

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE EXECUTIVE
HELD ON 28 SEPTEMBER 2017 FROM 7.30 PM TO 8.45 PM**

Committee Members Present

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

Other Councillors Present

Prue Bray
Gary Cowan
Richard Dolinski
Clive Jones
Pauline Jorgensen
Dianne King
Malcolm Richards
Imogen Shepherd-DuBey
Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey

37. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillor Simon Weeks.

38. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 27 July 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

39. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor Norman Jorgensen declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 42 Shareholders' Report by virtue of the fact that his wife was a paid Non-Executive Director of WBC Holdings Ltd. Councillor Jorgensen remained in the meeting during discussions and voted on the matter.

Councillor Norman Jorgensen declared a personal and prejudicial interest in Agenda Item 45 by virtue of the fact that the company he works for is owned by Veolia, the current provider of the Council's waste collection contract. Councillor Jorgensen left the meeting during discussions and did not vote on the matter.

Councillors David Lee and Stuart Munro declared personal interests in Agenda Item 42 Shareholders' Report by virtue of the fact that they were paid Non-Executive Directors of WBC Holdings Ltd. Councillors Lee and Munro remained in the meeting during discussions and voted on the matter.

40. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

40.1 Barry Keech asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

Question

I have written to the Leader of the Council, expressing my concerns that the status of our town is in decline. Most importantly, sustainability, which appears frequently in Council documents, is being ignored. Little or no marketing action appears to be underway to attract quality retail outlets, and I see no evidence of sustainability in the way major housing developments are being planned and implemented. I have had no response from the Leader of the Council. Therefore, I plan to be present at the Executive Meeting on 28th September 2017. I would like to ask the Leader if the Council thinks that retaining town status is important, and if so, what is being done to sustain it?

Answer

Firstly I would like to express my sincere apologies for not responding to your e-mail.

Heeding public concerns in the early 2000s about failed private sector regeneration initiatives in Wokingham Town Centre, the Borough Council adopted a masterplan in 2010 following much public engagement and consultation; it set out a vision to reinforce the vitality and viability of the town. Subsequently the Borough created a regeneration company to enable this vision and investment led on a £138m regeneration initiative at three main sites. These are: Peach Place, Elms Field and Carnival Pool. Work is completed and occupied at Peach Place Phase One, Peach Place Phase 2 redevelopment is underway and Elms Field is due to start soon. The Carnival Pool car park is completed and open, with planning in hand for the next phases. Environmental improvements jointly commissioned and funded, that is £3.9m by the Borough and Town, are progressing well in the Market Place right now.

Acknowledging our housing needs, as set out in the South East Plan, we also adopted a Core Strategy in 2010 which envisioned dealing with our strategic housing requirements in four high quality, infrastructure rich, strategic development locations which are known as SDLs. These developments are South of the M4 (Shinfield/Spencers Wood/Three Mile Cross), Arborfield, and North and South Wokingham. We masterplanned these through extensive public engagement and consultation and adopted them in final guidance in 2012. These were designed specifically as sustainable developments each creating walkable districts with district and neighbourhood shopping centres, associated community buildings, secondary and primary schools, library space, employment uses, sports facilities, parks, open spaces, new roads, public transport and other facilities. There are local road improvements, five substantial new roads which include the Eastern Shinfield Relief Road, the Northern Distributor Road, the Southern Distributor Road, Arborfield Cross Bypass, Winnersh Relief Road, two park and ride facilities and an interconnecting greenway network between the SDLs and the main towns of the district. The SDLs are being built now along with £350m of infrastructure. These infrastructures as I have said before are:

- 5 new roads plus the Station Link Road and Winnersh Relief Road;
- Lots of new pedestrian and cycle links;
- SANGs which are open spaces;
- Allotments;
- Three new sports hubs;
- Seven new Primary Schools and one extension;
- One new Secondary School which has just opened formally this month;
- Five new community buildings;
- Six new neighbourhood centres;
- One new district centre;

- The Science Park; and
- Two park and rides which I mentioned before.

