

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE EXECUTIVE
HELD ON 27 JULY 2017 FROM 7.30 PM TO 8.10 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Charlotte Haitham Taylor (Chairman), David Lee, Mark Ashwell, Chris Bowring, Norman Jorgensen, Julian McGhee-Sumner, Stuart Munro and Simon Weeks

Other Councillors Present

Charles Margetts
Gary Cowan
Angus Ross
Imogen Shepherd-DuBey
Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey
Pauline Jorgensen

24. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillor Oliver Whittle.

Councillor Charles Margetts attended the meeting on behalf of Councillor Whittle. In accordance with legislation Councillor Margetts could take part in any discussions but was not entitled to vote.

25. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 29 June 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the following amendment:

Minute 18.3 - Question from Pauline Jorgensen to the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement: in the second line of the second paragraph of the answer replace "I" with "we".

26. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

27. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

27.1 Kevin Morgan asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Question

Can an update be provided on the plans for before and after school childcare from September for the academic year 2017/18? Many local parents are very concerned about the growing need for these services and the current lack of capacity.

As the questioner was absent the following written answer was provided.

Answer

Our requirement is to encourage schools to offer out of hours childcare and to encourage providers to enter the market and extend their provision. With this in mind, and as an

example, I am currently personally talking to the parent's forum of Emmbrook Infants and Junior Schools. This in preparation for September and the academic year 2017/18. I do know that Emmbrook Infant and Junior schools run out of school provision from the former caretaker's bungalow.

Private sector providers could increase that local provision but only if they can find a suitable venue. We have a number of after-school club companies who operate on school sites and they may be interested if there were available buildings. Viability would very much depend on the numbers and clearly we are limited by the availability of premises.

27.2 Keith Malvern asked the Executive Member for Environment, Sports, Environmental Health, Leisure and Libraries the following question:

Question

I have emailed you twice to ask about the decision making around the proposed relocation of Wokingham library but am asking this question as I have had no response.

In considering this issue did you look at the Impact Assessment that has a plan that fails to show the full location of the existing library and adjacent parking? In the Relocation Engagement feedback there were no comments supporting the move and no responses were made to customers who criticised the move.

To a comment about there being existing plans for the current library site to be sold for residential purposes there is no response. How can any rational decision be made with these questions unanswered?

Answer

The decision to relocate Wokingham Library to the Carnival Phase 2 site when it opens in 2021 was taken because of the many benefits it provides to the people who regularly make use of its services and the potential to increase its usage by locating the library with the new leisure centre and the wider Elms Field development.

The issues and questions surrounding the proposed relocation have been explored extensively by the Council through the large number of questions submitted to the Executive at its March 2017 meeting, the subsequent Call-In to the Scrutiny Committee of the decision and through the range of engagement activities that publicised the proposals and encouraged feedback. Within these considerations, the current location and adjacent parking were reviewed and considered in detail. The Executive Report and the Impact Assessment make clear reference to the advantages of the new site being on one level and to the access to the library, including the access from the new car park, also being both flat and level.

Despite the number of press releases, press articles and engagement activities about the proposed relocation, the number of actual responses and comments was very low. This is in stark contrast to the library consultation that was conducted last year, where a large number of respondents from the Wokingham town area expressed their support for the co-location of libraries with leisure and other popular services.

Finally, I would like to confirm that there are no existing plans for how the existing Wokingham Library site will be used after the relocation in 2021.

Supplementary Question

That is an interesting answer to some of the points I raised. You are confirming, basically, that the report presented was deficient in a number of ways. The map was not complete and you make no response in your decision about the site. My concern is a general concern about the way the Borough Council makes decisions. My supplementary question relates to the Council's reputation for secrecy, for example in relation to Grazeley. At the last meeting you also considered a report about a property adjacent to the regeneration site which may have been Marks and Spencer.

The last part of my question refers to the current library site and asks about its sale for residential purposes. Following the decision to relocate Wokingham Library, surveyors were seen on the current library site. I would like to know if there any specific plans for this site?

Answer provided by Charlotte Haitham Taylor

This is addressed in the final part of the answer. There are no current plans relating to the future of the existing Wokingham Library site.

28. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

28.1 Gary Cowan asked the Executive Member for Strategic Highways and Planning the following question:

Question

Following your presentation at Overview and Scrutiny on the 11th of July of the Local Plan update Flow Chart, which I thought was very helpful, as was the slide presentation by John Spurling. Slide 24 stated the following

1. Interim Measure: Release reserve sites and encourage sustainable proposals which meet our objectives.
2. Medium Term: Progress Local Plan Update (through Options Development) addressing the delivery and engagement concerns of residents.

