

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE COUNCIL
HELD ON THURSDAY 27 MARCH 2008 FROM 8.00 PM TO 10.50 PM**

*Present:- Annette Drake, (Mayor), Pauline Helliard-Symons, (Deputy-Mayor)
Malcolm Armstrong, Alistair Auty, Keith Baker, Chris Bowring, Prue Bray, Iain J Brown,
Frank Browne, Malcolm Bryant, Tim Charlesworth, David Chopping, Mrs Ullakarin Clark,
Alan Clifford, Gerald A Cockroft, Stephen Conway, Gary Cowan, Matthew Deegan,
Mr C Edmunds, Michael Firmager, Mrs K Gilder, Norman Gould, Mrs P Graddon,
Tim Holton, Norman Jorgensen, Dianne King, David Lee, Perry Lewis, Jenny Lissaman,
Abdul Loyes, Julian McGhee-Sumner, Kirsten Miller, Philip Mirfin, Mr D Morgan,
Barrie Patman, Mr A Pollock, Angus Ross, Mrs E Siggery, Alan Spratling, Rob Stanton,
Pam Stubbs, Paul Swaddle, Dee Tomlin, Simon Weeks and Bob Wyatt*

Prior to the commencement of the meeting, the Council stood in silence for one minute in order to pay its respects to former Councillor Ian Crail.

134. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 21 February 2008 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

135. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Andrew Bradley, Steve Chapman, John Kersley, Debbie Lewis, Stuart Munro, Sam Rahmouni, Beth Rowland, Mrs Patti Sherratt and Malcolm Storry.

136. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

137. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

137.01 Question

Parry Batth asked the Executive Member for Environment the following question, the reply to which is set out underneath:

Many of the residents in the Loddon Ward are concerned about the possibility of WBC introducing fortnightly bin collections. Can the Executive Member for Environment please give assurances that the weekly collection of bins will continue?

Answer

Yes. It is undoubtedly necessary for the Council to find ways of reducing the volume of household waste that is land filled which makes both environmental and financial sense. Some authorities have introduced a fortnightly waste collection service to boost their recycling levels. However with the promotion of our kerbside recycling service and the continued expansion of the popular green waste scheme this Council's recycling rate has increased by four percentage points this year to approximately 38%. This is one of the

best in the South East and our residents are to be congratulated on their continuing and growing support for recycling.

Therefore with the weekly household refuse collections, fortnightly black box recycling and green waste garden schemes we are already achieving an excellent recycling rate and have no plans to introduce a fortnightly service. However, with the ever increasing targets being imposed by Government, we are very reliant on the support of all residents to sustain and improve recycling and waste minimisation.

Wokingham will continue to monitor and review all the specifications of our waste services in line with policies imposed by the current Government.

138. PETITIONS

The following Members presented petitions in relation to the matters indicated.

The Mayor's decision as to the action to be taken is set out against each petition.

UllaKarin Clark	Development of dwellings and commercial buildings in North Wokingham. Executive Member for Local and Regional Planning
UllaKarin Clark	Moving the St Crispin's skate park to Joel Park in Emmbrook Youth and Leisure Champion to the Executive
UllaKarin Clark	Residents only or restricted parking in St Paul's Gate Executive Member for Highways and Transport

139. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor informed the Council that Mr Harry Long, the husband of former Chairman of the Council Mrs Muriel Long had recently died. The Mayor commented that on behalf of the Council she had written to Mrs Long to express condolences.

At it was the last Council meeting prior to the end of the municipal year, the Mayor commented that it was an appropriate time to pay tribute to Iain Brown, Frank Browne, Tim Charlesworth, Alan Clifford, Pamela Graddon and Alan Spratling who were due to stand down as Councillors.

At the invitation of the Mayor, Angus Ross on behalf of the Conservative Group and Prue Bray on behalf of the Liberal Democrat paid tribute to the retiring Members and the significant contributions they had made to the Council.

(Note: A copy of the valedictory statements made are attached to these minutes as Appendices 1 & 2)

140. ANNUAL AUDIT AND INSPECTION LETTER

The Council considered the contents of the Audit Commission's Annual Audit and Inspection Letter. The letter set out the Audit Commission's overall assessment of the

Council based upon audit and inspection work undertaken in 2007 and also provided an analysis of the Council's performance and improvement since the previous audit as measured through the Comprehensive Performance Assessment, (CPA) framework.

In presenting the report as Chairman of the Audit Committee, Matt Deegan commented that for the third year the Council had achieved a three out of four overall star rating. With regard to the indicator measuring the use of resources, a maximum award of four stars had been received and the Council was one of only two Councils in the country to have achieved this award. The Council has also achieved a four star rating for internal control and Matt Deegan paid tribute to the role played by the Members and Officers supporting the Audit Committee in achieving that rating, in the context of what had been a challenging year.

He also referred to the Council's high performance with regard to indicators relating to education of which 11 out of 14 indicators were in the top decile and improvements expected resulting from the implementation of the Waste Private Finance Initiative. However, it had been noted that the Council's rate of improvement had slowed over the last year, but that this was to be expected given the significant improvements previously made. With regard to the drop in performance relating to Social Care, he commented that an action plan was in place to address this. Mention was also made of the important role played by the Local Strategic Partnership.

With regard to the future, he referred to the introduction of a new assessment process, the Comprehensive Area Assessment, (CAA). He commented that the new system would bring fresh challenges to all local authorities and that it was recognised by the Audit Commission that local authorities would see a slip in their star rating. Under the CAA greater emphasis would be placed on how the Council worked with partners and held them to account.

