

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE COUNCIL
HELD ON 23 JULY 2015 FROM 7.30 PM TO 9.15 PM**

Members Present

Councillors: Parry Batth (Mayor), Bob Pitts (Deputy Mayor), Mark Ashwell, Alistair Auty, Keith Baker, Laura Blumenthal, Prue Bray, David Chopping, Gary Cowan, Lindsay Ferris, Michael Firmager, Mike Gore, Guy Grandison, Kate Haines, Mike Haines, Charlotte Haitham Taylor, John Halsall, Pauline Helliard-Symons, Tim Holton, Philip Houldsworth, Dianne King, Norman Jorgensen, Pauline Jorgensen, John Kaiser, Abdul Loyes, Tom McCann, Julian McGhee-Sumner, Ken Miall, Stuart Munro, Ian Pittock, Barrie Patman, Malcolm Richards, Angus Ross, Beth Rowland, Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey, Chris Singleton, David Sleight, Chris Smith, Wayne Smith, Bill Soane, Rob Stanton, Alison Swaddle, Paul Swaddle, Simon Weeks, Bob Wyatt and Shahid Younis

17. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillors Chris Bowring, UllaKarin Clark, Nicky Jerrome, David Lee, Philip Mirfin, Anthony Pollock and Nick Ray.

The Mayor welcomed back Rob Stanton from his recent illness. Rob Stanton thanked Members for their messages of support during his illness and praised the Royal Berkshire Hospital for the excellent care that they had provided.

18. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meetings of Council held on 19 March and 21 May 2015 were confirmed as correct records subject to the amendment of a table in Minute 6.2 of the minutes of 21 May 2015, and signed by the Chairman.

19. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Tom McCann declared a Personal Interest on the grounds that his daughter was employed by a company involved with the Wokingham Town Centre Regeneration Project.

20. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions received.

21. PETITIONS

There were no petitions received.

22. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor informed Members that he had been privileged to attend William Iland's 101st birthday and to present him with the Chevalier Odre National de la Legion d'Honneur, the highest French military honour. Mr Iland had received this honour because of his involvement with the battle for Normandy and the liberation of France.

23. CHANGES TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

The Council considered a report regarding changes to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee structure as set out within the Agenda.

Tim Holton thanked members of the Community Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee past and present for their valuable contribution. He commented that at the

start of the municipal year the workloads of the scrutiny committees had been reviewed. The Community Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee's workload had been comparatively light and combining the committee with the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee was considered a better use of resources. It was noted that the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee would monitor the effectiveness of the new structure.

Prue Bray commented that the Community Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee could have undertaken additional work had it been allowed, such as talking to partners about budgets and working together to improve efficiency and maintain services.

Michael Firmager commented that the way in which the committees worked had changed and that the Community Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee's workload had reduced. Merging the committee with the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee would see a reduction in unnecessary meetings.

It was proposed by Tim Holton and seconded by Michael Firmager that the recommendations set out in the report be approved.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the Corporate Services and Community Partnership Overview and Scrutiny Committees be amalgamated to become the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
- 2) the terms of reference of the amalgamated committee as set out in Appendix 1 to the report be agreed;
- 3) that the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee consist of 7 Conservative Group Members and 1 Liberal Democrat Member, plus 2 substitute Members per group, as advised by the Group Leaders;
- 4) it be noted that the Chairman and Vice Chairman will be appointed at the first meeting of the amalgamated Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

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

Keith Baker, Leader of the Council:

I have two topics I wish to inform Council of. The first one is around budget setting for 2016/17. For some time we have been looking at ways to engage our residents and the difficult task of balancing the books. Every year we are forced to find significant savings whilst the demand on some services simply increase exponentially. At the same time the ability to mitigate some of this through Council Tax increases is also limited due to the Government imposed cap. Our neighbouring authorities all have some form of budget consultation vehicle; be it a web based questionnaire or maybe a citizen's panel. However, all these approaches have limitations so we will be trying a different approach designed to remove some of these limitations. This approach will be based around face to face engagement with residents by holding a series of events and inviting the public to engage with us in thinking about how we set our budgets and how we spend money as a Council. We are looking to hold at least five events in local venues across the Borough. We will publicise these as early as we can. There may be additional events with specific

audiences in mind; for example the seventeen parish councils. The basic programme will be to firstly introduce the process; talking about how we cut the cake; where the cake comes from; how the cake is shrinking; whether it has got salt or sugar in it. Number two would be group work on tables; what are the services that the Council provides that are of the greatest value and importance? How would you allocate reducing resources to the services the Council runs? Number three, the third feature, would be feedback, including setting out how we will use the information we have gathered. Information will be available to the groups and on display setting out the range of services the Council provides and some other information about activity, volume, costs etc. Officers will be in attendance to support the exercise, facilitate the group work and provide expert advice to the groups on services, the impact of cuts and similar things. We will capture the outputs, the questions we receive and suggestions about how we might do things differently or better. Our intention through the sessions will also be to find volunteers who might also want to be involved on a more regular basis and who can help us improve the exercise for future years.

The second big statement I would like to make is an update on the statement I made at the Executive meeting in March concerning how the Council is seeking to ensure that its responses to the threat of child sexual exploitation (CSE) are as robust as they need to be. I said then that an independent review of the leadership and governance the Council provides across Children's Services, focused on CSE would take place. An independent person with considerable experience and knowledge in this field has been commissioned by me and her work has begun. She will be holding interviews with key Members and Officers this month. Her final report will be reported formally to the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny group and to the Executive, along with any actions that emerge from her recommendations to bring about further improvements.

