

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF  
THE COUNCIL  
HELD ON 23 MARCH 2017 FROM 7.00 PM TO 10.30 PM**

**Members Present**

Councillors: Bob Pitts (Mayor), Rob Stanton (Deputy Mayor), Mark Ashwell, Alistair Auty, Keith Baker, Parry Batth, Laura Blumenthal, Chris Bowring, Prue Bray, David Chopping, UllaKarin Clark, Gary Cowan, Andy Croy, Richard Dolinski, Lindsay Ferris, Michael Firmager, Kate Haines, Mike Haines, Charlotte Haitham Taylor, John Halsall, Pauline Helliar-Symons, Emma Hobbs, Tim Holton, Philip Houldsworth, Dianne King, John Jarvis, Clive Jones, Norman Jorgensen, John Kaiser, David Lee, Abdul Loyes, Charles Margetts, Julian McGhee-Sumner, Ken Miall, Philip Mirfin, Stuart Munro, Ian Pittock, Barrie Patman, Anthony Pollock, Malcolm Richards, Angus Ross, Beth Rowland, Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey, David Sleight, Chris Smith, Wayne Smith, Alison Swaddle, Paul Swaddle, Simon Weeks, Oliver Whittle and Shahid Younis

**89. MINUTE'S SILENCE**

The Mayor announced that a minute's silence would be held to commemorate the victims of the terrorist attack which took place in Westminster on 22 March 2017.

**90. ROSE GREEN**

With the agreement of the Mayor, Councillor Beth Rowland paid tribute to Rose Green who had given outstanding service as an Officer of the Council until her recent death.

**91. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillors Pauline Jorgensen and Bill Soane.

**92. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 22 February 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

**93. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**94. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

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

It was moved by the Mayor and seconded by the Deputy Mayor that, in accordance with Procedure Rule 4.2.12n, Procedure Rule 4.2.9.1 be suspended to allow Public Question Time to be extended to one hour.

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

**94.1 Philip Meadowcroft asked the Executive Member for Resident Services the following question:**

**Question**

The Constitution of the Royal Borough of Maidenhead and Windsor repeatedly welcomes the involvement of the Borough's residents in Council Meetings which are open to the public.

Maidenhead's Constitution, like Wokingham's, is silent on the issue of Points of Order being raised by a member of the public.

Maidenhead have adopted a simple, common sense, and entirely workable solution as advised to me by their Democratic Services office on March 6 earlier this month; namely, at a Maidenhead Council meeting, a Point of Order can be raised by a member of the public and will be dealt with there and then entirely at the discretion of the Chairman.

Will Wokingham Borough Council adopt the same policy and so put an end to the unfortunate situation which has manifested itself at the last two Full Council meetings where a member of the public, indeed it was me, attempted unsuccessfully to raise a Point of Order but it was deemed totally out of order and immediately dismissed by the Deputy Mayor and the Mayor respectively on the guidance of the Chief Executive?

### **Answer**

In the absence of the Executive Member for Resident Services, Councillor Alison Swaddle provided the following answer:

I note your comments about the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead's process. Here in Wokingham we also welcome the involvement of residents in Council meetings by enabling them, as you have, to submit a public question.

However, even Parliament does not allow members of the public to raise points of order. In fact, in Duhaime's law dictionary, it specifies that a point of order is a legal procedure in Parliament referring to an interjection during a meeting by a member who doesn't have the floor to call the attention of the chair to an alleged breach of the meetings rules of order.

If a Member believes that there has been a breach of Council Rules of Procedure or the law then a Member is able to raise a Point of Order and I think that is the correct process.

I believe it could be disruptive to allow members of the public the ability to interrupt the meeting under the premise of raising Points of Order and will therefore not be proposing adoption of the policy as you suggest.

### **Supplementary Question**

A Point of Order is an appeal to the Chair for clarification or ruling on a matter of procedure in the chamber at that moment in time. Anyone raising a Point of Order must explain the reasons for believing an error has or is about to be committed and the Chair decides whether it is valid or not. A Point of Order is a long established custom in British political life and Wokingham's reluctance to recognise it is lamentable. It could be that you wish to conduct Council meetings purely on a culture of pre-submitted questions and pre-digested replies drawn up, perhaps, with the assistance of Council officials. Points of Order introduce spontaneity and the need to think on your feet. Quite possibly some Members might find this uncomfortable. I ask you whether the opinion you have expressed in your reply has the support of the Executive as a whole and indeed has the support of the majority of the Members of the Council.

### **Supplementary Answer**

The answer I have given you this evening was supplied by Councillor Jorgensen who has had to send her apologies this evening, so I will be asking Councillor Jorgensen to supply a written answer to your question.

**Note:** the following supplementary answer was provided after the meeting by Councillor Jorgensen.

I have not asked Council or Executive's opinion on my response as I did not feel it was necessary to ask them about the definition of phrases which are clearly defined in legal books on procedure. Our Constitution Review Working Group did however consider the section on "points of order" and also whether it would be appropriate to include a paragraph in the Constitution setting out public speaking rights.

The cross party CRWG felt that it was quite clear in the Constitution that only Members could raise a point of order and decided it was not sensible to include any wording negating public speaking rights in this area as there was a likelihood that this would cause further ambiguity in areas where intent was inferred rather than explicit. For example, if we had an exhaustive list of all things that were not applicable against each point in the Constitution the document would probably be even more long and unwieldy.

This conclusion was reported at February Council and at no point did any Member raise any objection to CRWG's findings.

#### **94.2 Tom Berman asked the Mayor the following question:**

##### **Question**

My question relates to the minutes of the Council meeting of 23rd February 2017 (which have now been approved).

Would the Mayor agree that, where these minutes state that "Councillor Gary Cowan sought clarification regarding points of order which was provided by the Mayor" this is an incorrect and seriously misleading statement of what actually occurred (as the video record shows), because the matter was not clarified in so far as (i) the Mayor incorrectly cited paragraph 14 in the Constitution, when he must have meant paragraph 4.2.13.13, and (ii) he quoted this section as stating that "Only a member may raise a point of order..." though the word "only" does not appear here in the Constitution, and (iii) when Councillor Cowan specifically asked who had given the professional advice that the Constitution could be interpreted as prohibiting residents from raising points of order, the Mayor did not answer the Member's question?

##### **Answer**

I am sorry but I do not agree that the statement in the minutes is incorrect and misleading. Although there was a typographical error on the information I had been provided with, which stated "14" instead of "4", it was clear that the rule I was speaking about related to Points of Order at Council meetings i.e. 4.2.13.13.

As stated in the report that went to February Council the Constitution Review Working Group had considered whether rule 4.2.13.13 should be amended to provide greater clarity but felt it was clear that only a Member may raise a Point of Order as they were the only people who were mentioned in the Rule. Therefore I don't believe that it was incorrect to use the word "only".

As stated by the Deputy Executive Member for Resident Services it would be extremely disruptive to allow members of the public the ability to interrupt the meeting. Members of the public do, as you are aware, have the ability to raise matters by submitting public questions.

In response to the last sentence of your question I can confirm that advice was provided by the Chief Executive with input from the Monitoring Officer.

### **Supplementary Question**

Thank you for telling us that it was the Chief Executive who advised that members of the public are barred from raising Points of Order. Would it be correct to say that the Chief Executive is not a lawyer and is not legally qualified to give a professional opinion on this interpretation of the constitution?

### **Supplementary Answer**

The answer to your question is that the advice was given to the Chief Executive by the Monitoring Officer with input from the Council's Legal Officer.

### **94.3 Gill Manton asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:**

#### **Question**

The Department for Education is currently conducting a consultation for a new national schools funding formula. As a parent I am concerned that when the new funding formula is introduced local schools will suffer a large financial shortfall. To date what steps have been taken to ensure schools in Wokingham Borough are sufficiently funded?

#### **Answer**

In the absence of the Executive Member for Children's Services, Councillor Dolinski provided the following answer:

There are a number of different steps that have and will continue to be taken to keep the paucity and inadequacies of our Borough's schools funding on Central Government's agenda and make sure that we do everything in our power to persuade Government to increase the levels of schools funding going forward in order to safeguard their viability.

On a local level, an effective Schools Forum, supported by the Local Authority, has set in place a funding formula which, within its statutory limits, provides protection for small schools by maintaining financial support for schools' fixed costs.

Conservative Members in this Borough have tirelessly kept Wokingham funding levels on the agenda of national decision-makers. The Lead member for Children's Services has written to and spoken with the past Secretary of State for Education on this issue and most recently written to The Rt Hon. Justine Greening, Secretary of State for Education, and will be meeting with her in the coming weeks. Charlotte has also assiduously written to, briefed and met with local MPs and is active in our support of our cause.

The Council and many individual Conservative Members have ensured a robust response to national consultation on the National funding formula. We are very clear it needs to do more to support our schools and their financial security.

### **94.4 Kerry Jones asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:**

#### **Question**

Many schools in the area are now asking for voluntary financial contributions from parents.

Even if Wokingham is an affluent area it would be naive to assume that all families can afford to pay. I am concerned that this type of request will become commonplace leading to schools in more affluent areas getting more money than those in more deprived areas, where arguably more money is needed. What is the lead Member for Children's Services opinion on schools asking parents for financial contributions?

### **Answer**

In the absence of the Executive Member for Children's Services, Councillor Dolinski provided the following answer:

I know that voluntary contributions to extra-curricular activities have been happening all over the country for many years.

More recently though, head-teachers have been placed in the unwelcome, and uncomfortable, position of relying more and more on those contributions. I have enormous respect for heads dealing with the dilemmas of running schools with tight budgets. I am also grateful to parents who wanted to contribute in this way and I am, by the same token, sympathetic to those, who for reasons of principle or practicality do not or are unable to contribute. Education is an entitlement for all, and it is expensive.

For me though perhaps it is about drawing a clear line in the sand about what is core to the curriculum and what is not when we look at these issues. When the Lead Member visited the Secretary of State she raised this very issue and she and I am not content that in many of our schools parents are having to fund items such as core text books, ICT, Design and Technology classes.

### **94.5 Vicki Laurie asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:**

#### **Question**

In December last year the National Audit Office published a report on the financial sustainability of schools. The report concluded that there would be an 8% real-terms reduction in funding due to cost pressures. What contingency plans, if any, have been put in place by Wokingham Borough Council to help our schools bridge the predicted shortfall in funding?

#### **Answer**

In the absence of the Executive Member for Children's Services, Councillor Dolinski provided the following answer:

Whilst we recognise the current poor deal for our schools, it is worth noting that the average real-terms proposed National Funding Formula reduction for WBC schools is approximately 2.6%, with the highest real-terms reduction still below 3%. This is probably as a result of our funding already being at a rock bottom level.