It was proposed by Matt Deegan and seconded by Philip Mirfin that the Council note the contents of the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter.

RESOLVED: That the contents of the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter be noted.

141. ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Council considered the annual report of the Scrutiny Committee as presented by the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee Ian Brown.

In presenting the report, Iain Brown commented that he wished to place on record his gratitude to David Chopping the Vice-Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee for his help and assistance during the course of the year and also the other Members of the Committee.

It was proposed by Iain Brown and seconded by David Chopping that the report be noted.

Prior to a vote being taken, David Chopping paid tribute to Iain Brown's service as Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED: That the report from the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee be noted.

142. ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Council considered the annual report of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee as presented by the Chairman of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee Gerald A Cockroft.

In presenting the report, Councillor Cockroft commented that the year had been a very full and productive one for the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee and that in his view, the decision to increase the size of the Committee and the frequency of its meetings had been vindicated. He also stated that he felt that the delegation of areas of responsibility to individual members of the Committee had been particularly successful. One area of disappointment was that it had not been possible for a variety of reasons to establish a joint health overview and scrutiny committee with Reading Borough Council and West Berkshire Council.

Finally, he paid tribute to the enthusiasm and support of the other Members of the Committee and to Andrew Price, Policy Manager for his work in supporting the Committee.

It was proposed by Gerald A Cockroft and seconded by Bob Wyatt that the report be noted.

RESOLVED: That the report from the Chairman of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Agenda be noted.

143. REPORTS FROM MEMBERS APPOINTED TO OUTSIDE BODIES

At the Mayor's request, Members who had been appointed to serve on Outside Bodies had been requested to submit a short written report on the activities of the Outside Body and their involvement over the 2007/2008 municipal year. Additional reports received following the dispatch of the Agenda were circulated at the meeting.

It was agreed that further reports received would be added to the minutes of the meeting.

It was proposed by the Mayor and seconded by the Deputy Mayor that the report be noted.

RESOLVED: That the Outside Body reports of Members be noted.

144. STATEMENTS BY THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL, EXECUTIVE MEMBERS OR CHAMPIONS TO THE EXECUTIVE

Frank Browne, Leader of Council

Two main substantive announcements. One is final appointments that should have been done at the previous Council meeting but I wish to formally recognise the appointment of Alistair Auty and Chris Bowring as Champions. Alistair Auty to head up the area of our assets and Chris Bowring to head up the area of performance improvement and monitoring. Two key areas and two very able individuals to give those areas additional focus and clout.

I also just want to respond if I may to the very kind tributes that were made earlier this evening and just make three of my own if I may. I am not going to single out all the individuals that are standing down, but I do want to make mention of three. The first is to

Pamela Graddon whose ward borders a little bit of mine, I believe, and just to say that I have enjoyed working with Pamela in the northern parishes. She is one of the most conscientious Councillors I have ever come across, incredibly hard working and her loss is not only to this Council but to her local community and I applaud the incredible amount of work that she has put in over the years for her community. She has been a tireless worker and a real champion for Charvil, they will miss you Pamela.

I also want to mark Alan Spratling's forthcoming retirement. Alan was my opposite number when I first became Leader of my Group and Angus's words are absolutely spot on – direct, courteous and even handed. Alan I have to say is one of the better Liberal Democrats, he was very kind to me when I was fairly green and yes we were pretty political and had our argy-bargies, but behind the scenes he was very good as a Leader and I think his Group will miss him very much. He has assets and values that his Group much need.

My final tribute is to Iain Brown who has been a bit of a mentor to me. When I became Leader Iain very kindly and generously agreed to be my deputy and show me some of the ropes. His pragmatism, his even handedness and his wisdom served me very well. When we took control his knowledge of the organisation, his very good interpersonal skills and approach were invaluable during what was quite a difficult time. So my sincere thanks to you Iain, the Brown brothers are bowing out together and I do hope you spend a lot more time with your family, flying and if anyone does want to know how Iain has managed to achieve being so chilled out just have a look at his cellar. That is his secret and if he is really nice he may share some of it with you.

So Madam Mayor, my sincere thanks to all the Members that are standing down collectively, you have all served the community and this Council in your different and distinct styles and you will be missed.

145. MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

In accordance with the agreed procedure, the Mayor invited Members of the Council to submit questions to appropriate Members.

145.01 Question

Ullakarin Clark asked the Executive Member for Corporate Services the following question, the reply to which is set out underneath:

Can the Member for Corporate Services confirm that we have undertaken sufficient planning and research into the proposed Customer First centre which was approved in the January Executive meeting? I ask this question because there has been some suggestion in the local press by opposition members that we have not carried out sufficient planning with this project which if so could be of concern.

Answer

Thank you very much for your question which I welcome because it gives me the opportunity to clear up a couple of points.

I can confirm that there has been a comprehensive feasibility study conducted to validate the proposals for the new customer first centre. The study involved a range of senior managers and staff and was designed to test our assumptions about the best model for

Wokingham and there were many. The study was also independently reviewed by an external third party who confirmed that our approach and conclusions were valid.

In December 2006, the IDeA undertook a “peer review” of Customer Services here in Wokingham. That review backed up the emerging headlines from our feasibility study and underlined the benefits that we believe will materialise from the Customer First programme.

Throughout the planning and research period, Officers and Members have also visited a number of other authorities, which certainly includes myself, who have already implemented a contact centre in order to learn from best practice and equally importantly to avoid some of the mistakes that some of the earlier runners did in fact make. We believe that this approach will stand us in very good stead as we move into the detailed planning and implementation phases of this programme through 2008 for some early implementation towards the end of this year and early 2009. So I think that the planning has been meticulous, very carefully investigated and I believe it will bring huge enhancement in customer service.