Charlotte Haitham Taylor, Executive Member for Children's Services:

I am delighted to inform you that the Regional Schools Commissioner has confirmed our recommendation of Bohunt Educational Trust as a provider of our new secondary school in the South and secondly the Floreat Education for the primary school at Montague Park. The field of shortlisted providers for both schools was strong and the decision by the Wokingham Borough Council panel was unanimous. From the initial six expressions of interest for our new secondary school in the South, five applications were received and four Trusts were interviewed. All four Trusts gave very strong presentations and interviews. However, Bohunt's submission and vision was truly inspiring. Bohunt Educational Trust clearly understood the timetable of delivery for our new school and they demonstrated how they would hit the ground running, providing dedicated leadership from the outset and innovative and exciting approach to teaching and an understanding of the issues and views raised by our parents and community.

From the initial five expressions of interest for the primary school at Montague Park three applications were received and following shortlisting two Trusts were interviewed in April. In particular Floreat's curriculum model was innovative and exciting. Not only did they provide a comprehensive description in their application but they were also able to support and defend their ideas during their assessment. The level of detail in their preparation and material was impressive. Other strong features included the willingness to share their curriculum model and teaching skills with other local schools; their investment in teacher training; the longer school day but also longer holidays but overall more taught time; traditional values and strong community engagement. Both providers have the resources and the ability to deliver both of these schools.

Still on the theme of our schools, just this week a draft Primary School Strategy was taken to the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee. There will be a task and finish group looking at this in more detail before it goes to the Executive in a couple of months' time. Briefly I wanted to reflect on the excellent work that is also going on locally and further afield, indeed as far away as Australia, to recruit experienced social workers. We have a less than 10% vacancy rate and I hope that all Members will join me in welcoming our new antipodean social workers in Wokingham Borough; once the Ashes are over of course.

Lastly, we have just held a very successful Youth Conference and I thought that it might be helpful to share with you some of our proposed partnership pledges. We would like to continue to focus on young people in need and ensure that they have support from all of the services they need, helping to promote their self-assurance and self-resilience. We want to encourage our Health partners to be more involved with the support of Children in Care and encourage support activities. We also want to support young people at risk of poor education and employment outcomes, to achieve through the Virtual School and lastly to work with schools on bullying and celebrate the next anti bullying week. Perhaps Members could think about how they could help to deliver these pledges and commit to hearing the young people's voice.

Stuart Munro, Deputy Executive Member for Economic Development and Finance:

I am really delighted to give Council an update on some of the economic development we have been doing with Elevate Wokingham. The Elevate Berkshire team have successfully registered an expression of interest for European funding to support the continuation of the Elevate Wokingham Hub, which has been a success. The next stage will be to submit a full application. Elevate Wokingham has successfully won a small grant of £7,500 from the Skills Funding Agency. This will be to run a series of workshops for unemployed people to help them gain employment. This will also include CV writing, interview skills and building confidence. Elevate Wokingham is working with Children's Services and HR to develop a council wide supported apprentice scheme. The scheme will encourage a greater number of apprenticeship opportunities for young people, including some of our most vulnerable residents. A successful Careers Information morning about how the Council works and a description of different job opportunities within the Council was held for Year 12 students. In addition, two Year 12 students from Emmbrook School completed a week of work experience placed within the Council in Finance and Democratic Services. I think you will also remember that Create and Elevate are on the cover of the summer Borough News too, so again a little thing helping a lot.

Work is now underway to deliver a very successful Careers Fayre, which this year will be managed by the Elevate team and held on Wednesday 7 October at Loddon Valley Leisure Centre. I would recommend that all Members attend if they can. Initial invitations have been sent out to interested businesses and organisations and this year we are providing businesses with sponsorship opportunities.

John Kaiser, Executive Member for Planning and Highways:

I will be asking the Executive to back plans to take charge of producing and promoting travel plans for the new residents in the Borough on the major developments, this month. Travel plans are produced for people moving into new homes in the Borough, in order to encourage them to walk, cycle, bus or train around the Borough to manage the increase in the congestion. Currently travel plans are the responsibility of developers building the homes but I will be bringing forward a set of proposals to the Executive for approval, that the Borough would undertake travel planning with the money secured from the developers for this purpose. This approach to travel plans will see developers pay the Council £450

per home to fund the project and that will help new residents get around the Borough and provide incentives for people to consider sustainable options for some of the journeys as improved information tailored for individual residents and other schemes will help promote sustainable travel. Cars are a vital part of modern life and as such our transport and highways planning must reflect that. Almost all of us drive cars and that is not going to change in the near future but if we could just cut a few car journeys, if we thought about alternatives a bit more, with increased park and ride facilities and upgraded cycleways. This will help inform people's choice. Sustainable travel planning is about giving people information and choice to help them consider alternative ways of travelling. Congestion is a serious problem across the South East and the only long term solution is to manage the car. We are building new roads and improving junctions and that is important but it is only part of the solution.

If approved by the Executive, the Borough Council will use an agreed revenue stream of £5.6m from developers, specifically for the purpose of travel planning initiatives during the period of the Core Strategy to 2026. Travel plans produced by developers in the past have only been of limited value as they are short term, restricted to small areas and run by developers who do not necessarily have a strong commitment to their success. By taking the money and managing the plans ourselves we can plan long-term across the Borough so the initiatives we put in place will be joined up and complement each other. It is all about keeping the Borough moving.