The Council will continue to meet regularly with schools to review their financial positions and provide advice on making cost savings and other ways to alleviate budget pressures. Schools suffering particular challenges will have the ability to arrange a budget deficit or in extreme cases agree a loan with the Council.

### **94.6 Annabel Yoxall asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:**

### **Question**

The cost of supporting a child with special educational needs is often absorbed by schools because the additional money provided by the local authority doesn't cover the associated costs. Given the predicted funding cuts how will Wokingham Borough Council ensure that some of the most vulnerable children within our schools receive the support they require to achieve the best possible outcomes?

### **Answer**

In the absence of the Executive Member for Children's Services, Councillor Dolinski provided the following answer:

Support for children with special needs comes from the Education Funding Agency to the local Dedicated Schools Grant and is allocated according to national regulations. They include the expectation of schools contributing from their own budgets to the additional costs of support for those pupils.

What has happened locally here in this Borough is that Wokingham's Schools Forum has made available an early intervention fund to support schools. Schools have engaged with this and pupils are benefiting from it.

Wokingham Council has historically also invested in education well above the level expected by government – over £1.1m more every year. For 2017-18 we've increased that investment by over £700,000. This will fund and sustain a range of services which support schools, including the Special Needs team and the Educational Psychology Team.

Locally, Wokingham Borough Council has promoted the national changes in Special Needs. The SEND reforms have replaced statements of Special Needs with *Education Health and Care Plans*. The timescales for the new arrangements are challenging, but Wokingham officers have achieved a very strong 94% success rate in 2016 and 100% completed to time in the last quarter. These plans are part of the process of ensuring pupils' needs are properly understood and will enable them to receive the support they require to achieve the best outcomes.

### **94.7 Vanessa Lobato asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:**

#### **Question**

It has been reported in the national media that almost 1,000 local authority schools and more than 100 academy trusts are in debt. One possible solution that has been proposed by some local authorities is schools taking out loans to cover the cost of the deficit. Given that one of the biggest expenditures for schools is staff costs have any schools in the borough used short term loans from Wokingham Borough Council to pay staff salaries?

#### **Answer**

In the absence of the Executive Member for Children's Services, Councillor Dolinski provided the following answer:

Short term financial difficulties are usually funded by way of an agreed deficit (known also as a licenced deficit) and the longer term challenges are facilitated by way of a loan. Both have the effect of funding staff costs.

#### **Supplementary Question**

I do not believe that my question has been answered so please can you provide an

answer to my question?

### **Supplementary Answer**

I am going to research that and will get a written answer to you.

### **94.8 Janine Dotchin asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:**

#### **Question**

Inadequate funding of Wokingham Borough schools has put Wokingham schools into a precarious financial position.

How many schools are running budget deficits this year?

(Please state the number of schools in each category, primary and secondary and the percentage in each category, primary and secondary).

#### **Answer**

In the absence of the Executive Member for Children's Services, Councillor Dolinski provided the following answer:

There are a total of 5 schools running budget deficits in 2016/17. These consist of: 1 Secondary (which is 33% of all Secondary schools) and 4 Primaries schools (which is 8% of all Primary schools). This highlights just one of the strengths of our case that we have in this borough that current levels of funding are not sufficient and that Central Government needs to really consider the justified and true associated costs of educating students in this Borough.

#### **Supplementary Question**

If schools have cut back as much as they can already, how do they pay back these deficits?

#### **Supplementary Answer**

Clearly, with great difficulty. They will have to look at their internal costs and the governing bodies will have to take responsibility and manage and it's not a good picture for them. I understand that, and that is why we are fighting for more money for these schools. It is a good example.

### **94.9 Sonia Grundy asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:**

#### **Question**

In a recent newsletter from Headteachers to parents we have been told that the Government funding will soon be cut drastically. Furthermore we have been told that funding for schools in Wokingham Borough is one of the lowest in the country. The Headteacher has urged us to write to our MP expressing our concern. What are your plans to lobby central Government to fight for more funding for schools in our Borough?

#### **Answer**

As I said in answer to the very first question tonight, there are a number of different steps that I and the Lead Member for Children's Services will continue to take in order to fight for more funding for our schools from Central Government.

Firstly, I would like to thank my Conservative Colleagues here tonight who have kept our school's funding levels on Ministers' and MPs' radars in a sustained fight for a better deal for our schools. I would like to also say enormous thanks to the members of the community who have come here tonight to bring this petition and ask questions of this Council. You too are helping our schools by raising awareness of Wokingham funding levels, something which I am glad to say has not gone unnoticed at Westminster.

The Lead Member for Children's Services will continue to doggedly lobby the Prime Minister, MPs, Ministers and the Secretary of State for Education, The Rt Hon. Justine Greening MP. She will continue to brief our local MPs of the situation as it evolves so that they can continue to play an active role in supporting our cause too.

Lastly, in her forthcoming meeting with the Secretary of State for Education, I know that Charlotte will resolutely lobby for our Borough's schools and present a comprehensive and meticulous case to the Rt. Hon Justine Greening MP so that the Secretary of State and her Ministers are left in no doubt that this Borough's schools need additional money to prevent them becoming unsustainable.

This evening I got a letter forwarded to me to say that we've got another meeting scheduled in April to meet Nick Gibb, so the pressure is being put on all the time.

### **Supplementary Question**

Does this just mean to increase the percentage of Wokingham's budget or are you asking for the overall budget nationally to be increased?

### **Supplementary Answer**

Nationally to be increased, more money in the pot, but more importantly more money for our Wokingham Schools. We're at rock bottom and we deserve better, a lot better.

### **94.10 Rachel Burgess asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:**

#### **Question**

Inadequate funding of Wokingham Borough schools has put Wokingham schools into a precarious financial position. Schools have no spare cash.

How many schools, between 1.03.16 and 28.02.17, required occasional temporary loans of cash from Wokingham Borough Council to allow the schools to meet current account cash requirements?

(Please state the number of schools in each category, primary & secondary and the percentage in each category, primary & secondary).

#### **Answer**

In the absence of the Executive Member for Children's Services, Councillor Dolinski provided the following answer:

In addition to the agreed school budget deficits previously referenced, there is one Secondary school with a loan from the Council: again one Secondary school being 33% of the total maintained Secondary schools.

### **Supplementary Question**

So would the Member agree with me, then, that if some schools are requiring loans that



this would indicate that many schools have to operate with a cash deficit on a day to day basis?

### **Supplementary Answer**

Yes.

#### **94.11 Lucy Herd asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:**

##### **Question**

Schools make a huge contribution to the non-academic growth and development of our children. Some schools in Wokingham are lucky enough to have swimming pools on site. There can be little doubt that regular, on-site swimming lessons, without the disruption of off-site travel, is an excellent way to teach children the vital skills of swimming and respect for water. With Wokingham schools facing cash settlements below the level of inflation, school finances are at breaking point and school pools are at risk of closure. What plans does Wokingham Borough Council have to ensure schools receive enough funding to keep their pools open?

##### **Answer**

In the absence of the questioner, the following written reply was forwarded:

I have referred to the actions taken to ensure the best funding for Wokingham schools. To date, pools have typically stayed open, but schools I realise are feeling the pressure. We think that on balance the current National funding formula proposals could be positive for most Wokingham schools, although not all, but we are working to make them better. We will continue to demonstrate to Central Government why our schools are currently inadequately funded and but it will always be a matter for governors to determine the spending priorities for their school.

#### **94.12 Nada al-Sanjari asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:**

##### **Question**

Inadequate funding of Wokingham Borough schools has made staff recruitment and retention much harder. Teachers do not want to work in underfunded schools. Headteachers are forced to cut teaching assistants and staff to balance the books.

How many of the following: (1) teachers (2) teaching assistants (3) all other staff, were employed by the Borough's schools at year end for 2014, 2015 and 2016 (please only include schools for which there is data for all 3 years).

##### **Answer**

In the absence of the Executive Member for Children's Services, Councillor Dolinski provided the following answer:

Unfortunately the Council does not record data in the specific way that you have requested. However, I can tell you that the number of teachers (Full Time Equivalent) at 2014, 2015, and 2016 are 1,024, 932 and 963 respectively. The number of support staff (Full Time Equivalent) at 2014, 2015, and 2016 are 1,011, 1,017 and 1,192 respectively.

#### **94.13 Hilary Pierce asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:**

**Question**

Wokingham Borough Council needs to save approximately £19 million by 2019/2020. This will undoubtedly lead to significant cuts across all departments at the Council. Given the financial challenges facing Wokingham Borough Council, and the cuts in education funding from central Government, are there plans to merge children and education services with another, neighbouring, Borough in order to improve the funding available for our schools?

**Answer**

In the absence of the Executive Member for Children's Services, Councillor Dolinski provided the following answer:

In short the answer is no.

Discussions have taken place over the past three years with different local authorities to explore this. None of these has led to a concrete plan or anything we felt would materially benefit Wokingham schools and pupils.

Partnerships like these might save money for councils, but regrettably they don't make more money available for schools funding. That comes in a separate pot from the Education Funding Agency. As I have mentioned earlier this evening, Wokingham Borough Council has invested, and indeed, increased its investment in supporting local schools; this year this sum comes to over £1.8m.

What we are currently interested in is a partnership with Wokingham Schools – what we are calling at the moment a Learning Partnership. This is a new way of working, which would make the most of what is available to us, gaining schools' engagement and expertise and recognising their leadership. I am excited about seeing how this develops with our schools and look forward with enthusiasm to bringing more detail on this to the Council in due course as it comes to fruition.

**94.14 Nick Hatton asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:****Question**

The lack of funding for Wokingham schools means teachers are expected to spend more time in contact with children with less time to prepare lessons, less time to mark work and with few teaching assistants and other staff to support them. Teachers are spending more and more of their own cash to subsidise learning in their classrooms. Given the extraordinary pressure of work, the long hours, the cost of teachers providing their own materials for classroom use and unreasonable demands made on teachers, does the Borough have a strategy to help schools support their teaching staff and to reduce the number of teachers who become ill through stress?

**Answer**

In the absence of the Executive Member for Children's Services, Councillor Dolinski provided the following answer:

The Local Authority meets with representatives of the schools' workforce and the unions representing them on a termly basis, and indeed I attend these meetings regularly too. The purpose of the meeting is to consult with representatives on matters of general concern to staff across the schools within the Borough.

The issue of stress being faced by teachers and Headteachers in our schools has been an agenda item for the last few years. It is acknowledged that many of the demands being placed on the profession are the result of government initiatives and requirements.

However, Headteachers are encouraged to consider what is within their control and what guidance is available both from Ofsted and the Department for Education to assist them in reducing pressure wherever possible. Schools are being asked to consider recently published reports on teacher workload and accompanying material. I can ask Democratic Services to send you the link to this resource:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reducing-teachers-workload>

Sharing of good practice is also encouraged. An example stress management policy from one of our primary schools is being circulated to all schools.