As recently as August The Housing and Finance Institute presented our Council with a certificate for being housing business ready recognising the achievements around planning and delivering implementation and sustainability.

We have also been monitoring the satisfaction levels with the SDLs and this shows an increasing and high level of satisfaction from residents now living on these sites showing 84% satisfied compared with just 80% in 2016. The scale of delivery work currently being planned and implemented in Wokingham Borough provides evidence of a highly sustainable strategy.

Clearly the Borough Council shares your concerns as we have invested substantially already in addressing them. The product of our plans is being implemented around us right now; however as they appear to not be fully acknowledged or understood I accept that perhaps we are guilty of not shouting loudly enough about these impressive accomplishments.

Supplementation Question

I am very much aware of all the good work that you have done in terms of the developments and all the facilities that you have put into those. I am talking more about the town centre. We have lost Marks and Spencer. I sit on a panel where I get questioned and provide suggestions to Marks and Spencer and it appears to me that Marks and Spencer are beginning to question whether they should have left Wokingham. They put a lot of money into the garage further out of town providing a Simply Foods facility. I think if the Council had had some interaction with them, certainly more than they did, we may have retained Marks and Spencer in a slightly different form. My view, which I have expressed to them, is that if they had saved the money that they had put into Simply Foods and actually developed a food shop and a small café on the premises that they were occupying I think they would have done a lot better.

I just question whether the Council is actually interacting with retailers to encourage them to come into the town and provide some incentive to actually retain quality retailers in this town because that is what really enhances the status of the town?

Supplementary Answer given by the Executive Member for Business and Economic Development and Regeneration

I hear what you are saying and have recently been involved in completely understanding what we are doing here in the town centre and with our agents; which I will talk a little bit about later.

Interesting conversations have taken place with Marks and Spencer over the years. It isn't just Wokingham that they have left with their small stores they have also moved towards these larger, enormous stores like the one they have got in Bracknell. Long conversations have taken place with them over the years. We did not want to see them go, as you can imagine, but we do understand their strategy which is for these big megastores in a very interesting place right next door to the largest Waitrose flagship in the country. Their strategy has changed quite a lot and we have been talking to them the whole time. So it is not as if we have not taken any notice of this. We would like to keep some of these retailers and as far as we can we are talking to lots of retailers for all of the spaces we will

have when we have rebuilt the town and there are some very exciting conversations taking place.

The Leader of Council stated:

You also mentioned competitive rates and we do offer competitive rates particularly when we are trying to attract people into the town and we do have a good rental strategy and I am sure that if you would like to have an ongoing conversation with Stuart he would be happy to have that.

40.2 Rachel Bishop-Firth asked the Executive Member for Business and Economic Development and Regeneration the following question:

Question

This question is on agenda item 47, the Letting of the Elms Field Building Contract. I know that you have already got contracts with a hotel, supermarket and cinema to occupy those elements of the scheme, but the Elms Field plans include a number of other retail units. How many of those other retail units have you got pre-let agreements in place for?

Answer

You are quite right the Council has been successful in securing several pre-lets, to Premier Inn, Aldi and Everyman Cinemas to take units in the Elms Field development. These pre-lets represent approximately 65% (by rental value) of the proposed scheme which is a very healthy result given this stage in the project. No other agreements have been signed completely at this point although we are working on a number of further enquiries and some of them are quite exciting.

The Council and their lettings agents Strutt and Parker, who are the professionals in these sorts of environments around the country, are in conversation with a variety of businesses interested in taking units within the regeneration developments; with interest from both national names and local independents. However it is still early in the process especially with the Peach Place and Elms Field developments opening in late 2018 and 2019 respectively.

Supplementary Question

Is this in line with where you expected to be at this point in the project?