Julian McGhee-Sumner, Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing:

I have three items that I would like to speak to Council about this evening. First of all, the Fosters site in Woodley. Work is ongoing to redevelop the old Fosters care home site to provide 36 extra care apartments for older people. The bespoke design has now been agreed to ensure a state of the art care facility that focuses on independence and wellbeing. There has been a minor setback. Unfortunately, only two construction firms have expressed an interest in tendering for the work, so to ensure value for money for the public purse we will be going back to the wider market through a wider procurement programme but this is likely to provide an extension of between one and three months. Construction should start this winter with the aim of completion in Spring 2017.

Step Up-Step Down facilities. In partnership with the Wokingham Clinical Commissioning Group, Optalis and Catalyst Homes, we have converted two apartments at Alexandra Grange in Woodley into re-ablement flats. These are short stay flats with 24 hour onsite care plus intensive rehabilitation. The scheme is part of our Better Care Fund pooled budget between the Council and the Wokingham Clinical Commissioning Group. The idea is to get those who have had hospital stays but are not yet able to manage at home out of hospital as soon as they are medically fit. They are then able to recover their independence and in most cases go back home with their own package of support. The flats can also be used to avoid hospital admission and that is what we are looking for from the first couple to try this service. A wife, a carer for her husband, unfortunately broke her wrist. Instead of being admitted overnight into hospital and the husband having to go into respite care, they are able to stay together and get the care they needed at Alexandra Place. There are plans to extend the scheme pending evaluation of this pilot phase but it has certainly got off to a good start.

Turning now to the Care Act. Members will be aware that the Government has announced the intention to defer the introduction of Phase 2 of the Care Act. Phase 2, which was due to take effect from April 2016 would have seen the introduction of the care cap; a maximum amount of £72,000 that anyone would have to pay for their care. Responding to

a request from the Local Government Association to defer the care cap because of fears of the potential added burden that it would add to Councils, Alistair Burt the Care Minister replied to confirm that the timetable has been pushed back to 2020 but that there was still a strong commitment to ensure its introduction during this Parliament. Though there will be mixed feelings about the delay, given the rising adult social care costs, there is also a sense of relief for we have more time to prepare for this major reform into adult social care funding.

Pauline Jorgensen, Executive Member for Resident Services:

The drive for digital engagement as an option for our residents continues in Wokingham Borough. Further improvements have been made to the website with new sections for Planning and Building Control, Careers, Parks and Countryside. Website feedback from our customers is 90% positive and they report it to be easy to navigate, clear and simple and new website sections have been added to support Waste Services requests including missed bin collections and garden waste cancellations. These currently link up to our suppliers, avoiding retyping of information and they will eventually be implemented as part of the new customer portal when it is implemented in September, allowing information to flow straight from the residents to the suppliers without touching the sides.

The new planning system went live on 22 June for new applications. This will be incorporated into the customer portal again into September, allowing residents to view building control applications and report planning breaches online and much improving the search and usability, and hopefully the reliability as well. The integration with Mapping will save approximately £23,000 per annum. A new housing system was implemented this July. This system is again fully integrated with our financial systems and in operation will save around about £40,000 a year. All of this money will help our hard pressed taxpayers to ensure that they do not get charged more.

We have held a very successful Customer Engagement Stall in Wokingham Library and in the town centre on 20 June. People were really pleased to speak to the Council face to face and 44 queries were raised and have been followed through by the Customer Services Team. We also asked people about their expectations of Council services. 95% of customers expect a good service from Wokingham and so they should and 72% reported that their experience either met or exceeded their expectations. With Housing, Registrars and Cleaner and Greener picked out for particular plaudits. There are also lots of suggestions for improvements which we will be working through. As a result of the success of this event we plan to hold events in other communities. We have a stall planned for the Earley Green Fayre and also one planned in Woodley and I would be interested in anybody else who has a good location for a stall as well.

We have made good progress with Shared Audit with the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead winning new revenue, generating investigations work from both Oxfordshire County Council and Buckinghamshire County Council. Finally the Electoral Registration canvass started earlier this month.

Mark Ashwell, Deputy Executive Member for Regeneration and Communities:

As Deputy Executive Member for Regeneration and Communities I thought I would quickly take you through an example of our regeneration work and an example of our communities work. Regeneration. It is my absolute pleasure to report that last evening we gained planning consent for the Carnival Pool site redevelopment in Wokingham town centre. This is a result of 7 years of substantial community consultation and workshops dating all the way back to 2008. Regeneration is core to our Council's vision and we all agree that

Wokingham town centre needs regenerating to thrive. We will now see the development of a new 529 space multi-storey car park and ground floor bowling alley on the Carnival Pool site in Wokingham town centre. This will provide access to really good quality parking for the Wokingham automobile. This parking will be easily accessible and provide a convenient route in and out of our town, accessing its services all year round. In 2013 we secured funding, subject to this planning permission for our proposed car park. This was from the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership as part of the Growth Deals Initiative and this will now allow us to bring the car park construction forward to make sure car parking is available to support our town while we work on other phases of our town centre regeneration. The principle of redeveloping the rest of the site has also been approved and we expect now to come forward with plans to include a larger gym, improved changing facilities, studio spaces and a unique multi-function sports hall and cultural centre. We will be able to offer current and future residents the facilities they want and need in our principal town. It is about sports, it is about leisure and it is about recreation. This seal of approval gives us the mandate to get on with the job of regenerating our wonderful Wokingham town and beyond.