The staff well-being survey is an important tool which is available to school leaders to check the health and well-being of the school workforce. Although schools differ in structure and culture, the survey allows each school to take forward the findings of the staff survey in a way which best meets the needs of their school community. The survey asks staff what they like about their school and what changes they think are important and appropriate. The way forward is developed by the whole school team, with the availability of external support from an experienced consultant who will be pleased to provide confidential guidance, tailored to need.

The survey gives schools the opportunity to identify, celebrate and build on its strengths and achievements and identify areas for development too. It also provides for a benchmarking process, year on year.

Where individual teachers do become unwell due to stress schools are encouraged to utilise stress risk assessment tools and make referrals to Occupational Health or a counselling service at an early stage.

**94.15 Rebecca Amodio-Wilcox asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:**

**Question**

Everyone agrees there is a funding crisis in Wokingham's schools and that it has developed over the last few years.

Has the Executive Member for Children's Services proactively contacted the chairs of governing bodies or Headteachers to ask for their views on the funding crisis facing their schools and the best way to solve the crisis?

**Answer**

In the absence of the Executive Member for Children's Services, Councillor Dolinski provided the following answer:

I am lucky to have the opportunity to discuss not only this topic directly with Heads and governors but many other burning issues that are brought to my attention in my capacity as lead member. I try to take every opportunity to meet with teachers and governors and I am always pleased to visit schools but this is not the only forum where I have been engaged with them on this particular issue. Most recently, in the light of the Central Government cut to the Educational Service Grant, I have led a task and finish group to

look at specifically how we could in partnership address the funding of School Support services going forward. We have been lucky to have representation on this group from both the primary and secondary schools and also hold a meeting where over 45 of our schools were represented. Both my Deputy Lead Member and I were there to hear what schools views were and listen to how they wanted us to address these funding issues.

I also meet regularly with teachers and governors at conferences, board meetings and other forums. I have many ways of gaining the views of schools and their governors, some of which are not direct also. Discussions about school funding take place at the Wokingham Schools Forum, attended by headteachers, governors and schools business managers. The Deputy Lead Member routinely attends these meetings, and schools take the opportunity to contact him directly about things which concern them and then Councillor Dolinski briefs me in turn.

Both Councillor Dolinski and I therefore know how schools are placed and what difficulties they face. School bursars meet regularly with the school finance officer so there is an effective channel of communications. I am briefed on schools matters including their budgets. This is what is behind our sustained and very active engagement with the National Funding Formula and the need for a much better deal for Wokingham schools.

#### **Supplementary Question**

Were they proactively sought to get their views?

#### **Supplementary Answer**

Yes, very proactively.

#### **94.16 Fiona Cross asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:**

##### **Question**

There is a funding crisis in Wokingham Borough schools because the Government is not allocating enough cash to Wokingham's schools.

Does the Member for Children's Services agree the Government should make more funds available to schools in Wokingham Borough rather than funding expensive Free Schools?

##### **Answer**

In the absence of the Executive Member for Children's Services, Councillor Dolinski provided the following answer:

I believe that the Government should make more funds available for schools in Wokingham Borough now to prevent them becoming unsustainable. I am pleased to represent the interests of *all* Wokingham schools, including our two free schools, in our discussions with the Secretary of State and MPs.

Where funding for new free schools can make the most positive impact is, for example, when they create new 'basic need' school places in a location this is geographically advantageous. In the context of very low funding and the increased need for more school places in this borough we should look at this different pot of funding that perhaps this Borough can exploit in the future.

#### **Supplementary Question**

I do not believe that my question has been answered so please can you provide an

answer to my question - does the Member for Children's Services agree the Government should make more funds available to schools in Wokingham rather than funding expensive Free Schools? You mentioned two Free Schools but the question was do you think that the money that the Government is giving out should go to Wokingham schools rather than towards Free Schools?

### **Supplementary Answer**

You will receive a written answer.

### **94.17 Karen Blake asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:**

#### **Question**

A key role of Parent Teacher Associations is fundraising for schools. Traditionally monies raised are spent on "nice extras" for the children, such as a gift at Christmas or end of term discos. Recently, Emmbrook PTA had to raise and spend £16,000 to provide an IT suite for the junior school.

I am concerned that as a result of chronic underfunding in local schools our PTAs are being asked to fund essential resources for our children. What is the Executive Member for Children's Service's opinion on this?

#### **Answer**

I very much welcome PTAs' support for schools and would like to take this opportunity to formally thank our PTA's across the Borough for all of their amazing funding raising and other voluntary works that they do in our schools.

This is something that has been happening around the country for as long as I can remember. I know that PTAs have really engaged with providing the "added extras" and that's been really appreciated by school staff and governors.

When it comes to buying the essentials that's a different matter though, and it begins to look like a system under real stress. I know that Wokingham Borough's schools are experiencing financial pressures now, and I'm not surprised because of the unfair funding position for Wokingham. We have been and will continue to work hard to address this as one of my earlier answers mentioned before.

Again, I humbly thank our brilliant PTAs across the Borough for the support they give to schools and children. I'm also really grateful too for our dedicated headteachers and governors, and I'm fully committed to doing everything I can to get a better deal for Wokingham.

#### **Supplementary Question**

It is nice to know that the PTA is very much supported and we are all very grateful for the work that they do. However, how do the Council then propose that schools will meet this funding shortfall when the PTA can no longer fund those essential resources? As the essential resources cost even more money, there is going to come a point when they have no money left, so how does the Council propose that we actually meet those needs for those resources?

#### **Supplementary Answer**

I have been very clear with our MPs, and I've been writing to the Minister and the

Secretary of State, that the situation at the moment is untenable for us and that they need to meet all of our needs. I will be continuing to have that dialogue with the Secretary of State and our Ministers. In 19 days' time I will be meeting with the Minister for Education and making out a very strong case to him that we need funding to cover our very basic costs of education at the moment, and what we're getting at the moment is unsustainable and it is not viable and we shouldn't be asking our PTAs to cover the very basic things that Central Government should be funding.

**94.18 Simon Redgate asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:**

**Question**

Increased direct funding from Wokingham Borough Council could help to mitigate the impact of low funding from central Government of our schools.

Wokingham Borough Councillors voted themselves a backdated pay rise last year. Will Councillors also vote for increased direct funding for our schools from Wokingham Borough Council's resources?

**Answer**

I think that this Council, and our country's democracy as a whole, would be much weaker and inferior if the only people that could serve in public office would be those who could afford to meet the costs out of their own pockets. But, it is right that Councillors know what it's like to manage tight budgets, and I'm only too well aware that school budgets are not just tight but in fact over-stretched in the Wokingham Borough.

This is why I am absolutely determined to get the best deal for Wokingham when I'm talking to the Secretary of State, the Schools Minister or local MPs. I've been fighting the corner for Wokingham schools for not just months but in fact years now, and I know our local MPs are listening and helping too.

And that's why Wokingham Borough Council has already voted to increase our investment in support for schools in 2017-18. We've put extra money in for education teams – over £1m-worth every year. This coming year it will be almost double! (Over £1.8. to be strictly accurate). So – you said do it – and we've done it!

**Supplementary Question**

Money was found for the pay rise from somewhere. Is there not the opportunity right now, with interest being felt in schools right now to find some more money for the schools?

**Supplementary Answer**

As I've said before, we've almost doubled the investment in our schools this year, but I want Central Government to step up to the mark because we need not just a little bit of investment, but a lot of investment. We've continued in this Borough, unusually, to invest a lot of money in our schools. We've done it through infrastructure, building new schools, helping with our school services and this has really paid off in terms of school improvement and lots of different things, but the Schools Fairer Funding is totally flawed, and us being the lowest funded and yet having some of the highest living costs here in this Borough – it just won't work, and it won't work going forward. So by putting a little bit extra in here, a little bit extra in there, it is still not going to help to the degree we need here, so Central Government has got to step up to the mark.

**94.19 Louise Connolly asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:**

**Question**

In Mary Sandell's resignation letter, from her position as Headteacher of the Forest School, she cites a "bleak financial future" as a driving force behind her decision to resign.

What can Wokingham Borough Council say to reassure parents at the school that there will not be a negative impact on their children's education from the predicted cuts in school spending power between now and 2020?

**Answer**

I'm sorry that anybody feels compelled to resign, whatever their reason, in this Borough and particularly if they are a Headteacher – I know how much work they do. I have massive respect for all of Wokingham's headteachers, they do a brilliant job for all of our children and young people, and where ever I go, right across the Borough to all of our schools, I feel really proud about the work that they do when I go to see it. I have great opportunities to go to lots of different places right throughout the country, representing this Borough and I feel immensely proud of the work that our headteachers do when I go and represent this Borough. This is even more so now when we can see our schools' funding getting even tighter. We know Wokingham has historically been one of the lowest-funded local authorities in the country, and yet despite this our schools still do really well with their results, as we all know.

Parents know this as well and that's why Wokingham schools are still really popular. I want to and this Borough wants to, still support parents, children and schools. I'm determined to get the best deal for Wokingham, and it's my job to work behind the scenes as well as in public meetings like this. And behind the scenes I have been lobbying for Wokingham in Central Government, taking every opportunity to explain that Wokingham Borough does not have a fair deal. I will keep doing this because I know that there's only one way for Wokingham's funding to go up – and that is to keep on arguing – and surely that is the only way for it to go upwards.

**94.20 Rona Noble asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:**

**Question**

Wokingham Borough Council uses its Educational Services Grant to fund centrally provided services, such as school improvement and education welfare services.

The Education Services Grant helps fund some of Wokingham Borough Council's continuing statutory obligations.

With the ending of the Education Services Grant this summer, schools will have to find the funds for services previously provided by Wokingham Borough Council. How is Wokingham Borough Council intending to make up the financial shortfall to ensure it can meet its statutory obligations?

**Answer**

How will we do this? The answer is: Positively!

Wokingham has historically funded over and above the amount of the national grant. This

year the Education Services Grant has stood at £1.8 million. On top of that the council put an extra £1.1 million, so we had £2.9 million altogether. That meant extra spending for schools on support teams, so they got an even better service than they would have otherwise. More in the special needs team, more psychologists and more help with school improvement. So if you read Ofsted's inspection reports about our schools, they tend to say good things about the Local Authority too, so it's really positive news.

But, for 2017-18, the ending of Education Services Grant means we have lost £1.8 million, so we had to take a hard look at what to do. We have had to reduce the number of posts in our teams, so their work will be more targeted and where we really need it. The solution had various parts to it. One of those was for the Council to say – we will still put in the £1.1 million – and we will add an extra over £700,000. So with a council investment of over £1.8 million, we can say that the Conservative-led Council proudly supports schools, and is truly serious about them.