How will you ensure that residents, Parish/Town Councils and Ward Members are kept fully engaged in the process?

Answer

We recognise the important contribution that Parish and Town Councils can bring to the planning process and will be actively engaging with them and Borough Councillors in the site assessment work which will inform the Local Plan Update. Last year we wrote to all Parish and Town Councils asking for their input on all sites promoted by landowners. We will shortly be starting to engage with them on our initial assessments.

The intention is to batch those sites up into wards, then invite Parish and Town Council representatives and ward Members to discuss the initial assessments.

The report on the Local Plan Update, confirms the wish for early engagement. Making supplementary funds available will support detailed analysis and engagement.

Supplementary Question

On 2nd September 2005, when I was the Executive Member for Planning, I made the following statement to the press: “The Government will force housing numbers upon us. There is no doubt that there will be a need for some additional housing, including affordable housing. But this must be set against the delivery of appropriate infrastructure”. I said that it was a tall order but the Conservatives would do their best to deliver. Can you promise that you will not let residents down on this issue?

Answer

It is a very difficult thing to promise, but I can assure you and residents that we are doing our level best. We are currently fighting appeals for inappropriate locations because, under the current system, as I am sure you are aware, we had infrastructure with the four locations. With hindsight, we could have brought the infrastructure forward sooner if it had been possible. We did not have the money as we had not collected the contributions from the developers. We will be looking within this new period, up to 2036, to make sure that we have proper infrastructure on those sites whilst, at the same time, trying to fend off the developers.

We will be seeking to ensure that we have appropriate infrastructure in place and will continue to tackle inappropriate actions by developers.

28.2 Angus Ross asked the Executive Member for Environment, Sports, Environmental Health, Leisure and Libraries the following question:

Question

In view of a recent fire where solar panels caught light on a new block of flats in East London this month, can the Executive Member for Environment, Sports, Environmental Health, Leisure and Libraries confirm that the Fire Risks posed by solar panels, as fitted to a number of schools and buildings owned by WBC, will be investigated after international warnings over the panels' flammability? This will include checks that they meet the latest safety standards.

Answer

The Building Research Establishment (BRE), a government fire safety contractor is conducting tests on cladding after the Grenfell Tower blaze. It is also examining instances of solar panels catching fire and is due to report initial findings at an industry meeting this week.

On receipt of the advice and recommendations of the report our Property team will instigate necessary inspections and risk assessments on our properties.

Supplementary Question

Has there been good joint working with the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service on post Grenfell inspections, issues relating to solar panels and contact with residents, which has been done, to confirm that this Borough does not have any high rise buildings?

Answer

As you are aware, the Council collaborates very closely with the emergency services, including the fire and rescue service, on emergency arrangements across Berkshire, meeting very regularly. A practice is being held this week to test some of those emergency arrangements.

28.3 Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

Question

Will the Executive guarantee that Councillors will have a choice of retaining their IT allowance and providing their own IT equipment if they wish rather than forcing them to burden the rate payers with additional costs to pay for broadband and laptops or tablets maintained and provided by the Council.

Answer provided by Charles Margetts

We want to support all Councillors in their role as 21st Century Councillors and we are considering how we implement the new technology and benefits associated with this. There are active conversations between Councillors and Officers at the moment to understand usage and what Members require. This is a subject for the IT working group, of which you are a member. No final decisions have been reached. The outcome will depend on feedback from Members, the capabilities of the system and data protection issues.

Supplementary Question

Will you allow Councillors to use Office 365 instead on their own machines?

Answer

That is the system as it stands. No conclusions have been reached and what we do in future will be decided by the working group. No final decisions have been made. We are running Member training sessions in September. There will be a process of review for what comes out of that which will be brought to the working group and all Members are welcome to contribute.

28.4 Imogen Shepherd-DuBey asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question

The bus stops in Broad Street in Wokingham have extremely low, shallow kerbs and do not have the raised kerbs that are required by disability groups. This means that there are many people with mobility problems that cannot use bus services to get into town. There are many Kessel kerbs being installed around Wokingham, but not in the most important place, that being Broad Street in the centre of town or anywhere close enough to be of use.

When are we likely to see Kessel kerbs being installed in Wokingham Town Centre?