Communities. In my capacity as Voluntary and Community Sector Champion for our Council, I have embarked on a whistlestop tour of our community's unsung heroes. I am visiting and understanding the unbelievable value these organisations contribute to our Wokingham Borough community, including the Wokingham and Woodley Citizens Advice Bureau, Wokingham and Bracknell Involved, Wokingham Volunteer Centre, Wokingham Borough Sports Council, the Community Council of Berkshire Rural Communities, the Community Foundation, the Cultural Partnership, the Earley Crescent Community Association, the Winnersh Rainbow Park Community Centre and the Earley Help Shop. Did you know that Earley Town Council collects £60,000 worth of Council Tax in blue and brown bag payments on our behalf? These organisations and many, many more Borough wide volunteer run charities such as Building for the Future Disabled Children's charity in Emmbrook and provide us with resource which is invaluable. With this in mind we are investigating ways we can collaborate to get the most out of our joint Wokingham Borough finance and resources. So please Mr Mayor, watch this space.

Angus Ross, Executive Member for the Environment:

Two things. First, I just wanted to thank those Members, cross party, who are working on the working groups that were set up for flooding, for sports hubs and for country parks. We will keep Council updated on work progressing as we develop both practice, policy and what we might be doing in the exciting areas there.

The other thing is, as we all remember, last Spring the grass grew but looking at positive things it gave us the opportunity for a very open consultation across the Borough which caused us to review the grass cutting schedule across the Borough and to work out priorities that were really set by the responses to that consultation. We are successfully doing this and the added bonus is the biodiversity that we are building in. As some people have seen in trial areas, we are leaving large areas for people to walk, but allowing the grass to grow and also trying to get some wild flowers, and whereas I know in some areas wild flowers are not doing well this year, we seem to be hitting the button in other areas. I think it is a very exciting thing. By far the highest proportion of comments that we have received back have been positive but we will never please all the people all the time but it has also helped to inform the specification for the new contract which will be starting next Spring.

25. STATEMENT FROM COUNCIL OWNED COMPANIES

Simon Weeks, Non-Executive Director of Optalis:

I am reporting to Council in my capacity as Non Executive Director for Optalis, WBC's wholly owned social care business. Year to date turnover and profits remain ahead of budget and the forecast for the full year remains on budget. Cash flow remains well controlled and also on budget. Whilst sickness absence has improved over the year, our agency spend is still ahead of budget. Staff turnover has reduced and is now significantly below that of both local and regional averages for the care sector. However, recruitment remains very challenging in a highly competitive market, even though we already pay at least the living wage for all care staff. This constrains our ability to take on private home care business and necessitates ongoing agency spend. However, we have recently held recruitment events at Trinity Court and the Oakwood Centre in Woodley. Having refined the job description within corporate commissioning and the holding company, recruitment is now also underway to secure the services of our new Managing Director.

A new extra care unit at Clement House was opened last month by the Countess of Wessex and is now fully operational. Additional investment at Suffolk Lodge is planned. At the Commissioner's request we have recently taken over independent living services from another provider and its staff have been TUPE'd across to Optalis. In successful partnership with Reading College, Optalis has over the last year provided support services assisting young people with disabilities into employment. It is hoped that they fund a second year from September. The joint Interim Managing Directors of Optalis have provided consultancy services and expert advice to Bury Metropolitan Borough Council, a Labour controlled local authority and this has enabled them to establish their own local authority trading company. This demonstrates that Optalis is pioneering work in this area and is well regarded by other local authorities while facing the inevitable and escalating demand and increasing costs of providing quality social care for residents.

Negotiations regarding a new contract with WBC are ongoing and we are also awaiting the results of several tenders from a number of local authorities in the South East. Partnership working with the Commissioner continues to strengthen and Optalis Directors regularly attend Board and Company meetings.

David Chopping, Non-Executive Director of Wokingham Housing Limited:

This is an interesting year for the Housing Companies, one which marks a series of milestones and the quantum leap we are all taking in this massive investment for the future. Starting with personnel, our first Managing Director Robin Fielder has now left, to be replaced by Bill Flood. Bill is driving forward the application for Registered Provider status for Loddon Homes.

Dealing first with Phoenix, we have tendered the contract and are now in the process of appointing the winning bidder. The winning tender price is £11.454m but value engineering work and an element of contingency are expected to bring the final bill cost to very close to the £11.1m level estimated and reported to Council previously. We expect to release the site to the contractors in the next few weeks and we will endeavour to advise Council as to final details at our next meeting.

Fosters is more complex as you have already heard. It is the subject of not being big enough for the larger firms and thus we have not had the level of interest from contractors through the Homes and Communities Agency Contractor Framework as we anticipated. We are therefore changing our approach to ensure we receive the best possible bill price

and are offering the opportunity to build the scheme to smaller, specialist extra care contractors. This adds a further two or three months to the project completion dates, some of which we do actually expect to recoup but ultimately we will have to wait for rent receipts a little longer than first planned. However, when balanced against bill project costs, the longer wait for rental income is deemed a sensible trade off and will save the Council and taxpayers money in the long term. We feel being prudent with your money is more important than taking a chance.