Supplementary Answer

I wouldn't just like to say where we are in this part of the project. I think we have got a pretty good healthy start to get these very valuable partners working with us already. It is a very strange market that we are in. I have just recently watched a very large development in Bracknell where 60% of the lets happened in the last six weeks before they opened. So it is a very strange environment that we work in. I know it would be much nicer if we had it all signed up and knew that everyone was going to come and when. In reality we have not actually started the developments in Elms Field and we are just about to discuss this later in the agenda. We are on it and our agents are on it.

40.3 Chris Wallace asked the Executive Member for Finance the following question:

Question

I would like to express concerns about the quality of the information being given to the Executive relating to the 21st Century Council. In the update report on tonight's agenda appears to lack some of the information needed to make informed decisions.

Firstly the Staff Morale figures shown are meaningless in isolation and should show the overall response rate to the surveys. As without the size of the cohort being shown you cannot say whether good or bad, ie 94% of a 10% return is hardly a success story.

Secondly under the Programme Risks section which refers “to loss of key people and organisational knowledge; less capacity available post implementation; reduced performance in key service areas; non realisation of savings; increased programme costs and slippage in IT implementation. There are no current issues or concerns to report.”

The project team seem to accept that a staff turnover of >40% in Housing Services and >50% in the Rent Team are acceptable without considering the impact that level of turnover has on the service provided, the staff output nor on the HRA which we as Involved Tenants are required to scrutinise. A report on the costs of staff turnover by Oxford Economics in 2014 shows an average of £30,000 per member of staff with new staff taking up to 10 months to be fully productive. We are aware that since July there have been 19 staff recruited, plus your letter shows that there are 17 staff members on fixed term/agency contracts. The cost of this level of turnover is therefore in excess of £1 million this year without any further resignations. This is fast approaching 10% of the HRA account and equates to 50% of the budgeted management costs for 2017/18.

Finally the statement that “There are no current issues or concerns to report” is misleading unless the Council considers a Breach of Statutory Duty as a minor irritant and the concerns raised by TLIP and the involved tenants over the last six weeks to be unworthy of consideration.

Can we ask the Executive to ask for full details to be shown in future reports with the actions being taken to allay concerns and rectify any errors?

Answer

To address your concerns in turn. I can clarify that we have run three staff survey across the programme in November 2016, January 2017 and July 2017 asking the same questions to be consistent. We have had 690 responses in total with an average response rate of 22.5% which is considered to be a good response rate. I am sure that under any official survey, this level of response would be considered to be statistically representative. The survey is anonymous in order that staff can be honest in their responses.

With regard to your points about staffing I should clarify that the report we have this evening is a backward look reporting largely on the implementation of phase 1 of the programme which comprised the Council’s back office staff. Housing is in part 2 of phase 2 which, as reported, has only recently commenced.

Day to day management of staffing issues in our Housing Services remains a matter for the service. As reported to Council on 21st September, the Operational Housing Services Team is almost fully staffed, with 30 permanent, 10 fixed term contracts, 7 agency and 8 secondees (that is 5 internal and 3 external to the Housing Service). The Rent Team, which sits in another department, has 2 permanent and 2 agency staff.

Some of these changes have been more to do with the Council’s, we call it, ‘grow your own’ approach than anything else. Staff are given the opportunity to work in other roles which is a cost effective way of developing them. The operational staff in Housing have not yet been directly impacted by the C21 Council process, so is hard to link staff turnover with the transformation programme at this stage.

We have made a clear commitment to involve TLIP in a consultation about the design for the Council's housing function to address any concerns prior to any changes and improvements we make. We intend to honour that commitment and discussions are ongoing to arrange this.

Supplementary Question

We run staff surveys, or the Council does, every couple of years and the response rate there is between 35-40% with 90%+ positives. So it seems a trifle low and you are not being given the full picture of what those responses are currently. Also there is a section in my question about risk management. Have any of you, or any of the C21 Council team, read that document? It is the Sector Risk Profile 2017 issued by the Homes and Communities Agency. If you haven't I would suggest you do so as it is a good read before you go to bed.

40.4 Steve Bowers asked the Executive Member for Finance the following question:

Question

I would like to question the financial position of the 21st Century Council project in light of the problems being experienced in the Housing Service and the questions being raised by Involved Tenants via TLIP and directly with the full Council.

