 September.
- With regards to the Right to Buy audit, Mike Drake noted that there had been one high risk concern and 22 other concerns identified. He felt that this was high and asked whether this was typical. The Head of Internal Audit and Investigations clarified that the medium risk concerns filtered into the high risk concern and that resolving the high risk concern would help to address these. A policy was required to be put in place to address the high risk concern and management had a target date of March 2024 in which to implement this.
- Councillor Smith noted that there had been four whistleblowing allegations and that three had been resolved. He requested more information on how these had been resolved. The Head of Internal Audit and Investigation agreed to feed back. The Assistant Director Governance indicated that the Whistleblowing Policy would be presented to the Committee for consideration. It was noted that many of the referrals that came through the whistleblowing hotline were in fact service complaints.
- The Committee congratulated the Audit and Investigation team on the positive feedback they had received from officers.

RESOLVED: That the 2023/24 Internal Audit and Investigation Plan – Quarter 1 Progress Update (up to 30 June 2023) be reviewed and scrutinised.

31. 2023/24 EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSESSMENT OF CONFORMANCE TO THE PUBLIC SECTOR INTERNAL AUDIT STANDARDS

The Committee received the 2023/24 External Quality Assessment of Conformance to Public Sector Internal Audit Standards.

During the discussion of this item, the following points were made:

- The Standards required an external assessment at least once every 5 years as part of an Internal Audit's Quality Assurance Framework. They must be conducted by a qualified, independent assessor or assessment team from outside the organisation and the Council's assessment had been undertaken by CIPFA the week commencing 10 July.
- The Assessor had determined that all Standards had been complied with.
- The Assessor had concluded that no areas of non-compliance with the standards had been identified, nor had any significant areas of partial non-compliance been identified, that would affect the overall scope or operation of the internal audit activity.
- There had been five advisory suggestions which would be implemented. The Committee would be kept updated on progress made against these.
- The Committee congratulated the Audit and Investigation Team on the outcome of the review and thanked them for their hard work.

RESOLVED: That the outcome of the 2023/24 External Quality Assessment of Conformance to Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and the assessment of the Council's compliance with audit standards and the high quality of the Internal Audit Service, be noted.

32. CORPORATE RISK REGISTER

The Chief Executive presented the Corporate Risk Register.

During the discussion of this item, the following points were made:

- The report highlighted the top four corporate risks: Budget and financial resilience, Cyber security, Adult Social Care supplier sustainability and sufficiency; and Education for children with SEND.
- Two new risks had been escalated to the Corporate Risk Register: Elections Risk and Support for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children. The risks relating to the website replacement project and the Health and Social Care Reform, had been removed.
- With regards to Risk 22 Support for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, the Chief Executive indicated that there was a risk around funding. The Council was required, under the national transfer scheme, to accept the equivalent of 0.1% of the under 18 population – 41 unaccompanied Asylum Seeking children. This number had now been reached. However, a disproportionate burden was placed on the social work service. In addition, Wokingham did not currently have enough foster carers with the appropriate cultural knowledge and background so many had been placed outside of the Borough. The Council was seeking to address this. There was a risk that escalating costs of placement and ongoing provision of accommodation post-18 presented a significant financial challenge to the authority, and that the social care workforce would become overwhelmed. The Virtual School had met to discuss the differing needs of the children.
- Councillor Newton was pleased to note that many mitigations were on track. He went on to question whether when the target date of a mitigating action was reached it was anticipated that the risk and the target would be fully aligned. The Governance and Risk Manager indicated that there would be cases where the gap could not be fully mitigated. He would review how this was reflected to the Committee.

- Councillor Smith suggested that Planning fraud be listed as a type of possible fraud that a local authority could face.
- In response to a question from Councillor Smith regarding the mitigating actions for the risk around Cyber Security, the Governance and Risk Manager explained that the Public Sector Network was a national government standard accreditation for IT which allowed the Council to connect to government data sources such as the Department for Works and Pensions. There was a possibility that this standard would be replaced but the Council would meet whatever standard was required of it.
- With regards to Risk 2 Corporate Governance, Councillor Harper referred to a number of decisions which should have been key decisions and had then had to be rolled back. He questioned who had responsibility for ensuring that decision making was undertaken correctly, and that due process was followed. The Assistant Director Governance indicated that as Monitoring Officer he was responsible for ensuring that the Constitution was complied with appropriately. Directors were also responsible for monitoring their own areas.
- Councillor Harper queried the rating of the risk relating to Climate Change. The Chair suggested that this was linked to the wording of the risk. She queried what impact the recent change in Government policy around electric vehicles would have. The Chief Executive stated that the risk objectives would be further clarified.
- The Chair asked about the Elections Risk, the planning of resources and if there were any likely single points of failure. The Assistant Director Governance indicated that it was on the Corporate Leadership Team's agenda and that the Corporate Project Delivery Team would be meeting for the first time shortly. At this stage he was confident that the risk could be appropriately mitigated. Councillor Newton commented that if it was felt that insufficient support on this matter was being provided by CLT, the Audit Committee could be informed.
- Councillor Smith queried why Risk 17 Mainstream Education Provision, showed no movement when some of the mitigation target dates were September 2023. The Chief Executive explained that this had not yet been completed. School place planning remained a high priority area.
- Members requested that all risk owners be identified in the key.
- The Governance and Risk Manager agreed to circulate information regarding the footnotes to Risk 4 Uncontrolled Development.