Answer

Due to the footpath constraints and the threshold levels of neighbouring buildings unfortunately is not feasible to install the Kessel kerbs at the current bus stops on Broad Street, unlike the majority of other town centre bus stops.

The Council are aware this is not ideal, especially for disability groups, and will consider options to provide improved access as part of any regeneration of Broad Street. These options may include the relocation of the Broad Street bus stops if step free access cannot be accommodated at the current locations, subject to consultation of course.

In the meantime whilst the buses can “kneel” which helps reduce the step to the kerb, each bus is also equipped with a ramp which the driver can deploy to enable those with restricted mobility to board and alight the vehicles more easily. If residents are having

trouble alighting and boarding buses, they should mention this to the driver and ask that the ramp is deployed.

Supplementary Question

In terms of bus ramps being deployed, it is apparent that bus drivers will not use them unless you are in a wheelchair. Even for wheelchair users the ramps are quite steep. They are not deployed for people with prams, buggies or luggage. The Equalities Act 2010 required local authorities to tackle discrimination and advance equalities. What are we doing in Highways to ensure that we comply?

Answer

We are seeking to comply with our duties under the Equality Act except in circumstances where it is physically impossible to do so, which appears to be the case in Broad Street at the moment.

29. REVENUE MONITORING 2017/18 - Q1 JUNE 2017

The Executive considered a report setting out the budget monitoring position of the Revenue Budget at the end of June 2017 and the level of forecast balances in respect of the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account, Schools' Block and the Authority's investment portfolio.

The Deputy Executive Member for Finance, 21st Century Council, Internal Services and Human Resources reported that the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account were not forecasting any variance while the Schools Block was forecasting an adverse variance of £385k.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the forecast outturn position of the Revenue Budget and the level of forecast balances in respect of the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account, Schools' Block and the Authority's investment portfolio be noted;
- 2) it be noted that the 2017/18 carry forward requests are £0.

30. CAPITAL MONITORING 2017/18 - END OF JUNE 2017

The Executive considered a report setting out the budget monitoring position of the Capital Budget as at the end of June 2017.

The Deputy Executive Member for Finance, 21st Century Council, Internal Services and Human Resources reported that, at the end of the first quarter, the Capital Budget was showing a nil variance.

The report also gave details of an increase in the overall value of the 2017/18 Capital Programme due to the receipt of ring fenced grants and a contribution from Wokingham Town Council towards the cost of environmental improvements in Wokingham town centre.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the Capital Monitoring report for 1st quarter of 2017/18, as set out in Appendix A to the report, be noted;

- 2) it be approved and noted that the overall value of the 2017/18 Capital Programme has increased due to the receipt of ring fenced capital grants and contribution, for:
 - (a) Schools Formula Devolved Capital grant of £11k.
 - (b) Home and Communities Agency, Platform for Life Programme (2015 – 2017) grant for £304k;
 - (c) Wokingham Town Centre – environmental improvements contribution from Wokingham Town Council to match fund project for up to £650k.

31. TREASURY MANAGEMENT OUTTURN REPORT 2016/17

The Executive considered a report setting out the Treasury Management outturn position for 2016/17 which was presented for the purpose of monitoring and review, in accordance with Council's Treasury Management practices.

The Deputy Executive Member for Finance, 21st Century Council, Internal Services and Human Resources reported that the Council had adhered to all agreed prudential indicators in 2016/17 and all borrowings were within Treasury limits.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) it be noted that this report was presented to the Audit Committee on 13 June 2017;
- 2) Council be recommended to approve:
 - (a) the Treasury Management Annual Report for 2016/17; and
 - (b) the actual 2016/17 prudential indicators within the report.

32. LOCAL PLAN UPDATE (LPU) OPTIONS DEVELOPMENT

The Executive considered a report relating to Local Plan Update (LPU) Options Development which will ensure that the Council has an up to date and robust planning framework to management development in the Borough.

The Executive Member for Strategic Planning and Highways introduced the report and stated that the number and nature of promoted sites had exceeded expectations when setting the original budget for the Local Plan Update. Hence the requirement for supplementary funding to support the assessment process, in particular the formulation of more in-depth infrastructure delivery plans for larger sites.

The report stated that future consultation on the Local Plan Update would be supported by the detailed assessment of all sites. Effectively, this was an options development phase where some sites or clusters of sites would be explored in more detail to fully understand their potential, some of which would be recommended for allocation for specific uses as part of a balanced strategy for delivery.