## 95. PETITIONS

The following member of the public presented a petition in relation to the matter indicated. The Mayor's decision as to the action to be taken is set out against the petition.

Stephen Minett	<p>Mr Minett presented a petition with 126 signatures requesting a limit on the speed of traffic using Ellis Road.</p> <p><b><i>To be forwarded to the Executive Member for Highways and Transport</i></b></p>
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## 96. PETITION DEBATE

The Mayor announced that, in line with Procedural Rule 3.5.4.2, a petition containing more than 1,500 signatures had been received (on 1 March 2017) in relation to Fair Funding for Wokingham Borough Schools. Under the Constitution this had triggered a debate at the Council meeting.

It was proposed by Councillor Richard Dolinski and seconded by Councillor John Halsall that Procedural Rule 4.2.11.13 be suspended to allow the Petition Debate to be extended to one hour.

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

### 96.1 Petition submitted by Rachel Bradley

Rachel Bradley, the petition organiser, presented the petition, the wording of which was:

“We, the undersigned, petition Wokingham Borough Council to do everything in its power to persuade the Government to improve the level of funding for schools in the Borough. Our schools deliver a high standard of education but receive the lowest level of funding in the country and additional money is needed now to prevent their financial position becoming unsustainable, as well as in the longer term when the national funding formula is introduced.”



Rachel Bradley and Annabel Yoxall addressed the meeting and set out the background to the petition which related to the Department for Education's consultation exercise on the development of a new national schools funding formula. Under current projections it was likely that the proposed new formula would result in significant financial shortfalls for schools in the Borough. This came on top of an already deteriorating situation with local schools facing financial pressures resulting in staff reductions, licensed deficits and appeals to parents for financial help.

During the ensuing debate Members from all political Groups supported the aims of the petition and thanked the petitioners for raising the profile of this key issue. Councillor David Lee suggested that copies of the petition debate recording be sent to the Secretary of State and opposition spokespersons and that Members be provided with details of names and addresses of key MPs in order to facilitate lobbying on this issue.

Following the debate the Mayor invited Motions as to how the Council wished to respond to the petition.

The following Motion was proposed by Councillor Charlotte Haitham Taylor and seconded by Councillor Beth Rowland:

"In response to the petition titled "Fair Funding for Wokingham Borough Schools" signed by over 3,500 local residents. We, the Members of Wokingham Borough Council, will do everything in our power to persuade Central Government to increase the levels of funding that our Borough's schools receive from the National Funding Formula.

Our schools deliver a high standard of education but receive the lowest level of funding in the country. All organisations and schools need to continue to strive to be as efficient as they can be, however, additional money is needed now to prevent their financial position becoming unsustainable. Educating children has a justified and associated fundamental cost: schools in wealthier areas in the country with very high living costs, such as Wokingham, need improved financial support to safeguard their viability."

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

**RESOLVED:** In response to the petition titled "Fair Funding for Wokingham Borough Schools" signed by over 3,500 local residents. We, the Members of Wokingham Borough Council, will do everything in our power to persuade Central Government to increase the levels of funding that our Borough's schools receive from the National Funding Formula.

Our schools deliver a high standard of education but receive the lowest level of funding in the country. All organisations and schools need to continue to strive to be as efficient as they can be, however, additional money is needed now to prevent their financial position becoming unsustainable. Educating children has a justified and associated fundamental cost: schools in wealthier areas in the country with very high living costs, such as Wokingham, need improved financial support to safeguard their viability."

Following the debate, the Mayor confirmed that copies of the recording would be forwarded to the Secretary of State and opposition spokespersons and that details of postal addresses for key MPs would be circulated to all Members.

## **97. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Mayor referred to the printed list of Mayoral engagements and highlighted the following events:

- Poppy Appeal presentation evening at Wokingham Town Hall on 21 February 2017;
- Past Mayors gathering to celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Wokingham Borough Council on 3 March 2017;
- High Sheriff Mock Trials at Reading Crown Court on 11 March 2017;
- Disability sports taster day at Loddon Valley Leisure Centre on 15 March 2017.

## **98. APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL MEMBERS**

The Council considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 33 to 35, which stated that, following the submission of the Independent Remuneration Panel report to Council on 17 November 2016, members of the Panel had resigned en masse.

The report gave details of the process used to recruit new members to the Panel. Following an interview process with the Monitoring Officer and Service Manager, Democratic Services it was recommended that Tom Berman, David George and Nicholas Oxborough be appointed to the Panel for a period of three years.

The report noted that the Council's Constitution required that the Independent Remuneration Panel consist of five members. However, as the Constitution Review Working Group was due to consider the process for reviewing the Members' Allowances Scheme, it was considered prudent to appoint only three members at this stage.

It was proposed by Keith Baker and seconded by Julian McGhee-Sumner that the recommendation in the report be agreed.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That Tom Berman, David George and Nicholas Oxborough be appointed to the Independent Remuneration Panel for a period of three years, commencing on 24 March 2017.

## **99. ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE AND OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES 2016-17**

The Council considered the Annual Reports of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and the three Overview and Scrutiny Committees, set out at Agenda pages 37 to 66.

Councillor Simon Weeks, Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, addressed the Council and highlighted the key issues considered as part of the Overview and Scrutiny process. Councillor Weeks also set out the priority areas to be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committees in 2017/18.

Councillor Lindsay Ferris commented that the Annual Reports had been submitted to Council prior to being considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee. Consequently, Councillor Ferris reserved the right to suggest amendments to the reports at the Management Committee meeting.

It was proposed by Councillor Simon Weeks and seconded by Councillor John Kaiser that the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Reports for 2016/17 be noted.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Reports for 2016/17 be noted.

**100. AUDIT COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2016-17**

The Council considered the Annual Report of the Audit Committee for 2016/17, set out at Agenda pages 67 to 70.

Councillor David Lee, Chairman of the Audit Committee, addressed the Council and highlighted the key issues considered by the Audit Committee during the year. The report concluded that the Council's systems of internal control, governance and risk management arrangements were appropriate to ensure the achievements of the Council's objectives.

Councillor Lindsay Ferris commented that the Annual report had been submitted to Council prior to consideration by the Audit Committee.

It was proposed by Councillor Lee and seconded by Councillor Norman Jorgensen that the Audit Committee Annual Report for 2016/17 be noted.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That the Audit Committee's Annual Report for 2016/17 be noted.

**101. STANDARDS COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2016-17**

The Council considered the Annual Report of the Standards Committee for 2016/17, set out at Agenda pages 71 to 76.

Councillor Ken Miall, Chairman of the Standards Committee, addressed the Council and highlighted the key issues considered by the Committee during the year. Councillor Miall also highlighted the priority areas to be considered by the Committee in 2017/18 in order to maintain the highest standards of conduct by Members and Officers of the Borough, Town and Parish Councils.

It was proposed by Councillor Ken Miall and seconded by Councillor Pauline Helliars-Symons that the Annual Report of the Standards Committee for 2016/17 be noted.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That the Annual Report of the Standards Committee for 2016/17 be noted.

**102. REPORTS FROM MEMBERS APPOINTED TO OUTSIDE BODIES**

The Council considered the annual reports for 2016/17 from Members appointed to outside bodies, as set out at Agenda pages 77 to 130 (plus tabled sheets).

It was proposed by Councillor Keith Baker and seconded by Councillor Julian McGhee-Sumner that the annual reports from Members appointed to outside bodies be noted.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That the annual reports from Members appointed to outside bodies for 2016/17 be noted.

### **103. OUTCOME OF CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINTS**

In accordance with the Constitution the Council received a notice stating that, following a Standards Committee Hearings Panel, Councillors Lindsay Ferris and Clive Jones had been found in breach of the Member Code of Conduct.

The Hearings panel decided to formally censure Councillors Ferris and Jones and instructed the Monitoring Officer to arrange training for the two Members.

It was proposed by Councillor Ken Miall and seconded by Councillor Paul Swaddle that the Council notes that Councillors Lindsay Ferris and Clive Jones have been found to be in breach of the Member Code of Conduct.

**RESOLVED:** That the Council notes that Councillors Lindsay Ferris and Clive Jones have been found to be in breach of the Member Code of Conduct.

### **104. STATEMENTS BY THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL, EXECUTIVE MEMBERS, AND DEPUTY EXECUTIVE MEMBERS**

#### **Keith Baker, Leader of the Council**

I want to report good progress on the 21st Century Council restructuring which is on schedule and on budget. I am proud to be the leader of this Council during these exciting times. Continuity of leadership is essential for the duration of this project and I fully intend, subject to this Council's approval, to provide that continuity.

Tonight I want to give everyone a preview of some changes I will be making to the Executive at the Annual Full Council in May. When I was elected as leader some three years ago I embarked on a regular review of Executive roles looking at whether they were relevant or needed reshaping or even removed. The consequence is that over the last three years I have refined the Executive and other paid roles which has made a saving of 14% or £24,250.

As we move forward to the completion of the 21st Century Council this review has become even more relevant so that the administration can "do their bit" alongside the restructuring. All the current Executive portfolios are large with the exception of one, Resident Services. The intention is to reallocate all the components of the Resident Services portfolio across other Executive portfolios. For example, Personnel will come to me as Leader to mirror the fact that Andy Couldrick is effectively the Officer lead on that. Procurement will go to the Executive Member for Finance and so on. More details will be provided at the Annual Full Council.

This allows me to remove this Executive role which will provide additional savings of £12,000. This will increase the total savings to £35,000 or 21%. I am currently discussing with Cllr Pauline Jorgensen options for the future. Please rest assured that my Executive will not be losing her exceptional talents.

Now can I turn to the multiple Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) issue. Can I remind Council that when I spoke in the Independent Remuneration Panel debate last year I clearly stated that I wanted to move to a position where no Councillor received more than

one Special Responsibility Allowance or SRA. At the time only 4 Councillors received more than one SRA. At the Annual Full Council when the appointments are voted on I can guarantee that not a single Conservative appointment approved will receive more than a single SRA.

### **Julian McGhee-Sumner, Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing**

Members will recall that we very reluctantly agreed to issue a Judicial Review (JR), along with our colleagues in West Berkshire, against the Department of Health (DoH) for the failure to provide additional funding for additional responsibilities we had to take on for our residents. Although we had a good response from the DoH initially and subsequently withdrew the JR so that further consideration could be given to our arguments little has progressed since.

WBC along with West Berkshire have agreed with the DoH to keep a watching brief on the impact of the criteria changes. The bottom line is, of course affected by many more variables than the number of packages and their complexity.

We have negotiated with the DoH that we can present data analysis throughout the year and we intend to capture quarterly data following the end of year position and seek to negotiate further with the DoH in the Autumn. I will of course keep Members updated as this is something that may come up in the Autumn Statement.