The Leader of the Council has already acknowledged that you are in breach of your Statutory Duties, a situation that should have been considered under risk management. Many of the concerns being raised appear to stem back to the original business case approved by the Executive on 29/9/16. The HRA/Housing Service appears to have been overlooked or at least misrepresented in that business case. Page 9 states:

"The funding source for each of these full time equivalents needs to be considered so that officers and Members can interpret how savings identified in transitioning to the new ways of working can be realised. £4.7m of funding within the scope identified above is grant or ring-fenced funding. As a result it may not be as easy to realise savings within this grant funding due to conditions associated with the funding source. This will need to be managed on a case by case basis in the detailed planning of the programme when the benefit management plan for the programme is created."

Either the £4.7m is erroneous or the £15/16m of ring-fenced HRA/Housing Service is outside the scope of the project.

If the £4.7m is erroneous it raises questions about the validity of the costs and potential savings shown in that report. If the HRA/Housing Service is not within the scope of the project then the position of Head of Housing should not have been removed. A full consultation with all affected Tenants, as required by the HCA, should have been budgeted for, either within the project or the HRA but neither includes this cost.

These issues have not been raised, changed or approved by the Executive, and decisions are being made without due regard to your statutory duties.

The Executive and the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee need to investigate the financial position in detail and the decision making process to reassure all Members that the facts and figures that you are being given are accurate.

Will the Leader of the Council agree to this investigation and ensure that a full report is issued to the Executive and the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee?

Answer

I do understand your concerns to protect the services provided for our tenants and I share this objective. Our tenants are important to us and it is a key priority of the Council to continue to provide high quality services to you all and we seek to provide for the housing needs of all our residents.

In terms of the business case your question contains a misunderstanding. To clarify the £4.7m that the business case refers to is in relation to grant and ring fenced funding for staffing costs only; and was accurate at the time the business case was compiled. It relates to staff outside of the General Fund, which does include HRA and other ring fenced areas of expenditure. This does not mean that these areas are outside the scope of the C21 Council programme, but it means that only £4m of the estimated £4.5m annual savings is attributable to the General Fund.

I would also assure you that the business case is only the starting point for detailed service design. As service areas are considered the figures are updated and detailed design work is undertaken with those closely involved in delivering the services and in this way, the starting point of the business case assumptions are thoroughly tested as the new design emerges. I do not therefore consider that a referral to Overview and Scrutiny, which is your suggestion, on the business case is necessary.

I note your comment re the Head of Housing but would assure you that a service post with oversight of the operations of the housing revenue account is provided for within the transition arrangements and the future management structure will be part of the design work. In fact I understand that you held a meeting today with senior officers and your representatives regarding your involvement in the design process for our services to tenants and I will re-iterate that as tenants you will be involved in the design process.

40.5 Alexandra Fraser asked the Executive Member for Business & Economic Development and Regeneration the following question:

Question

Agenda Item 47

It states on the agenda item; A key project towards a regenerated town centre which is aligned with the Council's Core Strategy and will provide:

- Improved public spaces
- A better retail experience
- An improved entertainment offer
- Better sports and leisure facilities
- Improved access and transport
- Improved sustainable community
- A rental income which can be used unencumbered for provision of services across the Borough.

I would like to know what sports and leisure features you will include in the Elms Field regeneration that caters for young children specifically the 0-5 group and what if any inspiration have you drawn from the carnival pool regeneration?

Answer

The outcomes you listed are the core objectives of the Council's town centre regeneration which is made up of schemes in Peach Place, Elms Field and the Carnival site. Now unfortunately, as you are aware as we have been discussing this off line, I am unable to discuss the Carnival proposals because these are the subject, even though they are part of the Elms Field development, of a live planning application which was submitted in July and is currently under determination.