Supplementary Question

There are a lot of rumours flying about and I just want you to clarify once and for all that we are not going to outsource this to any other country, are we?

Answer

I categorically assure you that it will be in this country, in this town and indeed in this very building, not 50 feet from where you sit.

145.02 Question

Liz Siggery asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question, the reply to which is set out underneath:

I recently contacted you about the flooding in Robinhood Lane following your letter outlining the difficulties in implementing a solution. Following our on site meeting you agreed to ask the Officers to see if they could come up with any innovative solutions to what is a major issue to residents in my ward. Can you please provide me with an update of those discussions?

Answer

Thank you for your question and may I applaud your tenacity on this matter which is clearly a serious matter for your residents.

As you know from previous communications the most obvious solution is not practical due to the lack of fall in the existing pipework which would require a disproportionate investment to rectify.

Following our site meeting I asked the Officers to try and think “outside of the box” to come up with a solution. As a direct result they came up with a further three potential solutions. I would like to put on record my extreme thanks to them for their excellent effort on this.

Unfortunately, two of these – a soakaway to the adjacent embankment and some form of pumping mechanism beneath the road were not viable and had to be rejected.

However, the final suggestion does look promising, but until investigations are complete I cannot confirm whether this can fully go ahead. This solution entails adding pipework from the offending “puddle area”, down an adjacent alleyway and into the system in Bathurst Road. The key to whether we can go ahead or not lies in the positions of the services on the route. I have asked Officers to carry out the relevant searches so we know exactly what is there. Such searches take about 28 days to complete and I will provide an update to you as soon as they are complete.

Supplementary Question

Keith thank you so much for coming out with me to have a look at it and taking me seriously on this issue. If the searches that the Officers are doing show that there are no potential problems I am slightly concerned what the financial position regarding this scheme might be. Is there money available to fund it and I cannot wait for the dispersal of the Winnersh lake?

Answer

I have asked Officers to look at a variety of options on how it could be funded and they actually believe that this should be possible on the basis of preliminary estimates. Obviously the full extent of the work has yet to be defined and therefore the final cost may be different to the preliminary cost so this will have to be reviewed at that time.

145.03 Question

Perry Lewis asked the Executive Member for Local and Regional Planning the following question, the reply to which is set out underneath:

Residents across the Borough are dismayed by the apparent ease with which developers seem to be obtaining planning permission for ever more houses and flats. What has the Council been doing to seek a limitation to this seemingly inexhaustible supply of new houses being built in our Borough?

Answer

As Members will know, the Conservatives whilst in opposition fiercely opposed the Berkshire Structure Plan housing numbers which were agreed by a previous Liberal Democratic administration. When we replaced that Lib Dem administration we refused to sign up to the 8,110 houses by refusing to adopt the Berkshire Structure Plan. The consequence of this Lib Dem refusal to listen to us was that the Government imposed the Berkshire Structure Plan on us and sadly we are therefore stuck with these numbers. In fact the whole sorry saga is very well documented.

The Council therefore has to meet these Structure Plan housing numbers and the approval of new housing on land already committed for this purpose in our adopted Development Plan is part of meeting that requirement. Last April in the new PPS 3 the Government introduced a requirement to maintain a 5 year rolling land supply, and that has not been helpful to good planning.

It is not for the Council to make the development process easy or for that matter hard for the developers to have planning applications determined in the Borough. The statutory regulatory role of development control is to ensure that planning applications are determined legally and impartially based on the national and local policy.

The Development Control process makes sure that the right type, quality and scale of development is tabled for each site and our new Residential Design Guide will from now on impose high design standards on all housing proposals.

Supplementary Question

If the Government's most recent response to the South East Plan has been to further increase the number of houses planned for the Wokingham Borough can you tell me what action the Council has been taking to challenge this assertion by the Government?

Answer

This Conservative Administration has continued and does continue to oppose the numbers in the South East Plan. Although the South East Plan Inspector's Panel Report was published last August we still have not received the Government's proposed changes. At the enquiry we made a very strong case by raising many concerns about serious infrastructure deficiencies that if not addressed would lead to a reduction in the quality of life of our residents which we consider to be totally unacceptable.

In anticipation of the Government's response, due later this Spring, the Council is preparing its case to continue its fight for lower housing numbers and work is on-going to identify the weaknesses in the Panel's recommendations which will be updated once we get the Government's report.

It is our intention that all our residents are informed by letter once we have the Government's report so as to enable them to submit written comment during the 12-week period of consultation that will follow.

I do hope this answer will clearly show this Administration's very positive commitment to oppose any imposed increase in housing numbers for Wokingham Borough.

145.04 Question

Jenny Lissaman asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question, the reply to which is set out underneath:

The re-build of Addington School has already undergone three major revisions. Each time we have been assured that the administration has the project under tight control. Can you please explain why an application has recently been submitted to vary four of the planning conditions, including getting rid of the green roof and removing three of the highways conditions?

Answer

The Addington re-build is a major project procured on a 'Design and Build' basis, which allows for the expertise of the contractor and his design team to further develop the design during the project in conjunction with Wokingham Borough Council. As the project progresses proposals and designs are reviewed with the aim of increasing the benefits delivered by the project.

It is likely that further planning applications will be made during the remainder of the project. For example a sprinkler system was added to the scheme very late, so that is not included within the current consent.