RESOLVED: That the Corporate Risk Register be reviewed to determine that strategic risks are being actively managed.

33. ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2022/23 - UPDATE ON ACTIONS

The Committee considered the Annual Governance Statement 2022/23 – update on actions.

During the discussion of this item, the following points were made:

- Ten areas had been identified in the Annual Governance Statement where governance could be strengthened.
- Good progress was being made around the different areas.
- It was noted that progress was being made against the review of the Constitution and the progressing of the Community Vision.
- There was a slight delay in moving towards the Local Government Association Member Development Charter. It was likely to be later in 2024/25.

- Councillor Harper referred to an action relating to petitions and Motions that he had raised at the June Committee meeting. The Assistant Director Governance reiterated that this would be covered under the review of the Constitution.
- Councillor Smith sought an update about financial management. The Assistant Director Finance commented that with regards to training, finance e-learning was being developed for November with in person training due to start in December. On the job financial training continued currently. Staff qualifications were recorded manually, and work was being undertaken with HR to record this on the learning management system. In addition, LG Improve had been engaged to provide a tool to assess financial resilience. Feedback on the position would be embedded in the Chief Finance Officer letter in January. With regards to strengthening of job descriptions, this had begun on a rolling basis, as roles were advertised. It was noted that the Asset Management Plan had not progressed as much as had been hoped for due to the progress of the Local Plan and the timing of the Council's asset review. Finally, the Assistant Director Finance confirmed that an Improvement Plan monitoring process was in place.

RESOLVED: That the progress made on the actions identified in the Annual Governance Statement 2022/23 be noted.

34. FORWARD PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the forward programme for the remainder of the municipal year.

During the discussion of this item, the following points were made:

- It was noted that the Annual Governance Statement had been previously considered.
- A report regarding the Audit Committee effectiveness would be brought to the Committee's February meeting.
- The Committee would be informed of the outcome of the Members' Knowledge and Skills survey.

RESOLVED: That the forward programme be noted.

ACTION	OFFICER	ONGOING/CLOSED
JUNE MEETING - Councillor Smith noted that senior officers had received training on the respective roles of officers and Members and working together, and asked whether this could be provided to Members.	Assistant Director Governance	Open. LGA has been asked to support this training.
JUNE MEETING - The Chair also referred to a skills audit of the Committee members and private meetings between the Committee and the auditors, without officers present.	Governance and Risk Manager/Assistant Director Governance	Open – skills audit – results to be reported to Nov or Feb meeting of the Committee. Closed – private meetings with auditors commencing 27 September.

<p>JULY MEETING – SIRO Report Councillor Harper asked whether information regarding right to be forgotten requests could be provided in future reports.</p>	<p>Assistant Director Governance</p>	<p>Open. This information will be provided shortly.</p>
<p>JULY MEETING - Mike Drake praised the report and asked about benchmarking with similar councils. The Assistant Director Governance indicated that he would provide this information for the next meeting. More comprehensive information could be included in the next report.</p>	<p>Assistant Director Governance</p>	<p>Open This information will be provided shortly.</p>
<p>SEPTEMBER MEETING - Members questioned whether the Audit Committee could receive the regular update from the Contract Management Learning and Support Group. Officers indicated that this was an internal, operational officers groups, and suggested that the Chair of the Group provide an update to the Committee on its role.</p>	<p>Assistant Director Finance</p>	<p>Open</p>
<p>SEPTEMBER MEETING - 2023/24 Internal Audit and Investigation Plan – Quarter 1 Progress Update (up to 30 June 2023).</p> <p>Councillor Smith noted that there had been four whistleblowing allegations and that three had been resolved. He requested more information on how these had been resolved. The Head of Audit and Investigations agreed to feed back.</p>	<p>Head of Audit and Investigation</p>	<p>Open</p>
<p>SEPTEMBER MEETING – Corporate Risk Register</p> <p>He [Councillor Newton] went on to question whether when the target date of a mitigation action was reached it was</p>	<p>Governance and Risk Manager</p>	<p>Open</p>

<p>anticipated that the risk and the target would be fully aligned. The Governance and Risk Manager indicated that there would be cases where the gap could not be fully mitigated. He would review how this was reflected to the Committee.</p>		
<p>SEPTEMBER MEETING – Corporate Risk Register</p> <p>Councillor Smith suggested that Planning fraud be listed as a type of possible fraud that a local authority could face.</p>	<p>Assistant Director Governance</p>	<p>Open</p>
<p>SEPTEMBER MEETING – Corporate Risk Register</p> <p>Councillor Harper queried the rating of the risk relating to Climate Change. The Chair suggested that this was linked to the wording of the risk. She queried what impact the recent change in Government policy around electric vehicles would have. The Chief Executive stated that the risk objectives would be further clarified.</p>	<p>CLT</p>	<p>Open</p>
<p>SEPTEMBER MEETING – Corporate Risk Register</p> <p>Members requested that all risk owners be identified in the key.</p> <p>The Governance and Risk Manager agreed to circulate information regarding the footnotes to Risk 4 Uncontrolled Development.</p>	<p>Governance and Risk Manager</p>	<p>Open</p>