### **Angus Ross, Executive Member for Environment**

There has been much Member and Resident speculation, most recently in the local newspaper's letter column, of whether there was a done deal about the future frequency of Household Waste collections when we tender for a new contract from 2019. Whilst the details of the intended contract have not yet been agreed, I can announce tonight that the household collection arrangements post 2019 will remain weekly.

Whilst many Councils have extended the collection to fortnightly or even longer, we realised a great number of our residents wish to keep this weekly collection. In fact, when asked in our professionally procured Market Research exercise at the start of the year on what was important to residents and specifically re "Maintaining the current service in its current form (i.e. weekly)" – and these were the exact words of the question; 92% said it was important. Less than half would be happy with fortnightly collections even if food waste was collected separately and weekly. Over half said that they would not mind paying more Council Tax, saying they need a weekly collection.

We have not yet decided on the many other aspects of the collection arrangements and I plan to announce these very soon. Meanwhile both this Council and through Re3, our joint waste disposal arrangement with Bracknell Forest and Reading, we are actively moving forward on finding new products to recycle and new initiatives on communication with residents, all aimed at increasing our recycling rate towards the 50% target set nationally for 2020.

I will move on to tell you of the uplifting experience I had a couple of weeks ago when around 100 disabled members of our community, including students from Addington School spent much of the day at Loddon Valley Leisure Centre on a Disability Sports Taster Day. Volunteers from 10 sports provided the experience and our Sports and Leisure Team organised the day superbly. All are to be thanked and congratulated, not least the 100 who clearly enjoyed the experience, as I did as well!

### **Mark Ashwell, Executive Member for Planning and Regeneration**

Planning: I can report the superb news that we have determined an average of 90% of all planning applications in time. This is against the national average of 68%, which is testament to the hard work and diligence of our Planning Department. The bad news is that appeals are at an all-time high, which is a massive drain on our Council's resources. The good news is we successfully defended 70% of all of our appeals. I'd like to thank my Deputy, Councillor Bowring, for his hard work with our local plan update.

Regeneration: This is full steam ahead in Wokingham Town and at Carnival Pool we are nearing the completion of what has been our best kept secret – a state of the art, 500 space multi-storey car park. This will open mid-May and enable the commencement of the re-generation of Elms Field and the Paddocks car park. Peach Place regeneration is also well under way, with the one-lane closure at Peach Street actually not working out too badly – 10 weeks to go.

Communities: In my portfolio, this is all about standing shoulder to shoulder with our existing residents in the newly forming Strategic Development Locations, the SDLs. We've worked very hard in making our regular forums engaging and worthwhile and in this respect, I cannot thank the Residents Associations and the Town and Parish Councils enough for their critical friendship.

Do you know, Mr Mayor, we're truly getting there and by sticking together the pain will be worth the massive gain we will all experience.

### **Malcolm Richards, Executive Member for Highways and Transport**

This month sees further progress on the development of the Carnival Pool car park at Wellington Road / Elms Field. The car park is expected to open for use in May 2017.

Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) is also progressing well and is due for formal submission to the Dept for Transport (DfT) by June, with an expected response soon after. It is anticipated that CPE will commence across Wokingham Borough during the last quarter of 2017. An additional benefit of our CPE decision is the digitalisation of our mapping system, which will enable online access to our maps and all the CPE regulations applicable across the borough, not just within our offices but eventually for all our residents to see on their own computers and phones, without having to look at printed maps and text descriptions.

Moving on to Highways, Members and residents will know of the substantial roadworkings occurring across the Borough at present, and for the foreseeable future. Some of it is new roadbuilding, other works are road maintenance and repairs, some of it is the installation and upgrading of utility services (which are often within the highway itself) in order to cope with the growth of new housing and development. Yet another aspect is the utility companies having to do emergency repairs. In an emergency, we cannot expect anyone to delay fixing a gas or water leak or an electrical supply. All of this considerable work has a knock on effect on moving around the borough on our roads, and jams are sometimes inevitable. I don't like traffic jams, I get stuck in them as well – but all of the work is required and cannot simply be put off until later. We regularly review the way that the highways tasks are done and the related communications, and we will continue to make improvements in our practices and procedures. In the meantime, we would like to ask you to be patient and to bear with us during this very busy time.

### **Councillor Alison Swaddle, Deputy Executive Member for Resident Services, on behalf of Councillor Pauline Jorgensen, Executive Member for Resident Services**

Our changes to introduce self-service in our larger Libraries is underway, each Library takes about a week to refurbish and install the new technology. Lower Earley Library was first in line, followed by Woodley and finally Wokingham Library where the work is due to be completed in time for reopening on Wednesday of this week. In total the improvement works, including the self-service kiosks are costing £300K of developer's funding allocated to libraries, this innovation allows us to increase our cost efficiency and extend our library opening hours, including some more opening at weekends.

The first Joint Public Protection Partnership board has been held in Wokingham. This board will guide the development of an integrated and more cost effective service between neighbouring councils of Wokingham, Windsor and Maidenhead, Bracknell and West Berkshire. The new service covers Environmental Health and Trading standards.

Procurement recently updated Scrutiny on the progress of the new Procurement Regulations. These are more transparent, streamlined, easy to follow for Officers undertaking procurement activity and incorporate updated public procurement legislation. This includes the introduction of a 'light touch' regime for social care service contracts, which were previously exempt, and increased support for small companies to take up public contract opportunities through greater advertising of opportunities and removal of pre-qualification steps. We have already seen savings in contract costs of approximately £400k per annum for tenders undertaken since these new regulations were adopted.

Finally although not strictly in my portfolio, I was delighted to add to my report on outside bodies by congratulating Berkshire Record Office for securing UK Archive Service accreditation.

### **Anthony Pollock, Executive Member for Economic Development and Finance**

We have seen recent coverage of costs incurred through the use of interim and agency staff to cover key positions in the Council. I welcome the opportunity to address this issue.

Wokingham Borough Council has had, over many years, to respond to changes in Government funding while meeting growing demand for services, particularly in our Children's and Adult Social Care services. We have adapted successfully, reducing costs and maintaining and even improving service delivery. Business process re-engineering, zero-based budgeting and Transformation were among the approaches adopted by this administration to bring down the costs of service delivery.

We are now in the middle of the 21st Century Council programme, where the Council is looking to change fundamentally how it delivers services to residents, and in the process to reduce the workforce by at least 10%, saving our residents £4m a year. It is imperative that we take steps to mitigate the risk, and costs, associated with redundancy. This Council has a strong track record of making change happen and avoiding high redundancy costs. One of the ways we do this is by holding posts vacant during change, by procuring temporary or interim staff to hold the reins in these areas. Once we know a post will remain in the structure following the 21 Century Council changes, we will then look to fill it at the right time on a permanent basis. We procure temporary staff at competitive rates. The story in the paper about the daily rate of £900 disguises the fact that we receive, through the contract framework, a refund on daily rates.

Some posts prove hard to fill. We have advertised twice for our Assistant Director for Education, and found no suitable candidate, and we have had abortive discussions with two of our neighbours about a shared service model. We are eager to share, when it make

sense for us, more than most of our neighbours. So we will continue to act with prudence and with care, to ensure we continue to provide value for money for our residents.

#### **105. STATEMENT FROM COUNCIL OWNED COMPANIES**

It was moved by Councillor Keith Baker and seconded by Councillor Gary Cowan that, in accordance with Procedure Rule 4.2.12 (q), Procedure Rule 4.2.24 be suspended to allow Councillor David Chopping to address the Council for five minutes.

On being put to the vote, the Motion was declared by the Mayor to be carried.

#### **Councillor David Chopping, Chairman of Wokingham Housing Ltd**

I would like to make a joint statement on behalf of Wokingham Housing Ltd and Loddon Homes.

Development progress continues on our main sites and also on the small sites where building and preparation work has already started at Grovelands, and the two sites at Reading and Norton Roads.

Our biggest frustration remains around the delays at Phoenix Avenue, where weather problems in January mean that phases 3, 4 and 5 will now not be ready until the end of August. While phases 1 and 2, which are weather tight, will be ready in May 2017, the delays are a disappointment, but not unanticipated. The main impact remains the delays in new residents being able to move in to their new homes. Negotiations with the contractor and Employer's Agents (that's the quantity surveyors acting on our behalf) should substantially cover any theoretical financial losses. Despite the delays, the project does remain within budget. This is a constricted site and I reiterate that practical problems with access, supply and weather were anticipated.

Fosters is still on time and to budget and we still anticipate handover in the Autumn.

Progress at 52 Reading Road to build a replacement facility for young care leavers, to replace Seaford Court is not only on track with planning permission granted in February, but we have already agreed terms with LIFEbuild, with the contractors becoming responsible for the site this week. All of this urgency has been to secure the £300k of Government grant awarded to the project by the Homes and Communities Agency. The build contract needs to be in place and demolition work started before the end of March 2017, so we have complied! The scheme also needs to be completed by end of March 2018.

This shows what can be done when there is an effective co-operation between all the interested departments of the Council, the Planning Department and good contract systems. I say well done to all concerned!

Decisions have been reached as to the composition of the Housing Companies, partly to meet HCA rules, and partly to simplify management, tax and other financial arrangements. Loddon will answer directly to Holdco, instead of being a subsidiary of WHL, and will hold and manage all properties where Government grants are involved. There will be a new Housing Company, wholly owned by the Council, that company to handle all Social and Affordable properties where Government grants are not involved. WHL will continue to handle all development and construction related work. WHL will also deal with open market sales projects and be involved in any Private Rented Sector homes through a wholly owned subsidiary depending on the details in the proposed Housing White Paper.



On many of our other sites we are either progressing planning applications or tendering the build contracts. This will deliver our next pipeline schemes to house local people. There are also a number of other sites across the Borough where we are working-up detailed business case, to see whether they are viable to take forward to achieving the necessary Board and Council approvals before putting in planning applications.

For the future we are looking forward to the opportunity to start the Gorse Ride redevelopment, plans for which are just starting to come into public consultation with a meeting with all the immediately affected residents taking place last Tuesday. This could be really exciting, and show what local initiative can achieve.

We continue to look for more sites, and thank those Councillors who have come forward with ideas. So I will finish with my usual plea of...More Please?

### **Councillor Anthony Pollack, Chairman of Optalis Ltd**

Many of you know that the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead will be transferring their adult social care services to Optalis and taking a 45% shareholding in the company at the beginning of April. I'm looking forward to the opportunities which the merged business will provide for both Councils, enabling them to continue to provide first rate adult social care within the financial envelope constraints predicted to be available over the next few years.

I am confident that the Local Authority Trading Company (LATCo) model developed by Wokingham Borough Council over the last five and a half years will provide a sound basis for the expanded company and I look forward to the innovation that I believe will come from the combination of Wokingham Borough Council and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, which will provide a sound basis for other Councils to join Optalis later, either as new shareholders transferring their adult social care services, or as commissioners of services, either in part or in whole, through service level agreements.