Registration of Loddon Homes with the HCA as a Registered Provider has been made much more complex by the recent proposals coming out of Whitehall. Moving quickly with the application is also becoming more important. One of the criteria for registration is that Loddon Homes must demonstrate an appropriate degree of independence from WBC. As a result the Boards have been changed and it is this information that I think is important that Council is made aware of. Alistair Auty and I remain on both Boards to form the link between the companies. We are joined on WHL by John Jarvis, another Chartered Surveyor, but this time with his main expertise as a Quantity Surveyor. I remain Chairman and Alistair has been appointed Vice Chairman. Bill Flood makes up the Board with the assistance of our accounts expert John McNiece. John Jarvis has already made an impact as we went through the contract assessments for Phoenix. The HCA will not accept the same Chairman or Vice Chairman on both companies so the Loddon Board now comprises Gary Cowan as the appointed Chairman, Robin Fielder, our former Managing Director, as Vice Chairman, Lee Newton as the tenants' representative with Alistair, Bill and myself, together with John McNiece. We are also discussing a further appointment with the recently semi-retired Finance Director of one of the larger local Housing Associations who will add scrutiny skills and expertise to support Gary as Chairman. If negotiations are successful he will be asked to chair Loddon Homes Audit Committee, a requirement of the HCA registration process, that this be independently managed. Finally WHL and Loddon Homes continue to put together a pipeline of developments, planning on another scheme, our seventh, was granted last night, and I am confident that we can make full use of all available commuted sums. However, we do want more sites so please do keep your eyes open for us. WHL's future may be more as a development company with the purely social housing sitting within Loddon Homes. However, to a great extent how the housing companies evolve from here will be determined by how the Council wants to respond to the Government's changing housing policy agenda and how we feel we can best serve the needs of our residents.

26. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

26.1 Beth Rowland asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

It is the Conservative government's policy for all schools to become academies. Is that what this Council wants for our schools?

Answer

The Council's view on schools becoming academies is neutral. For existing successful schools, the decision to change to academy status is one for that school's governing body to make. I am aware that government policy is to support growth in the number of academies, and this Council is broadly supportive of that. The new schools which Wokingham needs have by law to be academies, and the Council Officers have operated that system in the best interests of local residents. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee

for Children's Services have already overseen a review of how the local authorities engage with school improvement, noting their significant statutory duties in this area. Since then the new government has placed renewed emphasis on academy status being a solution for failing or coasting schools, and sees academy chains or trusts as an appropriate middle tier between individual schools and national government. Wokingham is fortunate to have successful schools in all phases, but the consideration of the benefits of running with the flow of a national system should also be considered perhaps.

Regardless of school organisational arrangements being an academy, free school or a maintained school, this Authority is clear that the partnership with all our local schools is fundamental to support children to succeed, to be safe and to thrive. We have a range of key partnership priorities with schools which includes refreshed strategies for the provision for children with additional needs and school improvement, improved comprehensive CAMHs and proposals for a joint approach to recruitment and retention of staff.

Along with our schools, the shared priority and mutual concern at this time is the poor settlement our schools receive through national funding; the lowest level of funding in the country; which is leading to school budget pressures. Officers are working actively to lobby DfE to remedy this issue and I and other Conservative Members, will continue to present evidence to our political colleagues in Central Government to deliver the funding that is needed for our schools.

Supplementary Question

I am glad to hear what you have said Charlotte thank you, because I think as a Borough Council I would like to see us working to protect our primary schools especially, from being forced down the academy road. A good, strong, well balanced, well-informed local authority is what I would like for my schools to keep them in the club.

Supplementary Answer

I was not completely clear about the question but as I said in my initial response to your original question, we continue to support all of our schools whether they be academies or whether they be local authority schools and we plan to continue to do that.

26.2 Lindsay Ferris asked the Executive Member for Environment the following question:

Why has Wokingham slipped down the local authority ratings for recycling rates and now is only in 232nd position out of 352 local authorities?

Answer

It gives an opportunity to share some figures beneath this headline one that you have brought up. We were in 2012/13 197th out of 352 and we have slipped to 232nd. Over the last five years recycling has stayed broadly flat in the Borough which reflects the national picture of an increase in residual waste and flattening of recycling. However of particular relevance to Wokingham Borough was the change implemented by Government in May 2012 to deregulate the recycling of street sweepings. Part of this change meant that waste that had previously been recycled was diverted to landfill and was no longer considered in the recycling calculation. The amount of roads we have, we have a large amount of street sweepings. For Councils like Wokingham, who had previously performed well and recycled 100% of street sweepings, this had a disproportionate effect on our recycling rate. If these changes had not occurred we would have seen a recycling rate of 45% in 2012/13. We are exploring, with our partners, ideas about possible treatment of the arisings that could see some element of street sweepings being included within the

recycling rate again. In addition, we are not being complacent about recycling generally and are trialling a number of initiatives including targeting areas where we have evidence of poor recycling rates. This includes working proactively with particular households and communities to help them improve their recycling. We are targeting our communications to these areas too and working at community events to help raise the profile of this issue. With our Re3 partners we are working on a strategic marketing campaign that will see key messages being communicated across all three Council areas.

On a positive note to finish our reliance on landfill has reduced significantly thanks to the Re3 Contract with the diversion of approximately 27,000 tonnes of our waste diverted away from landfill every year – for this indicator we rank at 36th out of 352. As always the waste performance indicators cannot be considered in isolation and a complex set of variables must be considered to appreciate the wider position.