The item you refer to in the question is the removal of the 'sedum' roof and this application has been withdrawn. The 'sedum' roof was added to the scheme originally because it

provides some environmental and ecological value. It may be that these benefits can be increased within the scheme by, for example, enhancing the woodland habitat, conservation planting and surface water storage. So further detailed reports have been commissioned to inform the decision-making process. In the meantime the erection of the structure and the water-proofing of the roof continue.

Supplementary Question

I would really like an answer to the question because that only seemed to be the answer as to why you were wanting to change the green roof but it didn't say anything about the removal of the three highways conditions which will involve considerable reduction in spend to the Council?

Answer

This is a very important project and it is a major project over the next year. We are planning to spend a further £5.7m over the next year so I agree with the principle behind your question that it is very important that we get this right.

In relation to the three planning conditions you refer to relating to the highways. Since the application was put in further work has been carried out and on further investigation and review they were deemed to provide no benefit to the operation of the highway or the School so these applications have also been withdrawn.

145.05 Question

Beth Rowland had asked the Leader of the Council the following question but due to her inability to attend the meeting the following written answer was provided:

Conservative MP for Reading East, Rob Wilson, has recently said publicly that Woodley and Earley are being starved of resources. Leaving aside the money from the government that has come in to fund two specific education projects, the rebuilding of Waingels College and Addington, what is your view of Mr Wilson's comments?

Answer

(Note: The written answer to this question will be added as soon as it available)

145.06 Question

Alan Spratling asked the Executive Member for Social Care the following question, the reply to which is set out underneath:

Question

Could the Executive Member please explain why in the Administration's recent budget it was necessary to increase the cost of Meals on Wheels by 10% and the charge to elderly and disabled people of the Railcard by almost 100%?

Answer

Charges for Meals on Wheels in Wokingham Borough have for some years been well below the Berkshire average, in fact the current year we are £2.55 and we are estimating £2.80 next year and £3.00 the year after. Continuing that point Slough, for example, is £3.30 per meal and indeed Bristol, which I believe is a Lib Dem controlled Council, which receive 50% of funding from Government instead of our 20% charges £3.39. Mindful of the impact on elderly and disabled residents of a sudden increase in February 2007 the Executive approved a three stage stepped increase, rather than imposing a one-off increase which would have been 22% or 51p per meal. Instead the Executive approved

the phased programme of increases at 10% per annum over 3 years. This current increase is the second year of a phased increase to bring charges up to the expected average cost across Berkshire unitaries.

The Council's Concessionary Travel scheme, which you also comment on, has seen the number of residents claiming rise by over 2,500 in the last 2 years and as I have explained with regard to finances from Central Government we are the worst funded. So this allied with the introduction of the new national free bus pass has already seen the scheme budget increased by £250,000 for 2008/09. In addition, the rail companies have increased the full cost of senior railcards, which are available to those aged 60 or over, by 20% to £24.00 from 1st January 2008.

Therefore in order to minimise council tax increases and keep these as low as possible for all of our Borough residents we are having to remove the subsidy we pay that allows us to offer senior railcards at such a low price. The cost therefore increases by 85%, not 100%, from £10.40 to £19.20 from 1st April 2008. Despite this the railcards purchased from the Council will still be some £4.80 cheaper than if it was purchased direct from a railway station (£19.20 instead of £24.00) as the Council receives a 20% discount on the full cost. Once purchased the railcard gives the user a 1/3rd discount on all off-peak travel.

It is disappointing that we are having to do this but we are still offering more than most other councils. WBC is the only local authority in the area that offers the senior railcard in addition to the national bus pass or travel tokens. Indeed, WBC has one of the best concessionary travel schemes anywhere in the South East despite, as I have said, the fact that we are the worst funded authority in the country.

Supplementary Question

When people over 80 only got 5p a week more in their pension how can you possibly justify these increases particularly as there is no subsidy from the Council now on railcards at all this year?

Answer

I have explained that we are making sure that all our residents get the service to which they are entitled. We will continue to provide a service to the most vulnerable in our society but we have to manage our finances and they are still getting a discount and we are still passing on the total discount that we get from the rail companies to our residents.

145.07 Question

Stephen Conway asked the Leader of the Council the following question, the reply to which is set out underneath:

I was disturbed to note that the recent council budget failed to make provision for grants to many key voluntary bodies that provide a vital service to our residents. Such a failure seems particularly regrettable when the Conservative administration has suggested that the voluntary sector should help to provide the services that the Council itself offered to the elderly and vulnerable until last year. The voluntary sector is expected to take on more responsibilities, but is not being given the resources to do so. Will the Leader of Council explain what steps he intends to take to enable the voluntary sector to carry out their work?

Answer

The Council has agreed annual grants of £344,550 to the voluntary and community sector for 2008-9 in recognition of the important services these organisations provide right across the Borough. However, this is only a part of the overall package of support the Council gives to local voluntary and community groups under Section 137 of the 1972 Local Government Act to recognise the considerable work these groups do in providing a wide range of services to our communities.

The Council also has discretionary powers to direct resources towards voluntary and community sector development, including service level agreements, economic development work, accommodation grants, and discretionary rate relief. For 2008-9 this equates to some £2.3million, representing an increase of nearly 4% on the 2007-8 total. In addition, the voluntary and community sector is supported via a number of specific central government grants coordinated by the Council, including the Carers Fund, the Children's Fund, prevention monies, Safer Stronger Communities contribution, and Supporting People programme and just to highlight the amount of money, as I think this is the nub of your question Councillor Conway, under the eligibility changes we are proposing to invest something like £2.9m into preventative work over the coming year. That is £563k into reablement, £1.3m into supporting people, £453k into prevention schemes, £327k into equipment and adaptations, £52k in falls prevention and £220k into employment services which brings the total of £2.9m.