However if I can go into some of the other pieces without being specific; as I know we are trying to get a meeting together with Councillor Jorgensen to talk about your specific concerns on a particular item. In regards to Elms Field proposals there are a range of things that are proposed that will benefit young children and families for years to come which I thought might be interesting to list:

- An improved park with large areas of open grass to run around, with attractive planting and increased seating to enjoy the space;
- A fantastic destination play area which has been designed with equipment for all ages and abilities with lots of opportunities for creative play, active play and relaxation;
- Large pedestrianised areas that have been designed with space to circulate and to run great community events such as the May Fayre, Winter Carnival and Family fun days which are so popular with local children and families;
- A new Everyman cinema which is part of a comprehensive programme to show regular family friendly films and offer special Baby Club screenings where families with small children can watch films in a relaxed environment with softened sound and dim lighting;
- New restaurants designed to make the most of the adjacent pedestrianised spaces and open space to allow families to enjoy a great day out in Wokingham.

Off-site the Elms Field proposals are also contributing funding towards a wide range of improvements for families across the area. This includes, and I will not go on for too long:

- £320,000 towards the new tennis club at Cantley Park which offers coaching for children from age four upwards;
- £95,000 towards the provision of a Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANG) to provide outdoor activities and leisure in the local area; and
- £4.8 million in developers' contributions which will be used by the Council towards funding infrastructure improvements from their CIL priorities list which includes a range of benefits to families and small children such as nursery schools, sports facilities and country parks.

Supplementary Question

That sounds fantastic as there is a large scope for all members of the community young, old, all ages and abilities. I was just curious about the needs of 0-5s as they have specific and different needs developmentally than say older children. So what specifically has there been something in there where that has been addressed eg the current pool has excellent sensory equipment and it is a perfect pool for them to play in. That is a really good example of catering for that age group and I was just wondering in this new development if there is something similar that is so specific and dedicated to them and their needs at their age and stage of development?

Supplementary Answer

I suggest that we leave that until we get a meeting with Councillor Jorgensen and the three of us can sit round and explain in detail what we have planned as I think that would help.

The Leader of Council stated:

We can organise an off-line meeting to go through the Carnival Pool application because there are a number of different things and proposals that are coming forward as well, within Carnival Pool, which are quite exciting. As a mother myself of an 8-year old having gone through the 0-5s recently there are some interesting things.

41. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

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

Question

In your answer to my question on the 29th of June Executive you stated that we are compelled to use that as the most up to date information we have and a public consultation was not required.

Can you confirm therefore that the G L Hearn report dated February 2016 is legally binding on this Council and the other councils covered by the report?

Answer

We are compelled by the National Planning Policy Framework, or the NPPF as it is also known, to ensure that the local plan is based upon up-to-date and relevant evidence. GL Hearn were commissioned by the Berkshire local authorities to assess future housing needs across the county in line with this framework. As you are aware the original figure that was used was from the old South East Plan and it had not been objectively assessed; that was what GL Hearn did. The output of this commission is the Berkshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment, published in February 2016. The assessment currently represents the most up-to-date information on housing needs for each of the Berkshire local authorities and is used by each of them to inform their work. GL Hearn are however currently undertaking an update of this assessment; the results of which are due out later this year. This work has been commissioned in response to challenges to the current housing need calculation through appeals, where Planning Inspectors have preferred a higher figure of 894 additional homes per annum. So they have moved us from the original figure of 856 to 894 and one Inspector simply relies on the previous Inspector and they have been building on that.

In the meantime the Government is consulting upon a new methodology for calculating housing need which if adopted would raise our figure from 856, which is the GL Hearn figure, to 876 which is below that being used by appeals Inspectors of 894. The new methodology takes the national household projections and progressively increases this for areas where the ratio of house prices to incomes is more than four times. In our case it is up 11 times the average income. The ratio in Wokingham Borough increases the national projection by around 45%; an increase from 603 additional households (that is the household increase) per annum to 876. Is that helpful?