Supplementary Question

You partially touched on what my supplementary is but I will ask it. As all three Re3 councils recycling rates seem to be affected in the same way, is this caused by the way the Re3 is set up and managed?

Supplementary Answer

As I said in my answer, we seem to be mirroring national rates and national trends. I think everything we can do with Re3 is a positive thing and definitely we are doing things within this Council but also trying collectively to work within Re3 to improve the performance and we hope we will be able to look at further materials to judge how we best do it. One of the factors of course that I did not mention is, a large part of our recycling used to be newsprint and we are not buying as many newspapers which is having a perverse effect on our recycling rates.

26.3 Prue Bray asked the Executive Member for Resident Services the following question:

It has been almost 4 years since the Council abandoned its attempt to hand over the running of the Borough's library service to a private company. This plan had met with significant public opposition. At the time, the Liberal Democrats, as the Opposition, recognised the need to make savings, but felt that there were alternatives such as a charitable trust or a shared service which would meet the same objectives without introducing any element of private profit. Both of those alternatives were dismissed by the Conservative administration.

Since then there have been no significant changes to the way the library services are delivered but the financial position of the Council has worsened and is likely to worsen further in the next few years. It was clear from the public response to your privatisation plans that libraries are valued. They, and we, want a sustainable future for the library service.

What are your plans for the future of the Borough's libraries?

Answer

As you know I also value the library service and as you must recall we decided that our dedicated staff and volunteers were best placed to develop the service and improve its cost effectiveness over the last four years.

In the time since the Council withdrew its considerations to adopt the alternative model for the delivery of its library services, both the number of active library users and the numbers of visits to our libraries has increased. The number of active library users has increased by more than a thousand in the last year. That is against the national trend. This has been achieved against a backdrop of falling library usage across the country and significant technology innovations that mean that some people will not use libraries who did in the past.

We have done this by investing wisely in the types of things our residents want and expect from a modern library service. This includes being open when residents need them, providing free Wi-Fi and computers in all libraries, improving our online services and investing in eBook stock, and creating flexible spaces with libraries for events and activities. We do all sorts of activities with children to encourage reading; we have competitions; we have presentations from authors; we have craft events, all sorts of things to get children and parents into libraries. These successful investments have been achieved whilst also reducing the overall cost of running the service.

There has been an absolute reduction in the cost of running the library service of 8%. That is quite significant in itself and that is on a base of an increase of 4% in demand so that is a very significant efficiency improvement. That has not been achieved by cutting service we have actually increased our services and I think we are providing significantly better value for money and that is in no part thanks to the staff and also the volunteers who are absolutely excellent.

Our approach is to continue this good work which has been done across the library service and to be open to new opportunities to further improve the value of our library service to those who live, work and study in the Borough. As you will be aware the Council's financial position, as you mentioned, will be challenging over the next few years and in common with other services, the Library Service will continue to need to play its part in finding further efficiencies. However we remain committed to a quality library service and any changes to the library service, including examining new ways for the Council to generate income will be identified through comprehensive analysis, robust public engagement and commitment to quality.

Supplementary Question

I am pleased and had noticed that the library usage had gone up. On the Executive agenda for next week which came out after I had put the question in, there is a report about the libraries IT system and the report says you are going to look at how the libraries contribute to health and wellbeing this autumn and then says you are going to review libraries at some point in approximately the next two years. Could you explain a bit more about the timetable for that and what you are hoping to get out of it?

Supplementary Answer

Yes certainly, happy to. The review of the libraries IT system is all to do with actually managing the stock of books and managing loans and managing all the sort of gubbins that goes behind managing a library, so that renewal will happen. We have been developing plans to try and further improve the services provided by libraries. We are looking to commercialise some elements of that, so where we can get revenue from other organisations, or where we can actually support other products and facilities that library users actually value, we will bring those forward. At the moment we have not actually got to the end of that work so I cannot be specific about what we are planning but when we do

plan it and have got to the bottom of it and analysed it properly I will be happy to bring it back.

26.4 Tom McCann asked the Executive Member for Planning and Highways the following question:

What are your plans for resurfacing roads for the next 3 years?

In asking his question Councillor McCann clarified that he referred to Woodley in particular.

Answer

The Council reviews its roads every year to determine what are the highest priority for resurfacing. This is done on the basis of technical surveys and feedback from our highway inspectors who visit every road in the Borough at least once a year.

As prioritisation is done on a Borough wide basis the approach taken for roads in Woodley is the same as for roads in any other part of the Borough.

Every year there are more roads that we would like to resurface than we actually do. Future year's programmes have not been determined but will be subject to technical appraisal and fitting a programme to the available budget. I would just add, even with the reduction in revenue we plan to spend £2.4m this year with £2.5m allocated for next year and £2.5m for the year after that.

Supplementary Question

So could you explain to me why your Officers have no information about the conditions of the roads in Woodley, nor have they done any surveys on the conditions of the roads in Woodley, and when will they have this condition survey of the roads in Woodley?

Supplementary Answer

I can only assume they have because I have here the fact that they will be doing the remainder of Fairwater Drive and Kingfisher Drive in Woodley this year so I am sure they must have surveyed them.

27. MINUTES OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS AND WARD MATTERS

27.1 Lindsay Ferris asked the Executive Member for Planning and Highways the following question:

Why did it take nine days to move travellers off Stanlake Meadow in Twyford, a community field used by local residents including many children, at a cost of several thousand pounds to Twyford Parish Council?