Supplementary Question

Thank you very much for that full answer and I hope that you or your successor will recognise that this Council should never again leave the voluntary sector in such an uncertain state as it was left in by this year's budget. Do you accept that telling our partners in the voluntary sector in February that any funding they receive from this Council would depend on subsequent discussions with our Community Care Department is not good enough? It means that they have no opportunity to plan how they might deliver services, often to very vulnerable people, over the coming year. We really do need to do better than that.

Answer

I think that is a slight distortion of the actuality and there have been significant ongoing discussions with key partners over a number of months. The decision as reflected in the budget papers should not have been a surprise to any of our key partners and I believe that key negotiations are still ongoing where appropriate.

146. MEMBER QUESTIONS – ON MINUTE AND WARDS MATTERS

In accordance with the agreed procedure, the Mayor invited Members of the Council to submit questions to appropriate Members.

146.01 Question

Dee Tomlin asked the Executive Member for Social Care the following question, the reply to which is set out underneath:

I was extremely distressed to receive a phone call from a resident of my ward this week, a 75 year old lady whose pension had gone up by £3.00, her Council housing rent by £5.00 and lets not even go near the increase in her Council Tax. She is a Council tenant and has received a letter from the Council to say that as of this week, she will no longer be able to receive free hedge cutting and grass cutting despite being given a Council property

with a large garden, which has a lot of grass and a hedge that runs alongside a pavement. She cannot do this herself as she is ill with angina and now it would seem that she is going to have to pay for a service that was previously free at short notice. Would you not agree that this is another Tory attack on the most vulnerable and needy in our Borough?

Answer

I would stress that yes that is unfortunate, but it is not a Tory attack, it is a Labour attack. We receive £12m rent from our Council Tax tenants and this Government takes £5m of that from us. Out of the balance that is left we have to actually make matters work. It is unfortunate, but rents have gone up in line with Government's guidance and we are still carrying out repairs, we are doing all the work that we can. I would love that the situation was somewhat different, but I do not see how you can blame a Tory Administration for managing it so that we still continue to provide the repairs that are required and we still do all of the other things that are required for our tenants. Yes, it is unfortunate that rents have gone up. The pension has gone up, but we do not set the pension. I will look at grass cutting, but it is part of the reason that we have had to withdraw that service. We will continue to look at other opportunities of providing the service. I would be delighted as Executive Member for Social Care if you could come up with some constructive ideas of how the Council could move this forward. However, when we receive £12m rents which is having £5m taken from it, we have to manage our resources.

146.02 Question

Perry Lewis asked the Executive Member for Highways & Transport the following question, the reply to which is set out underneath:

Many of the residential roads of my ward, Wokingham Without have not seen any resurfacing since they were built well over 30 years ago. Can the Executive Member tell me what the Council is going to do to rectify this situation in the coming year?

Answer

I would like to preface my answer by saying that we have got significant kilometres of road to resurface and maintain and safety is the paramount driver of the actions we take. Although what I say now is good news for you, I do need to stress the caveat that it can be overridden on safety grounds. In terms of your ward, full resurfacing is scheduled for Dukes Ride and preventative maintenance is scheduled for Hilary Drive, Corsham Way, Westbury Close, New Wokingham Road, Lyneham Road and Thornbury Close. That is a total investment of £130k.

146.03 Question

Alan Clifford asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question, the reply to which is set out underneath:

In June 2007, the Council stated in its consultation document on play areas that action would be taken as soon as possible. In January 2008 it was stated that final recommendations would be brought to this Council in March. I note that there is no such report in the papers that you have before you and I would like to know when are we going to hear from this report, particularly with regard to Hearn Road and Mollison Close and I am sure that the residents in those areas would like to be told as soon as possible.

Answer

Yes, obviously there is no report here today and the work on that is on going. We hope to bring that forward as soon as possible.

146.04 Question

Liz Siggery asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question, the reply to which is set out underneath:

We have a big problem in Bathhurst Road in Winnersh with parking. The verges are being destroyed by cars that park on them and children that try to cycle around them. It is becoming dangerous, but it also looks very tatty now. I did mention this to the Executive Member some time ago who did say that a preliminary investigation would be undertaken. I am just hoping that you have had the time to do that?

Answer

Officers have started to look at it and they are pursuing the option of installing grass with grids on the verges which will improve the situation no end. That work is ongoing.

146.05 Question

Stephen Conway asked the Executive Member for Environmental Services the following question, the reply to which is set out underneath:

There seems to be a problem between Environmental Services and Children's Services sorting out what is supposed to be happening with children's play areas. I am particularly concerned with a play area for young children in Broad Hinton, Twyford. It has been closed for three years pending a decision as to where it should be moved to and the relocation of its equipment into another play area nearby. I was very strongly assured that a report would be coming to the Executive this month, which it clearly has not. I would be very grateful if it is not possible to provide an answer now, to get some kind of a written answer that explains why there has been such a long delay and why despite the promise that it would come to this months Executive, get political approval and get implemented, nothing is happening?

Answer

I think really there is little to add beyond what we have already heard from the Executive Member for Children's Services, but I will get together with him because as you correctly state this is an issue that crosses into several different aspects of the Council's activities. We will endeavour to get you a written response.

146.06 Question

Bob Wyatt asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question, the reply to which is set out underneath:

Langborough Road in Westcott ward is in a poor state of repair. The road is in about the worst condition of any of those in the town, pavements are becoming hazardous to pedestrians, pushchairs and wheelchairs. Can the Executive Member please state when he intends to resurface Langborough Road and its pavements?