I think this is an exciting prospect and I look forward to it immensely.

## **106. MEMBER QUESTION TIME**

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

### **106.1 Tim Holton asked the Executive Member for Finance the following question: Question**

Can the Executive Member inform the Council of the attendance for this year's Budget Engagement Sessions with Borough residents?

### **Answer**

We do not have an exact attendance figure because the budget engagement were drop-in and no sign-in is required from attendees. However from a headcount we had approximately 120 people take part in the Budget Priority Activity at the five public sessions and a further 50 (approximately) taking part in the Black History Month Taster and Performance Evening.

We also attended the Wokingham Borough Council Schools' Fair at which approximately 300 young people took part in the Budget Priority Activity and some took part on-line. All

the findings are on the WBC website at [www.wokingham.gov.uk/consultations](http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/consultations)

Although we would of course always like greater participation, the numbers were considerably higher than last year, and many of those who took part considered it to be very useful and an engaging experience. We therefore intend to progress with these events and we will do what we can to increase participation further.

### **Supplementary Question**

What action did you take as a result of the feedback you received at these sessions?

### **Answer**

As you know, this is not a formal consultation – it is a budget engagement session. We found support for Council services; support for paying extra Council Tax budget on social care, which we have done as you know, and residents and the public were very supportive of our caring services and the need to continue to fund it.

### **106.2 Alistair Auty asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:**

#### **Question**

The Royal Berkshire Fire Authority is working to ensure that schools and public buildings are safely equipped to deal with fires. Could the Executive Member confirm that all schools currently being planned or built will be fitted with sprinkler systems?

#### **Answer**

In accordance with the policy that this Conservative-led Council agreed on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2012, the Council will “undertake a risk assessment of the need to install fire sprinklers in all new buildings it constructs, particularly schools”.

It is anticipated that in accordance with current Department for Education guidance (Building Bulletin 100: Design for Fire Safety in Schools) that the assessment will lead to sprinklers being installed, as they have been at all of the recent new schools that have been built in this Borough.

### **106.3 Chris Smith asked the Executive Member for Finance the following question:**

#### **Question**

Does the Executive Member for Finance agree that changes to the Council Tax Discount for empty homes brings greater fairness to our Council Tax system?

#### **Answer**

Local Authorities have the flexibility to vary the amount of discount given on an empty and unfurnished property and those properties which are empty and undergoing structural or major works. We have considered the existing or proposed discounts given by other Berkshire Authorities and the significant savings which may result in removing the discount. A recommendation was accepted to remove all discounts on these types of property. These changes bring the Council in line with the existing or proposed discounts at the other Berkshire Authorities. Annual savings of £400k, which will contribute towards the provision of Council services, will result from these changes.

It is felt that these changes will bring greater fairness as they will ensure that a consistent approach is taken across Berkshire. It will also ensure that within Wokingham those who

pay Council Tax pay an equal amount for similarly banded properties regardless of whether they are occupied or empty. This may result in more homes being brought into use with related community benefits.

### **Supplementary Question**

Does the Executive Member also agree that these changes should encourage those with empty homes to let them out or sell them on, and thus help to provide homes for those struggling to get on to the property ladder, especially our residents, like myself, who have grown up across Wokingham and are now in their twenties and thirties?

### **Supplementary Answer**

Yes.

### **106.4 Shahid Younis asked the Executive Member for Resident Services the following question:**

#### **Question**

21<sup>st</sup> Century Council will see a transition to greater use of self-service to make our residents' interactions with the Council more efficient. What steps is the Council taking to ensure that our residents who are less IT-literate, particularly the elderly, still have the means of contacting us if they have a problem?

#### **Answer**

As you've highlighted, the project will enable many more interactions we have with our residents to take place via our website at a time that is suitable to the resident. This will enable the resident to track the progress of their query or application at any time not just when the Council offices are open.

However, we do, of course, recognise that not all of our residents will be able to interact with us in this way. So, to assist in these cases we will also develop "Assisted Telephony" services. These services have been successfully introduced recently to administer the Blue Badge service and have worked extremely well. This will enable our customer services staff to help the individual and provide support for those customers who are unable to access our online services, such as completing application forms for them.

In addition, as many of our staff become more mobile and more visible within our communities, they will be able to offer support as required.

### **106.5 Laura Blumenthal asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:**

#### **Question**

Could the Executive Member set out what part the Council played in the changes to the Reading Buses Orange routes in Woodley?

#### **Answer**

The Orange 12/13/14 Reading Buses services are operated commercially, therefore the Council cannot specify the route, the fares, the timetable or the vehicles used.

Wokingham Borough Council officers were informed of the commercial changes to the Orange 13/14 routes by Reading Buses in March 2016. Officers made informal comments on the routes, which the company did consider and as a result added Orange service 12 as a late addition to the commercial offering.

Officers informed Woodley members of Reading Buses commercial changes during a specific presentation arranged for this purpose on 18<sup>th</sup> July 2016.

### **Supplementary Question**

On a wider view, what level of financial involvement do we have with travel related concessions?

### **Supplementary Answer**

There are several categories here. We spend £720,000 per year on public transport services. That is, supported bus services, for example the vehicles and the drivers etc, just to enable to service to be set up. Of that £720k there is £220k in grants of S106 funding or developer contributions, so the Council pays £500k per year of its own funds in this category of setting up vehicles for routes. Almost £100k is spent supporting Keep Mobile and Readibus, again supporting the vehicles and the drivers for Keep Mobile and the Readibus service.

In addition, another £900k per year is spent on concessionary subsidised fare payments. That's for bus passes including the senior bus passes and disabled bus passes, and that money is spent as a reimbursement to the public transport bus companies and to Keep Mobile and Readibus services. Just for extra information, there are currently 25,000 senior bus passes in circulation within Wokingham. That is £1.5m if you want to add it all together

### **106.6 Alison Swaddle asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:**

#### **Question**

Could the Executive Member provide an update on the Multi-Academy Trust Working Group in light of the Government's confirmation that it will no longer pursue compulsory academisation of all schools?

#### **Answer**

The Working Group has continued to meet and both elected Members and headteachers have come to similar views. The evolving national context means that there is value in looking at a local learning partnership to provide a grouping for schools support, including mutual support consistent with long-standing national policy. At this stage to set up a local authority multi-academy trust now looks premature, but might well be a later stage in the process, and we still have this on our radar in the Working Group.

Headteachers have been pursuing this too. The Member Working Group is also aware of and supports the exploration of similar arrangements in a London borough authority. Officers from Camden, which is the same size as Wokingham, have met with Wokingham heads and officers this week. Heads have also been asked to confirm the current status of interest in the learning partnership, with most responding positively.

The next stages will include the development of a worked-up learning partnership proposal, with any ideas of this including or excluding development in the partnership with headteachers. We need to think of schools in the lead for this, with the learning partnership membership ultimately a matter for heads and governors. The local authority is a valued partner, and we will take on and follow through in our enabling role.

**106.7 Abdul Loyes asked the Leader of the Council the following question:**

**Question**

Could the Leader set out the ways in which our residents will benefit from the changes from 21<sup>st</sup> Century Council?

**Answer**

The C21 Change Programme will transform the way the Council interacts with its residents and other customers leading to more effective and efficient processing of queries, applications and casework. Services are being redesigned around the customer journey thereby breaking through the traditional Council structures which can be confusing, time consuming and complex.

In the future our residents will be able to find for themselves much more of the information they are looking for more easily and readily on our website. They will be able to track progress of their queries for themselves including the ability to “track” requests online, and receive updates via SMS or email. If residents need to speak to us our customer services team building on the great improvements made over recent years will be able to answer many more of the queries and questions they receive.

If the issue is more complex or involves for instance an application process then the case will be held by a customer case owner who will be the point of contact for residents. They will be able to progress the case and crucially keep the resident updated at each stage.

Underpinning these changes will be an improved use of technology that connects systems across the organisation and enables our staff to work in much more efficient ways. Staff will be able to access resident’s records rather than having to ask the resident the same questions each time they interact with us. Technology solutions will enable residents to interact with the Council in a way that is flexible, easy to use and available at the time of their choosing. Intuitive and easy to use services will enhance the customer experience. It will reduce hand offs and create a customer centric approach to Service Delivery.

More of our staff will be mobile and visible in our communities. This will again help residents to get their queries resolved quickly and will also reap many benefits in terms of dealing with local issues such as highway defects, faster inspections and investigations of complaints.

Once implemented the Council will have a much greater focus on problem-solving and customer responsiveness This will be underpinned by the efficiencies gained through the improved use of technology and will lead to a leaner Council which costs less to run.

**106.8 Mike Haines asked the Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing the following question:**

**Question**

Every morning on my way to work outside Reading station I see a number of people huddled in doorways; some sleeping, some begging, and some wandering around with a number of bags looking as if they have been out all night. To my untrained eye the number of homeless appears to be increasing and clearly this problem isn’t going to stop at the Borough boundary. Please could the Executive Member responsible advise; What trends are we seeing in the number of people presenting as being Homeless across Wokingham Borough over the recent 3 year period?

## **Answer**

Rough sleeping in our Borough has been relatively high for the last two years. In December 2015, we undertook the formal count and estimate, and we counted 13 individuals as rough sleeping. On November 2<sup>nd</sup> 2016, the date of the last count, the number estimated to be 11, even though only one person was found to be bedded down. A Rough Sleepers group meets monthly to talk about how to help each individual person and there have been some successes in helping people get settled. Where there is a chaotic element to a person's life, this can mean the solutions are not always successful and on occasion, avenues of help are limited or have been exhausted.

Homeless applications have increased from 68 in 12/13 to 183 in 15/16 of which our duty to rehouse has increased from 17 to 97. The main reasons are: the end of Assured Shorthold Tenancy; parental eviction, and relationship breakdown. Wherever possible, we take steps to prevent homelessness, for example, if there is ever a chance to negotiate with a private landlord or to offer assistance that may prevent eviction. Frequently the reason for end of Shorthold Tenancy is that the landlord wishes to sell the property and so there is little chance for prevention in these circumstances.

The Council's ongoing endeavours to provide affordable housing, enabled and facilitated by our approach to Strategic Development Locations and the work of WHL, is a further significant response by the Council to meet the growing instances of homelessness.

## **Supplementary Question**

I think those are, clearly, fairly shocking figures. What steps, as a Council, are we taking to make sure, as far as we can, that these homeless can access the facilities that we enjoy, for example decent medical care?

## **Supplementary Answer**

We have a detailed homeless strategy. We've recently purchased a property which we're planning to use for short term homelessness. We work very closely, as a Health and Wellbeing Board, with all local medical centres within the Wokingham Borough. Where we identify someone as homeless, we try to put them in contact with the GP and we have been relatively successful in that.