Answer

We move as quickly as possible with regards to where we have illicit travellers and sometimes we are successful to get them moved within 48 hours; however it is really at the bequest of whether or not the Police will use their Section 61 powers. They are sometimes reluctant to do so and that may be because there are issues of welfare and so on and so forth but we do move as quickly as possible. Whether it is Stanlake, whether it is Earley, whether it is the Council car park, we move as quickly as possible to move this on. Obviously if the Police do not use the Section 61 powers, it means injunctions and they take time.

27.2 Guy Grandison asked the Executive Member for Planning and Highways the following question:

Could the Executive Member for Highways give us an update on the improvement work at Meldreth Way and Lower Earley roundabout please?

Answer:

The designs for the improvement to the roundabouts have been completed and shared with the local Members. The project is fully funded and we should be on site in September subject to contractors being available.

27.3 Tom McCann asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

Can you confirm that in the Minutes and film of the Executive meeting of 26 March 2015, the Council Leader Keith Baker put into the public domain the following information: that a child exploitation related assurance panel had recently met; that it had made eight recommendations and that the eighth of these recommendations 'a review of Child Services in order to address issues relating to child sexual exploitation' and therefore any Member of the Council is not bound to keep this confidential, bearing in mind the recommendations that were not reported must form part of the review that is currently underway?

Answer:

You obviously were sleeping when I did my statement so let me give you that section of the Leader's statement that relates to what you are talking about. I said I wanted to update Members on the statement I made at the Executive meeting in March, which is what you are talking about, concerning how this Council is seeking to ensure that its responses to the threat of child sexual exploitation are as robust as they need to be. I said an independent review of the leadership and governance the Council provides across Children's Services focused on CSE would take place. An independent person with considerable experience and knowledge in this field has been commissioned by me and her work has begun. I believe you also may have had an interview with her maybe, or you will have one. She is holding interviews with key Members and Officers this month. Her final report will be reported formally to the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny group and to the Executive along with any actions that emerge from her recommendations to bring about further improvements. I will just remind you, the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny group is a public meeting and the information provided to that meeting will be in the public domain, so there is no overt confidentiality. I have been quite clear on the leadership and governance that has been set up.

27.4 Pauline Jorgensen asked the Executive Member for Planning and Highways the following question:

Several residents in my area, both in my ward, both in the Radstock Lane and the Redhatch Drive area have been seriously impacted by developments being done on the Sibley Hall site with noise, nuisance planning infringements etc. I wonder if John could please outline what the planning authority have done about this?

Answer:

Sadly and unfortunately development often results in some disturbance to existing local residents throughout the construction period and this cannot be used as a reason to refuse planning applications in accordance with regulations. However, the Council can place conditions on planning permissions to try to reduce the impact of the construction phase and the application for the development of Sibley Hall included conditions to restrict hours of construction and requires a Construction Management Plan. I am aware that the

developer has not always complied with the conditions of the planning permission and have operated outside specific hours of construction and the Council took enforcement action and actually served a stop notice upon the developer to address this. Since this time there have been some further reports of breaches of the specified construction hours. In response the Council has immediately contacted the developer, spoken with the site manager to remind them of the restriction and remind them again that we will bring a stop notice if they do not desist.

The Council is not aware at the moment that the conditions on the Construction Management Plan are not being complied with. However, I am aware that local residents have reported issues about noise, vibration, dust and nuisance to the Environmental Health Team. The Environmental Health team have made regular visits to the site and had a site meeting with the Assistant Site Manager. The outcome of this meeting was that the developer has agreed to enhance the dust mitigation measures, including additional water spraying covering stockpiles and additional wheel washing. At this stage no statutory nuisance has been confirmed so no formal enforcement action under the Environmental Protection legislation has been taken. However, the situation will continue to be reviewed and if it is felt necessary, enforcement will take place.

27.5 Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey asked the Executive Member for Planning and Highways the following question:

Since Winnersh will be gifted with roundabouts on either side of the M4 bridge over the Reading Road and traffic lights on Old Forest Road, what will you be doing to coordinate the traffic lights in these three areas since you have not really been able to coordinate the traffic lights at Winnersh Crossroads? This is the fifteenth incarnation of software on Winnersh Crossroads and I am assuming you can do that faster than fifteen times.

Answer:

I am not quite clear what you are referring to there but I would say whenever we put in a junction, and if you look at Showcase Cinema, probably one of the most complicated junctions probably in the country. I think it has 64 traffic lights; it has got 113 signals and we will make sure when we do these junctions and we are onsite, we actually have people there when they open, much like we did, we had four people standing by when we opened the Link Road. I think everybody in this room will admit that the Station Link Road works extremely well.

We will always use the best talent we have got. We use WSP who are a worldwide company to help us with all our traffic stuff and also Balfour Beatty as part of the alliance, but now whenever we do a new junction you will find that there will be our staff standing there making sure the junction works. My instructions are very clear. I would like a telephone call from an Officer before I get one from the radio.

27.6 Chris Smith asked the Executive Member for Planning and Highways the following question:

What is the Council's response to the recent recommendations in the Davies Report for an expansion of Heathrow? Has the Council considered the positives such as additional direct and indirect jobs and the negatives such as increased noise and disruption? Also how many jobs and families within Wokingham Borough work at Heathrow and are supported by Heathrow?