Answer

I will not repeat my previous caveat, but Langborough Road is currently third on the list for resurfacing with an investment of £65k.

146.07 Question

Malcolm Armstrong asked the Executive Member for Environmental Services the following question, the reply to which is set out underneath:

A large number of Winnersh residents use Dinton Pastures. In respect of this, I have had a number of complaints about the Café. Mirroring the consultation responses, my residents have reported a limited menu, running out of food, a lacklustre attitude of the staff and lack of broad management. What reassurances can you give me that these problems will be urgently addressed?

Answer

Since this is the first occasion that you have told me about this please understand that I do not think it is practical for me to respond with a detailed answer at this stage. Would you perhaps speak to me outside of this meeting and give me some details because I have not had these comments reported directly to me by any Winnersh residents.

146.08 Question

Jenny Lissaman asked the Leader of the Council the following question, the reply to which is set out underneath:

What is the latest on the third Thames bridge, the one that you promised to push forward and put in a planning application for very soon?

Answer

I suspect it might be worth you having a chat with Councillor Steve Chapman outside of this meeting as he is the Council's representative on the Strategic Transport Board for Berkshire which is now leading on this project. I am pleased to say that we have agreement from Reading Borough Council that this is a key project that should be supported and it has been supported as part of the capacity funding that we have received from central government. The consultants have now, I think, drawn up Phase Two of the project which requires significant funding and there will be discussions between Reading Borough Council and Wokingham Borough Council as to how that funding is identified and brought forward.

146.09 Question

Prue Bray asked the Executive Member for Social Care the following question, the reply to which is set out underneath:

Part of the King Street end of Bailey Court was knocked down some weeks ago, not for the first time. The wall belongs to the Council and rubble has been removed, but leaving a gapping hole in the wall decorated by a nice orange plastic barrier. I was wondering if you could tell me when it is going to be repaired or what is going to be done with it?

Answer

Malcolm Armstrong and I attended a meeting at Rainbow Park at which we were made aware of the wall. I have discussed this with Tenant Services, however I cannot give you an exact date but the matter is in hand.

147. NOTICE OF MOTION 297

The Council considered the following Notice of Motion submitted by Mrs E Siggery and seconded by Matt Deegan.

“This Council notes and applauds the successful move from a County Council and six District Councils to six Unitaries made in Berkshire some ten years ago.

We believe this has reduced bureaucracy, improved transparency in local government and enhanced services for our residents.

We wish to put on the record our thanks and appreciation to the officers and members involved in that transition”.

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

RESOLVED: This Council notes and applauds the successful move from a County Council and six District Councils to six Unitaries made in Berkshire some ten years ago.

We believe this has reduced bureaucracy, improved transparency in local government and enhanced services for our residents.

We wish to put on the record our thanks and appreciation to the officers and members involved in that transition.

148. NOTICE OF MOTION 298

The Council considered the following Notice of Motion submitted by Malcolm Bryant and seconded by Mrs Ullakarin Clark.

“This Council calls on Network Rail, Southwest Trains and First Great Western to update and regenerate Wokingham station and its environs to bring facilities into the 21st Century in this fast growing area of mid-Berkshire”.

During the course of the debate, it was suggested that a business lunch or meeting might be organised between the Mayor and Chief Executive of the Council with the Chief Executive of Network Rail, Southwest Trains and First Great Western in order to promote the case for the development of Wokingham station.

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

RESOLVED: This Council calls on Network Rail, Southwest Trains and First Great Western to update and regenerate Wokingham station and its environs to bring facilities into the 21st Century in this fast growing area of mid-Berkshire.

149. NOTICE OF MOTION 299

The Council considered the following Notice of Motion submitted by Prue Bray and seconded by Stephen Conway.

“This council regrets that the Conservative administration has

- considered withdrawing Homestart’s grant, potentially leaving vulnerable families without support,

- restricted access to adult social services to people with “Critical” needs only while failing to secure alternative services, putting Wokingham Borough in the bottom ten councils in the country,
- done too little too late to take proper consideration of resident’s views on the level of development proposed for Elms Field,
- cut the school maintenance budget year on year, leaving schools requiring millions of pounds worth of repair work,
- failed to plan appropriately for the housing allocated to Wokingham Borough under the South East Plan and, further, identified more house building sites than the housing allocation requires, and
- presided over a dramatic decline in services for our tenants

While spending money on

- plasma screens and glass engraving in the council chamber,
- providing Sky TV in the councillors’ rest area,
- increasing the number of councillors who receive extra allowances, and
- changing the District into a Borough

Council calls on the administration to rethink its priorities”.

Upon being put to the vote, the Mayor declared that the Motion had been lost.

150. NOTICE OF MOTION 300

The Council considered the following Notice of Motion proposed by Jenny Lissaman and seconded by Perry Lewis.

“This Council notes that:

- An estimated 17.5 billion plastic bags are handed out by supermarkets in the UK every year.
- The proliferation of plastic bags causes considerable environmental damage.
- These bags result in a substantial financial cost the Council, and to the local taxpayers in Wokingham Borough, through landfill charges and litter collection costs.

This Council welcomes the good work many Councils across the UK, including Woodley Town Council and Wokingham Town Council, have been doing to promote the reduction of disposable plastic bag use and resolved to:

1. Work with community partners and the business sector to actively find ways to encourage consumers to use “bags for life” instead of disposable plastic bags.
2. Set an example by using only biodegradable and reusable bags in council promotions.”