In other words Gary, as you are aware, we are being crucified by developers, I would describe them as carpetbaggers, who are coming in here and not submitting their sites under the normal 'call for sites'. We are not being allowed to assess them and

Government are allowing Appeals Inspectors to ride roughshod over us despite us doing everything that has ever been asked and you, I am sure, are well aware of how we have handled that in the past.

Supplementary Question

Nothing has really changed has it? The only comment I would make is that both yourself and the Leader were told whether the legal number, and you quote numbers both at Council and in the press, and I am only suggesting that the legal numbers are what the Core Strategy agreed; which is the number that was agreed through a proper consultation and a public inquiry. In fact two public inquiries because of the MDD as well.

Now I do agree with everything else you have said but what I am saying is that the legal number expressed should be 626 and that any changes to this number are because of pressure brought on by Government but to actually quote the Government figures which have not been assessed or evaluated by us or through any consultation process I think is flawed and it gives the wrong message.

Picking up on your last point there the Housing White Paper includes a number of proposed planning reforms to support housing development including the introduction of a housing delivery test; a standard approach to assessing housing requirements and reforms the current system of developer contributions which I think is crucial. At the same time they publish revisions to the NPPF and in a way would it not be better if we hold back as this is going to happen in the next month or two? Hold back and see what these changes are rather than jumping into the fire now on random numbers that have not been proven by any proper consultation process.

Supplementary Answer

I would totally agree with you however the one thing I would say is that the 894 is not something that we unfortunately have the right to reject, as you will know that from these decisions being made by Appeal Inspectors. What I would ask is that every Member of this Council, every member of a parish council, every resident and everybody else writes to the Secretary of State because it is he who is allowing this to happen. Do as Barkham Parish Council has done - they have written. It is no good criticising each other and actually demanding that we do not have any in our wards and in our towns. We are being forced to do this by Appeal Inspectors and if we all work together we may achieve the Government realising the errors of their ways and hopefully the White Paper will bring out some sensible resolution to developers getting a 20% add-on to our housing numbers because they are slow at delivering. They are challenging us on affordability yet a 2-bed terraced house three years ago was £250k; it is now £390k. I do not think this Council has caused that to happen but we and our residents are being crucified by Planning Inspectors so I would urge everybody to do what Barkham Parish Council has done and write to the Honourable Sajid Javid and tell him the error of his ways.

The Leader of Council stated:

Building on that point consultation is open at the moment from Central Government on the housing numbers and I would like Members and the public to write in questioning the methodology and the new housing numbers that have been proposed for this area which are higher than the existing numbers that we have at the moment.

41.2 Prue Bray has asked the Executive Member for Strategic Highways and Planning the following question:

Question

At the July Executive meeting, the Executive resolved to approve a supplementary estimate of £400,000 to “support the site assessments process for the Local Plan Update”. That is a rather general statement. What exactly is this additional money being spent on? Please cover in your answer how much of the assessment of all the 260+ submitted sites it covers.

Answer

The supplementary funding is required to assess the opportunities for sustainable development across all of the promoted sites. In particular, it will allow master planning of larger and more complex sites, specifically land around Grazeley, Barkham Square, which is directly north of the current Arborfield Green development, and around Twyford. This will ensure we are fully aware of the opportunities and constraints to sustainable development, including in-depth consideration of infrastructure delivery plans, including a Borough wide infrastructure delivery plan, which is a key message coming from residents.

Future consultation on the Local Plan Update will be supported by the detailed assessment of all sites, some of which will be recommended for allocation for specific uses as part of a balanced strategy. I cannot give you the assurance that it will be used for all 263 sites because some of them are for one house, two houses, etc so we are spending that money on assessing the major groupings of sites which have been put to us. As you know if we do not properly assess those when they come to be Examined in Public if we have simply cast one aside because what we should not be building there because of x, y or z we would not stand up to the developers.

Supplementary Question

I am very pleased that he has mentioned the masterplanning because Keith Baker wrote a very interesting letter in the Wokingham paper last week in which he suggested that that money was for masterplanning although I have not seen any Council documents that say that.