Answer:

The Wokingham budget welcomes the report of the Airport Commission. Research conducted by Western Wedge, a partnership of four local enterprise partnerships in the area, which includes the Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership, found that the expansion to Heathrow would supply 35,000 jobs and £300million worth of productivity, to the benefit of local economies. In the event that the third runway for Heathrow is given the go ahead Wokingham Borough will be pushing the Government to ensure that noise and pollution will be minimised and meet acceptable standards for residents.

Currently, there are almost 1,000 workers actually living in the Borough, the airport making it a key employer. The expansion of Heathrow would actually safeguard these existing jobs and lead to more employment opportunity. The airport in its proximity to Wokingham Borough is one of the main reasons why foreign businesses chose to move to Wokingham. However, we must ensure residents living under the flight path are considered along with the economic benefits and all that is possible is done to minimise the impact of any development at Heathrow should it take place.

27.7 Prue Bray asked the Executive Member for Planning and Highways the following question:

We have some correspondence John over the poor quality of the resurfacing of the pavement along Reading Road in Winnersh, which was done in connection with the new cycleway, which has included tarmacking over an inspection hatch. That is a polite way of saying that I have been going on about it. I would like to thank you for the interest you have shown in this and please can you update me on what is being done about it?

Answer:

There has been a meeting with the construction company and they are going to be asked to come back and redo the path.

27.8 Beth Rowland asked the Executive Member for Environment the following question:

I would like to ask Angus about South Lake. Angus said 'we are working with South Lake Angling Club to trial a form of chalk treatment at South Lake in an attempt to promote the breakdown sediment and reduce the odour highlighted by residents. This may also incorporate some reed planting at the appropriate time. We will continue to work closely with residents and local Ward Members to ensure that we communicate any works on site and are able to continue to fulfil our health obligations.' Since then we have had a considerable amount of hot weather and needless to say the smell on South Lake is not good to say the least and I am very sorry for the residents who live very close to it. Angus, when are you going to begin to work closely with me as a local Member and the residents and actually do something about the smell on the lake?

Answer:

Some of the work that we will be doing is season dependent. I have not got the exact dates when this chalk process would best be done and I am very happy to come back to you with a more detailed update. I do understand that the Officer who has been doing this work has been in contact with local residents on a fairly regular basis and if that is not the case I am sure you will contact me.

27.9 Tom McCann asked the Executive Member for Environment the following question:

It is actually a point of praise which I rarely do in this Council because I often find that there are lots of things to complain about but this time round I actually wish to praise the Officers and the lead Member Angus Ross, for their swift response to the flooding again of Moors Lake in Loddon ward, and I have been fully kept informed of what has been going on. I have been updated weekly by the Officers concerned and in fact Angus has kept me informed at other meetings that we both attend. This is a good news item as far as reaction is going and I am glad that we are now reacting appropriately and I hope this Council will be kept informed of any future leaks, and I believe they have asked for a list of any previous leaks from Thames Water and the Environment Agency. So I would like to pass on my thanks on behalf of my residents and as a Member of the Council thank you for the work that you are doing to facilitate this.

Answer:

If I could very briefly update the local Member even further the Thames Water response came in today. I have not had the time to study it but I have looked at it and it is totally inadequate and I will be following this up. They will admit to five incidents in the last five years. There is no action I think, or agreement and confidence in the maintenance of the sewer which runs through the back of a number of your properties and I will be on the case in the morning.

28. MOTIONS

28.1 Motion 368 submitted by Lindsay Ferris

The Council considered the following Notice of Motion submitted by Lindsay Ferris and seconded by Tom McCann.

‘This Council commits to include both the public and Overview and Scrutiny in the budget setting process for 2016/17 and in all future years, and will consult in a timely manner on budget choices, such as the priorities for spending and the potential impact and consequences of these choices.’

It was proposed by Keith Baker and seconded by Paul Swaddle that the Motion be amended as follows:

“This Council commits to **holding a series of events that invite the public to engage with the Council in thinking about how we set budgets and spend money as a Council. These events must occur throughout the Borough and need to be fully supported by officers both in terms of information being available but also be on hand to answer questions and provide guidance. Council further commits to capture the outputs, the questions received and suggestions for improvements of this new process.**”

28.2 Adjournment of the meeting

At this point, 8.50pm, the meeting adjourned for a short period as requested by Councillor Lindsay Ferris to allow consideration of the proposed amendment to the Motion.

28.3 Recommencement of the meeting

At 8.55pm the meeting recommenced.

28.4 Motion 368 continued

The amendment to the Motion was accepted by the proposer of the original Motion.

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

RESOLVED: That this Council commits to holding a series of events that invite the public to engage with the Council in thinking about how we set budgets and spend money as a Council. These events must occur throughout the Borough and need to be fully supported by officers both in terms of information being available but also be on hand to answer questions and provide guidance. Council further commits to capture the outputs, the questions received and suggestions for improvements of this new process.

28.5 Motion 369 submitted by Beth Rowland

The Council considered the following Notice of Motion submitted by Beth Rowland and seconded by Prue Bray.

‘Government per pupil funding for Wokingham primary and secondary schools is the lowest in the country. This Council will actively lobby local MP’s the Secretary of State for Education and the Department of Education until the level of funding for our schools is improved.’

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

RESOLVED: That Government per pupil funding for Wokingham primary and secondary schools is the lowest in the country. This Council will actively lobby local MP’s the Secretary of State for Education and the Department of Education until the level of funding for our schools is improved.