151. CONTINUATION OF MEETING

In accordance with Procedure Rule 4.2.8, Council considered a Motion to continue the meeting for a maximum of 30 minutes to enable further business on the Agenda to be transacted.

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

152. NOTICE OF MOTION 300 CONTINUED

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

RESOLVED: This Council notes that:

- An estimated 17.5 billion plastic bags are handed out by supermarkets in the UK every year.
- The proliferation of plastic bags causes considerable environmental damage.
- These bags result in a substantial financial cost the Council, and to the local taxpayers in Wokingham Borough, through landfill charges and litter collection costs.

This Council welcomes the good work many Councils across the UK, including Woodley Town Council and Wokingham Town Council, have been doing to promote the reduction of disposable plastic bag use and resolved to:

1. Work with community partners and the business sector to actively find ways to encourage consumers to use “bags for life” instead of disposable plastic bags.
2. Set an example by using only biodegradable and reusable bags in council promotions.

153. NOTICE OF MOTION 301

The Council considered the following Notice of Motion proposed by Frank Browne and seconded by

“This Council deplores the latest antics by Central Government to increase this Borough’s housing targets through the Local Area Agreement process.

Furthermore Wokingham Borough Council reiterates its categorical belief that the most appropriate level of growth is as set out in our submission to the Regional Assembly and that we are committed to fighting any higher numbers.

This position is based on the historic growth rates we have seen over the last 25-30 years, the lack of infrastructure investment seen over the same period and the unsustainability of the proposals Central Government wishes to impose upon this Borough.”

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

RESOLVED: This council deplores the latest antics by Central Government to increase this Borough’s housing targets through the Local Area Agreement process.

Furthermore Wokingham Borough Council reiterates its categorical belief that the most appropriate level of growth is as set out in our submission to the Regional Assembly and that we are committed to fighting any higher numbers.

This position is based on the historic growth rates we have seen over the last 25-30 years, the lack of infrastructure investment seen over the same period and the unsustainability of the proposals Central Government wishes to impose upon this Borough.

These are the Minutes of a meeting of the Council

If you need help in understanding this document or if you would like a copy of it in large print please contact one of our Team Support Officers.

Valedictory Speech by Councillor Angus Ross

Madam Mayor,

It is with some trepidation that I stand up today on behalf of the Conservative Group to thank and honour the service of six of our colleagues who are leaving the Council after so many years service and such contributions. It was a salutary thought that I find myself, after yourself Madam mayor and the Deputy Mayor, as the longest serving Conservative not standing down this year.

It is appropriate that we say our farewells now, before we start the cut and thrust of party politics which will most probably enter into the remainder of this evening's proceedings.

We have to celebrate and thank for 104 years of service – yes 104 years – that is averaging over 17 years each. I need to be brief!

But may I start with the newest members – Tim Charlesworth, elected for Finchampstead North in May 1997 – eleven years ago and exec member for Education for 2 years and Pamela Graddon, elected for Charvil almost 7 years ago and Chairman of our group for almost 3 years

Then the old stagers!

First Alan Clifford elected for Loddon back 22 years ago in May 1986 and leader of his group for two years

Then Alan Spratling elected for Hillside back in 1983, a mere 25 years ago. Alan was leader of his group over a number of years and Leader of the Council. So dedicated was Alan that he persuaded his wife Elaine to stand against me on at least one occasion in Wokingham Without. Alan has always appeared to me to be direct, courteous and even-handed.

All four councillors have contributed enormously to the council, its image in the community and their work on committees noted. All have been noted for speaking their mind when the time came!– they will all be missed.

And then the Daddy of them all, Iain Brown elected for Norreys in January 1981 - before some members were born! Leader of the Council for three years 1987-1990 and Chairman in 2005 and a great driver for our newly acquired Borough status. I would defy anyone to reel off all the committees on which he has served. All I can say is that anyone who can match your enthusiasm over such a long period is doing very well. Thank you again Iain.

I've left our current Leader, Frank Browne to last - not the longest serving but an impressive time spent as the Leader – 6 years, or half his time as a Councillor, representing Wargrave and Remenham and latterly Ruscombe as well. I trust everyone in the council will recognise the commitment and service this shows – times of great change and development as a successful unitary authority. Our group have earned the support of a significant majority of the borough's voters urged on by his leadership, drive and enthusiasm for the task. Two Browns down – one to go

On behalf of our Group, may I propose a vote of thanks to these six councillors and wish them good health and good fortune in the years ahead – we will miss them.

Valedictory Speech by Councillor Prue Bray

GOODBYE TO COUNCILLORS RETIRING IN MAY

Speech by Councillor Prue Bray (Leader of the Lib Dem Councillor Group and Councillor for Winnersh ward).

There are a number of members retiring at this election to whom we should pay tribute.

On the Lib Dem side, there is ALAN SPRATLING, who has this year celebrated 25 years of public service as a member, including as Leader of the Lib Dem Group and Leader of the Council. A lot of things have happened since Alan first sat down in a pond in Earley – I may have got the details of his early political campaigning slightly wrong, but protesting over a pond came into it somewhere I believe. As Leader of the Council Alan saw us through a very difficult period of much harsher government financing than we have now, and also oversaw the enforced change from the old committee system to the brave new world of Executive and Scrutiny. For the whole 25 years, including while he was Leader of the Council, he has done a sterling job in representing the residents of his ward, and there are many people with good cause to be grateful to him for the work he has done on their behalf. It is only a few years ago that we nearly lost Alan from the Council in a far worse way, when he collapsed and nearly died, and had to have a heart bypass. He survived that, and now has the chance to go into what I hope will be a long and happy retirement playing trains. I will miss his sage advice and quiet humour, and I wish him and Elaine all the very best.