## **106.9 Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:**

### **Question**

Would you provide several examples of each of WBC contracts on major infrastructure and roads that are delivered on time and on budget and when it goes wrong with slipping timetables & cost overruns?

### **Answer**

We deliver many successful major infrastructure projects within the Highways and Transport division to agreed timescales and budgets, however as requested here are a few that I confirm were delivered on time and within budget in the last financial year:

### **Annual carriageway and resurfacing programming**

17 road schemes

Designed by WSP and delivered by Balfour Beatty

Programmed and delivered throughout 2016/17 on time

Budget £2.5M

Spend £2.5M

### **Loddon Viaduct Phase 2**

That was a complex engineering scheme including re-waterproofing the bridge deck, strengthening concrete step barrier and carriageway resurfacing

Designed by WSP and delivered by Balfour Beatty

Programmed and delivered in the Summer 2016 to ensure completion before new school term began in early September 2017

Budget of £1.1M

Spend of £1.15M (additional £50,000 spend due to some additional works order by the Council not cost over runs)

### **LED street lighting contract – Year 1**

4118 lanterns and 1791 columns & lanterns replaced

Delivered by Volker Highways Limited

Programmed and delivered throughout 2016/17 on time

Budget £1.1M

Spend £1.0M

Despite performing well, and due to the increasing volume of highways works forecast for the highway network over coming years, the Highways and Transport service have prioritised improved programming, co-ordination and communication of all planned works on the network, and these improvements will be coming on line over the next few months.

### **Supplementary Question**

Why aren't we using penalty clauses in our contracts with developers and road maintenance companies, so that when they don't deliver on time, they have to pay for it rather than residents having to pay for it with cost overruns?

### **Supplementary Answer**

In order to work on the road, the companies have to pay a fee to operate for a certain number of days and there's a cost for that – the longer the time they spend, the more they pay, so it encourages them to work within time. If they exceed the time that is paid for, they have to come back and ask for another extension and pay another fee so they are, in fact, paying when they exceed the time.

### **106.10 Clive Jones asked the Executive Member for Environment the following question:**

#### **Question**

At the Council's budget meeting on February 23rd, I asked the Executive member for Finance the following question which he chose not to answer. Could you answer it for me?

Why do you think there will be a saving of over £1M in the waste and recycling budget in 2019-20? Especially as we will have to collect from many more new houses by that time.

#### **Answer**

This is purely an aspirational target in year 3 of our Medium Term Financial Plan and we have no plans as yet for how this could be achieved. This figure, along with all other budget figures beyond 2017/18, will be reviewed as we set the budget for 2018/19.

Due to time constraints, the following questions were not put and received written answers as set out below.

**106.11 Imogen Shepherd-DuBey asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:**

**Question**

Because, quite rightly, we have parental choice about where children go to school it means that many parents have no choice but to drive their children lengthy distances to get them there on time. This, of course, is exacerbating our traffic problems at peak times, with parking problems around our schools.

For children where walking to school is not possible, what transport solutions have been considered?

**Answer**

When the Council has a duty to provide transport to school it endeavours to use the most cost effective way of getting children to school so they arrive without distress and ready to start learning. This may be a bus pass, a payment to the parent, a seat in a coach or minibus or a taxi, depending on the number of children making that journey. Older children may also be able to cycle to school using the network of cycle lanes the council has provided and continues to develop. The Council also supports schools to develop School Travel Plans to promote sustainable modes of travel to school and when the journey is beyond walking distance this can include the promotion of car sharing.

**106.12 Gary Cowan asked the Executive Member for Planning and Regeneration the following question:**

**Question**

In the light of two recent Planning Appeal decisions at Charvil and Spencer's Wood where the 5 year land supply was challenged by the inspectorate as well as in social media Pegasus Planning was the decision to secretly raise the Core Strategy number of houses from 661 a year to 856 a year in April 1st 2013 a wise and justifiable move.

**Answer**

As established in the Beech Hill appeal decision and through the judgement of the High Court (in Gladman v Wokingham BC), the Inspector stated "*It is plain from this that the Gladman judgment cannot be read as endorsing the Core Strategy figure as the next best thing to, or even an adequate proxy for, an objective assessment of the Borough's housing need.*" (paragraph 30)

Paragraph 46 reads "*The Council is currently unable to identify its objectively assessed need for housing, and does not have an up-to-date SHMA. In such circumstances, it is hardly surprising that an appellant in a S.78 appeal should see a need to put forward its own evidence concerning housing need. The weight to be placed on that evidence remains a matter for the decision maker.*"

From the above it is therefore crystal clear that the Council had to use the Objectively Assessed Need housing figure from the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA). The SHMA is an evidence base to identify the Council's objectively assessed housing need and is not a policy that needs to be consulted on. Since it was published, the Council started to use the Objectively Assessed Housing need for the purposes of calculating the 5



year housing land supply. If the Council had not done this then Inspectors would simply have chosen to go for any much higher 'need' figure put forward by appellants in the recent appeals. This also represents a better position in 5 years Housing Land supply terms than would have been the case using the previous core strategy position.

In two recent appeal decisions (Stanbury House and Park Lane), Inspectors have decided to increase this OAN figure due to worsening issues of affordability. However, it is at least clear that Inspectors are choosing to use the OAN figure as a starting point even where they have departed from the OAN figure. The Council could not have substantiated the Council's position had the core strategy figures been used.

**106.13 Philip Houldsworth asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:**

**Question**

Phase I of the Winnersh Relief Road will be finished this year and there will be a demand to use it before Phase II is built. In the light of this urgency when will the Council finish the building of Phase II?

**Answer**

Winnersh Relief Road Phase 2 is provisionally planned for opening in 2021, however this date is subject to the usual caveats and risks for major project delivery including land acquisition, obtaining planning permission and procurement. Detailed refinement work is underway within the Highways and Transport service and council's designers WSP and delivery contractors Balfour Beatty, and over 2017 we plan to eliminate risks and provide greater accuracy over the completion date for all the major highway infrastructure projects across the Borough.

**106.14 Ian Pittock asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:**

**Question**

WBC plans to build an unlit greenway from the FBC Centre in Finchampstead via California Country Park up to Commonfield Road and then through an unlit SANG to Bohunt School. With her children's safeguarding hat firmly on her head will the Executive Member for Children's Services confirm that she is fully satisfied that this route will be safe for unaccompanied school children aged 11 and 12 to use as WBC's designated safe cycle route to the school from Finchampstead throughout the entire school year starting September 2017?

**Answer**

The Council is working to deliver the first phase of its wider Greenways project which will create a multi-use link between the Finchampstead Baptist Centre and the Arborfield SDL. The route has been designed to accommodate pedestrian, cycle and equestrian use and will conform with relevant standards for surfacing and road crossing points. This will be an alternative route to school from Finchampstead to the walking route that is also being established along Nine Mile Ride and Park Lane. DfE guidance is for walking routes, but the principles of safe route assessment can be applied to cycle routes too, and these are concerned with traffic hazards rather than wider issues of personal safety.

It is a matter for parents to decide at what age their children can travel unaccompanied. I observe though that at the start and end of the school day we can expect this route to be well used by children travelling to and from school, so children will not normally be alone at

this time. While I expect responsible parents to ensure their children's cycles have lights, if they are likely to cycle after dark, the school day (8:50 to 15:20) allows travel to occur during daylight hours. Even on the winter solstice, 21st December 2017, it is daylight between 7:36 and 16:27, allowing ample time to cycle home after school during daylight.

## **107. MINUTES OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS AND WARD MATTERS**

### **107.1 Michael Firmager asked the Executive Member for Environment**

#### **Question**

In my ward of Hawkedon the areas next to the River Loddon have suffered in the past from flooding. Can you assure me, and the residents of Hawkedon, that there are adequate protections against such flooding in the future?

#### **Answer**

The Environment Agency are currently conducting vegetation clearance and maintenance along the stretch of the River Loddon nearest to your ward and this will continue over the next few months. Benefits of this will be that the channel is clear and free of debris so the river can flow naturally during storm conditions. Furthermore, the SUDS feature being implemented within the Hatch Farm Dairies site should provide some form of betterment for this area and, at the very least, will not make the situation worse.

We are also working with the Loddon Catchment Partnership on a number of natural flood risk management projects to store water upstream in attenuation areas, and this will hopefully have some net benefits for all of the Wokingham portion of the Loddon. This work is upstream in Hampshire.

I recall there are a number of drainage issues with Thames Water's infrastructure in your ward, and the Environment Agency, Thames Water and Wokingham Borough Council, as local lead Flood Authority are working well together. We now have a dedicated Thames Water officer in our area.

We are also clearing and CCTV-surveying the various drains from and around the Showcase Cinema roundabout area, maybe just outside your ward, and could possibly raise the road level if we can show benefit from that without affecting flooding elsewhere.

Finally, I am pleased that a number of local residents have volunteered in your area as flood wardens and they are helping us as eyes and ears at all times but especially in times of flood.

### **107.2 Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport**

#### **Question**

Since we own the land, we have the money for the Winnersh Relief Road, and the developers are planning to finish their part of the Relief Road this year, why haven't we already submitted the planning application for the Council provided part of the Winnersh Relief Road so the rest of the residents don't have to get stuck in tailbacks on the Reading Road on a regular basis, which I'm sure you've been stopped in, and almost everybody in this room has probably been stuck trying to get through to Winnersh Crossroads?

#### **Answer**

There are various stages involved in building the Winnersh Relief Road and the

connections on the Wokingham Road and the Northern Distributor Road. Obviously a great deal of work has gone into this and is still going into it and they are looking at the most efficient way of providing it, as you don't have to do a job and then a bit later you change a bit of it to modify it when the next stage comes along. People aren't generally keen on having a major road job which finishes and then, six months later, you have to close the road for another part of it. So they've been organising it such that it causes minimal inconvenience to motorists and the timescale, and it is attempting to align many of the jobs into a better pattern than it was originally. That's all it is.

The aim is that the current plan, subject to all the usual caveats, is that the northern part of the Northern Distributor Road and the Winnersh Relief Road are intended to align around 2021. That is the current date. We'll keep you advised of any other changes as and when they arrive

### **107.3 Paul Swaddle asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport Question**

I've had it raised by residents, as it has been often over the past years, about inconsiderate parking outside of schools, and, in particular, Loddon Primary. Would the Executive Member for Highways be able to confirm that the new Civil Parking regime will be targeted to touch such trouble spots?

#### **Answer**

At the moment, matters of on street parking are managed by Thames Valley Police. We don't have any responsibility for it, nor can we. However, we are applying for Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) and as I gave an answer earlier in this session, CPE is currently going forward and we would hope to have it implemented in the last quarter of this year.