Councillor Lee confirmed that the 260+ sites under assessment would be the subject of consultation with Town and Parish Councils and ward Members. In response to a question from Councillor Ashwell, Councillor Lee confirmed that the Local Plan Update was on track for completion by 2019/20.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) a supplementary estimate of £400k to support the site assessments process for the Local Plan Update be approved; and
- 2) the update to process be noted.

33. HOUSING LAND SUPPLY AND RESERVE SITES

The Executive considered a report relating to Housing Land Supply and Reserve Sites.

The report stated that national planning policy and guidance required the Council to maintain a supply of land sufficient to provide five years' worth of housing. The Executive Member for Strategic Planning and Highways reported that the most recent assessment (March 2017) indicated a 5.27 year supply against the level of housing need identified by the Berkshire (including South Bucks) Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA).

Councillor Lee confirmed that the level of land supply and housing need continued to be challenged by developers at appeal. Whilst the Council could demonstrate a five year land supply in the annual SHMA update, Inspectors who accepted partial updates to the deliverable land supply or found that housing need was higher, were likely to find a periodic deficit as not all sources of supply were considered. Consequently, the release of additional sites was recommended in order to boost housing supply in the short term.

Councillor Lee gave an update on a specific site within Appendix A to the report: Reserve Sites and Current Activity, as follows:

“Land at Valley Nurseries, Broadwater Lane, Hurst (site SA 104). Full application for 16 dwellings refused on 22nd December 2016. An appeal was submitted at the beginning of March 2017, all written exchanges were completed and the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) were moving towards an imminent decision on appeal. A decision has been held in abeyance by PINS until the end of July pending the outcome of this Executive Report at the request of both the Council and the appellant. An application for costs has also been made by the appellant”.

Councillor Haitham Taylor commented on the fact that the Council had granted planning permission for over 12,000 houses which, to date, had not been built. Unfortunately, the Government did not take this into account when assessing housing needs. The Council would continue to lobby the Government and local MPs about the way in which local housing needs were assessed.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the current five year housing land supply position be noted;
- 2) the release of the allocated reserve sites to boost housing supply in the short term be approved;
- 3) the invitation of an application on land south of Cutbush Lane be approved.

34. WOKINGHAM BOROUGH SECONDARY STRATEGY 2017

The Executive considered a report setting out the Secondary School Strategy for Wokingham Borough for the period 2017 to 2020. The document provided an analysis of

the need for school places and a strategy for delivering places (if required) over that three year period.

The Executive Member for Children's Services introduced the report and stated that the timeframe for the strategy matched that for the Local Plan Update. The new Local Plan may result in fundamental changes to the size of some local communities and the distribution of the child population. Consequently, there was no value in developing a longer term strategy at this time.

Councillor Ashwell reported that the core recommendation in the strategy related to the ability to create additional capacity. It was felt that any demand for additional capacity in the three year period could be met from the use of existing premises and expansion on school sites. If demand increased towards the limit of current capacity there would be early engagement with stakeholders to explore potential options. Longer term growth may require a new school which would be delivered in conjunction with new housing proposals in the updated Local Plan.

RESOLVED: That the Wokingham Borough Secondary School Strategy 2017 to 2020, as appended to the report, be approved.

35. HEALTH AND SAFETY ANNUAL REPORT 2016/17

The Executive considered the Health and Safety Annual Report for 2016/17 which was a high level report that looked back at internal health and safety performance during the period, highlighting the main achievements over the year and outlining key priorities for the current year. As a regulator of health and safety, it was important that the Council led by example. Publishing the annual report was one way of achieving this.

The Executive Member for Environment, Sports, Environmental Health, Leisure and Libraries introduced the report and commented that the effective management of health and safety was an essential part of good corporate governance. The annual report provided stakeholders with information on health and safety performance which supported an understanding of the key issues facing the Council. It provided assurance to Members that key risks had been identified, prioritised and mitigated.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the corporate health and safety performance for 2016/17 be noted; and
- 2) the approach described and the health and safety priorities for the current municipal year be endorsed.

36. PEACH PLACE RESIDENTIAL

The Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing advised the meeting that, due to the fact that some points of detail for the scheme still required to be resolved, he intended to defer the Peach Place Residential report to the September 2017 meeting of the Executive.

RESOLVED: That the Peach Place Residential report be deferred to the September 2017 Executive meeting.