The other Alan, ALAN CLIFFORD, is also standing down this year. I am not sure if there is something about being called Alan, but Alan Clifford has served almost as long as Alan Spratling - 22 years as opposed to 25 – and he is also a former Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group. He has worked just as hard for the residents of Woodley as the other Alan has for the residents of Earley, as anyone will attest who has ever seen him running round the streets in his shirt-sleeves in the middle of winter knocking on doors. Alan has amassed an enormous amount of expertise in affordable and social housing over the years, and I hope he will be prepared to continue to offer me the benefit of his advice on that subject – in between telling me about all the exotic trips he and Pat are planning for his well-earned retirement.

It would be churlish not to mention the several Conservative members who are also standing down, one at least after very long service, even though his name is not Alan, but IAIN BROWN. Iain is of course a past chairman of the council. I wish him many happy flying hours. He will probably be very grateful not to have to listen to me at any more Scrutiny meetings.

We are also saying goodbye to TIM CHARLESWORTH, and to PAMELA GRADDON, and I wish them both well.

And finally, FRANK. I could not let his departure go unmarked, but thinking of the right words to say has been quite a challenge. In the end I decided that the only way to properly commemorate the occasion was with a poem.

I am not the best of poets, so at first I thought of borrowing already existing verse, and I turned to Shakespeare. How about a sonnet?

“Shall I compare thee to a Liberal Democrat?” well, no, on second thoughts, perhaps not.

Or perhaps a famous soliloquy? “Torier and Torier and Torier creeps in this petty pace...” but I didn’t like the way that one was going.

Then I tried Elizabeth Barrett Browning “How shall I miss thee? Let me count the ways” but that was going to be rather short.

At that point I realised there was nothing for it but to write my own original verse. I apologise in advance for the fact that I come more from the William McGonnagall branch of poetry than the Shakespearean. For those of you who don’t know McGonnagall, he is the poet that wrote the Tay Bridge Disaster – but rest assured, Frank, I have not entitled this poem the Wokingham Disaster. Here it is:

*There was a young Conservative called Frank Browne who came from Remenham Hill.
In 2002 he became the Leader of Wokingham District, later renamed Borough, Council.
In 2008 he decided that of local government he had now had his fill.
Despite the fact that we have hardly ever agreed about anything, on his departure I wish
him good luck and not ill-will.*

Best wishes for the future to all the councillors who are standing down this year.

Prue Bray

Additional Outside Body Reports from Members Received Following the Meeting

From Councillor David Chopping (Maiden Erlegh)
Members Room
Wokingham Borough Council

To: Full Council

Update and Annual Report on the Waterside Centre, Earley

As most Councillors will be aware, the Waterside Centre has now been in existence for some seven years and has been dogged by a number of problems, specifically:

- (a) The failure to agree proper lease terms, prior to allowing occupancy.
- (b) Inadequate original terms of reference for the appropriate management of the centre.
- (c) Inappropriate arrangements between the freeholder, head lessees, lessees and potential sub tenants.
- (d) Inadequate service provision.
- (e) Design and constructional difficulties, both actual and perceived, resulting in a lack of a formal maintenance regime.

Prior to my appointment, I was aware there had been difficulties, as these were communicated to me as a member of Earley Town Council. However, I was not aware of the intricacies/complexities of the problem and the way that the matter had been handled.

I attended my first Board Meeting as the Council's representative in November 2006 and made it clear that the Centre had to put its own management in order. I then brought the matter to the attention of the Executive Member who, in turn, raised the overall situation with the Executive and a draft ultimatum was drawn up, in an endeavour to resolve outstanding problems.

I am also aware that, during 2007, there were communications between Officers and Centre Management, in an endeavour to resolve perceived legal difficulties. Though the Centre was running satisfactorily, with the Centre Manager carrying out the appropriate functions and providing the facilities for the various users, the actual management of the Centre (buildings) itself had fallen into disarray.

During September, I became increasingly concerned about the apparent lack of cooperation and movement from the Waterside Centre Management. Following consultations with the present Executive Member and our own Legal Department, I presented an ultimatum at the AGM (incidentally, their first Board Meeting under the changed regime). The result has been a substantial change in the attitude, both of the Waterside Centre and other interested parties. The subtenants/users had been growing increasingly concerned about the lack of any appropriate tenure and, at this stage, have welcomed the resultant progress.

On 27th November, Officers and Members set out a forward programme confirming the Council's requirement for matters to be brought to a head.

As a consequence

- (a) Following the conclusion of the terms of the main underlease, this was able to be confirmed by Oracle, the freeholders.
- (b) Draft subleases, to the various users, have been agreed in principle.
- (c) An easement surrounding the recently installed water supply over land partly owned by the Reading University, WBC and Oracle, is awaiting regularisation.
- (d) Costs and maintenance of water supply and drainage are being identified.
- (e) The substance of a Deed of Easement has been drafted and is on file.

Members might like to note that the WWBC Board Meeting due for last Monday has had to be postponed, as Nick Johnson has had to go abroad on business.

My concerns remain over the way this matter has been handled, with Officers' problems in more recent years resulting mainly from incorrect decisions made at the time of set-up and inauguration of the Centre, and the failure to address issues of this nature at that time. Whilst this has not resulted in any financial loss, apart from Officer time, to Wokingham Borough Council, I do believe it has meant that users have been left in a state of uncertainty, which could have been avoided.

David D Chopping