When that comes along, we will be organising and having responsibility for parking control and for breaches. So where there are yellow lines and markings or anything outside schools which are supposed to prevent wrong parking, then CPE will be our responsibility and they will be pursued and kept flowing much better. Obviously on day one, when this system starts, if you don't already have yellow lines and all the extra things the policing, whether it's done by the police or us, won't be any different, but once you get restrictions – yellow lines or any other regulations and our digitalised maps will show you where they are – then CPE will cover it.

### **107.4 Prue Bray asked the Executive Member for Children's Services Question**

Could you please explain why 1.1 hectares was a big enough site for the new primary school in Winnersh at Wheatfields in 2013, but according to what happened at the Executive meeting earlier this month, discussing Aldryngton, is apparently not big enough for a new primary school at Hatch Farm Dairies in 2017 despite the Council having signed a legal agreement in 2014, which says that 1.1 hectares is what the Council asked for specifically to put a school at Hatch Farm Dairies?

#### **Answer**

I can find out the detail for you and get back to you as to why that amount was asked for and why it seems insufficient at the moment. If we've built a school on it before, we can do it again, I'm sure.

**107.5 Laura Blumenthal asked the Deputy Executive Member for Environment Question**

If you take a stroll around South Lake after rain, it's totally ruined if you go around the Linden Road end because there are huge puddles that form, and indeed they are a lot like mini-lakes. Can you explain what the Council is doing to address this issue?

**Answer**

The work to repair the large puddles was planned a little while ago, and both Councillor Ross and I took a walk around this very peaceful lake in your ward, and we do agree that whilst the small puddles are great fun for the little ones in their wellies when they enjoy jumping in and out, the larger puddles do present a problem after very heavy rainfall. I am pleased to inform you that the work to repair the large puddles started yesterday, and perhaps we can take a walk next week to inspect the facilities.

**107.6 Lindsay Ferris asked the Deputy Executive Member for Resident Services Question**

We did not see anything in the budget about the new library facility in Twyford. Can the Deputy Executive Member provide an update, particularly referencing funding?

**Answer**

We will certainly provide you with that.

**107.7 Philip Houldsworth asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport Question**

Why have the capital sums for the Winnersh Relief Road, which appeared in last year's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) suddenly disappeared from this year's MTFP? I guess it's because you are just not going to build the roads.

**Answer**

The figure was in 2016/17. It doesn't show in the current one because, although the money was put in, it hasn't yet been used and so it just carries forward, but it doesn't show as a carry-forward, but it is already allowed for. It hasn't been cancelled, it's in there. There's money for the budget, they are working towards it and are working on schedules that we've mentioned.

**107.8 Imogen Shepherd-DuBey asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport Question**

Recently we were informed that service of our school crossing patrol on Emmbrook Road was possibly going to be removed. The area, of approximately two blocks, has both Emmbrook Infants, Juniors, Emmbrook Secondary and two separate pre-schools. We are also expecting over 700 hundred homes to be built in the Matthews Green development beginning on the edge of this area. At the time when Wokingham Borough Council can find the money to pay contractors, taking earnings in the region of £600-£900 a day, which far exceeds the salary of the average school crossing patroller, can I ask if we've really got our priorities right when it comes to saving money, especially when it is putting our children at risk?

**Answer**

You'll know that we have published what our thoughts are on this. There are areas where we already have a crossing control of some sort, whether it is a zebra crossing or a push-button pedestrian crossing, and that is, quite obviously, a fairly safe crossing. There are thousands of them around the country, unless you are saying that a pedestrian crossing is not safe, in which case we've got a problem all over the country. They are safe crossings.

If you've then got a crossing controller at the same place, that's a double safe standard. It might be quite nice to say yes, we can have two, but we can't. We have very tight controls on the money, as you've heard most of the evening' and we can't really therefore justify having two safe methods in one location instead of one. So we're not withdrawing a safe facility for crossing at all, we are simply adjusting the level of contribution to any one of those double safe standard ones.

**107.9 Norman Jorgensen asked the Leader of the Council****Question**

In the latest newsletter, the Lib Dems have said, in bold headline, 'The future of Chalfont Park is in doubt'. Please will you tell me if this is true?

**Answer**

A piece of land next to the park owned by the Council, widely known as Area DD, has always been earmarked for development and is being assessed for suitability for houses or sheltered accommodation. To be absolutely crystal clear, any encroachment on to Chalfont Park would be unacceptable to me as Leader.

**107.10 Clive Jones asked the Executive Member for Environment****Question**

What measures have you put in place to ensure that the debacle around grass cutting that happened in Hawkedon Ward and throughout the Borough last spring will not be repeated in 2017? What is being done differently this year?

**Answer**

I did inform Council that last year there was a coincidence of 4 weeks between the old and new contract when no grass was being cut and that, by happenstance, was a period when the grass was growing out of control. This year, the contractor is well into the routines of cutting grass. We have confidence, we are working very closely with the contractor and I would not anticipate any issues this year.

We also, last year, took up a lot of consultation and conversations with both Members and residents where there was doubt about cutting the grass, and I think we now have what I would say is a stable situation, though you will never please all people all the time.

**107.11 Tim Holton asked the Executive Member for Children's Services****Question**

I have been made aware by a Hawkedon resident that a school in Reading, which their child attends, has been hit by clawback by Reading Borough Council of tens of thousands of pounds due to RBC claiming they made mistakes in calculating their payments. To settle this, RBC withheld the school's entire monthly payment, which is multiples of the amount in dispute, and caused issues with school payroll due to no warning coming from RBC and no attempts to discuss the issue before withholding payment.

I am sure the Executive Member agrees this exposes pupils to unnecessary and preventable problems. Could the Executive Member confirm the process of under or overpayments with Wokingham Schools and that they would give warning before changing any agreed payments to the school?

**Answer**

All Councils and Schools face financial difficulties, as we have discussed this evening extensively, and some more than others, and it would be difficult to make comment from the outside on how others address these issues. Some may take a very different approach to us – read what you may into that particular comment.

In Wokingham, we have worked hard to ensure that, whatever difficulties this Council faces, any effect on schools is absolutely minimal. In fact, this Council has increased its investment in teams supporting schools for 2017-18. We have worked to make sure that Wokingham schools get the best deal in a national review of school funding. We want school budgets to be fair and to be stable so they can continue to manage to do what they do.

Wokingham schools are run very well. Ofsted Inspectors say that, we know it, and our school staff live and breathe it every single day for the sake of our children and our young people. Any problem in a partnership like ours with schools is dealt with, with effective communication and, very importantly, honesty as well. We have transparent systems and we operate through an effective Schools Forum, where headteachers and governors make decisions together with us. Admittedly there are some tough decisions, but we face those head on with clarity and shared purpose.

Figures from the National Educational Funding Agency have changed mid-year historically, and this is always challenging. We have dealt with that in the past without dramatic effect to schools, so if there were any questions of under or over allocations, we would rely on our tested principles of transparency, effective communication and partnership and we get there in the end. We are here to get the best deal for our children and young people in our classrooms, our playgrounds and, of course, at home.

**108. CONTINUATION OF THE MEETING**

At this point in the meeting, 10.10pm, in accordance with Procedure Rule 4.2.12 (m), Council considered a Motion to continue the meeting beyond 10.30pm for a maximum of 30 minutes, to enable further business on the Agenda to be transacted. The Motion was proposed by Councillor Prue Bray and seconded by Councillor Lindsay Ferris.

Upon being put to the vote, the Motion was declared by the Mayor to be lost.

**109. MOTIONS**

**110. MOTION 392 SUBMITTED BY LINDSAY FERRIS:**

In accordance with Procedural Rule 4.2.12 (g) Motion 392, submitted by Councillor Lindsay Ferris, was withdrawn.

**111. MOTION 393 SUBMITTED BY IAN PITTOCK:**

The Council considered the following Notice of Motion, submitted by Councillor Ian Pittock and seconded by Councillor Lindsay Ferris:

“Whitehall requires that where the Executive System is used each Executive Member shall be subject to a scrutiny committee. This Council believes that it is essential to demonstrate avoidance of clear conflicts of interest and over-centralisation of power through patronage provided by the Special Responsibility Allowance system. Therefore, the Council Leader, who appoints the Executive Members and such Executive Members themselves, should in no way be involved in the pre-Council and Council processes used to appoint Members to scrutiny and audit committees, nor the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of such.

This Council resolves that non-Executive Members themselves shall pre-appoint Members to scrutiny and audit committees, ensuring political balance, and the Members of each committee shall themselves pre-appoint their own Chair and Vice-Chair with these names then being sent to Council for formal appointment, with Executive Members declaring an interest and abstaining in the vote.”

It was moved by Councillor Pauline Helliard-Symons and seconded by Councillor Norman Jorgensen that the Motion be amended by adding the following words:

“This Council also resolves that the matter should be referred to the Constitution Review Working Group to review in more detail and to recommend a way forward, and that the proposer and seconder of the Motion should be invited to provide more detail on their view of the practical implementation of this change.”

The amendment to the Motion was not accepted by the proposer of the original Motion.

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

**RESOLVED:** Whitehall requires that where the Executive System is used each Executive Member shall be subject to a scrutiny committee. This Council believes that it is essential to demonstrate avoidance of clear conflicts of interest and over centralisation of power through patronage provided by the Special Responsibility Allowance system. Therefore, the Council Leader, who appoints the Executive Members and such Executive Members themselves, should in no way be involved in the pre-Council and Council processes used to appoint Members to scrutiny and audit committees, nor the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of such.

This Council resolves that non-Executive Members themselves shall pre-appoint Members to scrutiny and audit committees, ensuring political balance, and the Members of each committee shall themselves pre-appoint their own Chair and Vice-Chair with these names then being sent to Council for formal appointment, with Executive Members declaring an interest and abstaining in the vote.

This Council also resolves that the matter should be referred to the Constitution Review Working Group to review in more detail and to recommend a way forward, and that the proposer and seconder of the Motion should be invited to provide more detail on their view of the practical implementation of this change.

#### **112. MOTION 394 SUBMITTED BY PARRY BATTH:**

Due to time constraints, Motion 394 was not considered and, in accordance with Rule 4.2.8.1 was deemed to have fallen.

**113. MOTION 395 SUBMITTED BY DAVID SLEIGHT:**

Due to time constraints, Motion 395 was not considered and, in accordance with Rule 4.2.8.1 was deemed to have fallen.

**114. MOTION 396 SUBMITTED BY RICHARD DOLINSKI:**

Due to time constraints, Motion 396 was not considered and, in accordance with Rule 4.2.8.1 was deemed to have fallen.

**115. PERSONAL STATEMENT BY COUNCILLOR IAN PITTOCK**

With the agreement of the Mayor, Councillor Ian Pittock addressed the Council and stated that he was resigning from the Conservative Group and the Conservative Party and would be joining the Council's Liberal Democrat Group with immediate effect.