What I am concerned about is that you do indeed, for precisely the reason that David has said, have to assess all the sites properly against a set of criteria otherwise you will be torn to pieces by developers. Is it not pre-judging the issue to masterplan on some specific large sites before you have done the sustainability appraisals of all the sites? Are you not going to get into trouble from other developers who have other sites who think you are pre-judging the issue?

Supplementary Answer

No I do not think so because we will be looking at all of those points. If you actually look at the plan of the Borough where the sites are there are some very large groupings put in there. There is a very large grouping to the north of the A329(M) which is in a totally unsustainable location and I would suggest that is because there is no means of access onto that road and that is why we are looking at the sort of major ones. The major ones happen to be the ones that I have read out the names of. There is no alternative to that but all sites will be looked at from a sustainability point of view and from a point of view of what infrastructure is needed on those.

We have as you know over the 30 years before this existing plan was operating we were building an average 800 houses per year we had £5k contribution from each of them. We now get a £27-30k contribution and we got no affordable housing because there was an

amazing fact that if they built 14 houses they did not contribute and it was amazing that they all came in at that figure.

So the sustainability is vital but we are determined that if we have to build this number of houses, and this is what I would ask people to challenge and question, but if we have to do it we have to do it in the most sensible way in the most sustainable locations.

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

Question

The 200+ residents of the Toutley Road area have recently had one end of the road closed for rebuilding and this has been scheduled for some time. Residents are largely tolerant and understanding of that work.

During the month of August, for three weeks, the other end of Toutley Road was dug up and controlled by three way traffic lights. This generated many complaints as the lights failed or were at times only allowing two cars through and effectively trapping the residents into their neighbourhood. More galling, there appeared to be no work happening as a problem was found with the planned work and the road was just left with traffic lights.

Please can someone explain to me why it was acceptable to schedule this work at the same time as the time as the road closure at the other end of Toutley Road?

Answer

To answer your question both of these works areas were in relation to the North Wokingham Distributor Road and there was a target to complete the works within the summer holiday period; when overall traffic flows on the network are much reduced. While it was recognised this would lead to an increased level of disruption, it was over a much shortened period of time when background traffic was much reduced. Coordinating the many highways schemes on the network is always a judgement, however we felt completing the works in the summer holidays over a shorter period was the best option.

Supplementary Question

I wish to question that best option because obviously at the same time while the corner of that road was closed with Matthews Green, Emmbrook and Toutley Road, Holt Lane was also closed; which was scheduled work. We had scheduled work on Toutley Road where Berkley Homes was building a new gateway. We also had Highways England closing the bridge for the motorway because they were doing motorway works at night combined with the never ending cycle lane works that are occurring on Reading Road.

I want to know who is scheduling this work and are they looking at the bigger picture and why town and parish councils as well as Ward Councillors do not have forward visibility of the work that is scheduled to happen within their wards and have the right to veto certain pieces when they are being done in what is clearly an inappropriate way?

Supplementary Answer

Works in the Borough are controlled centrally by Officers and they are advertised on roadworks.org up to three months in advance if you set your filter correctly. I fully respect the points you are making and that it is contestable whether these things are programmed in the right way as there are different views. So I fully respect your position but that is the view that Officers came to. We have to do the work in the end we cannot let it build up so it is inevitable that on occasions there will be difficulties with congestion.

42. 21ST CENTURY COUNCIL - UPDATE

The Executive considered a report setting out the progress with the implementation of the 21st Century Council programme.

The Executive Member for Finance went through the report and advised that Phase 1 of 21st Century Council was now complete and the expected annual savings of £2m had been achieved. A thorough review of Phase 1 had been carried out and as a result of feedback received from staff some changes would be made to the Phase 2 process; including redesign of the interview stages.

Councillor Whittle reminded Members that the recent Council motion to delay the implementation of Phase 2 until a permanent Chief Executive was in post had been defeated and had this been adopted would have caused a delay of at least six months and cost at least £910k.

Members were advised that Phase 2 would be split into two stages: Environment, income, assessments, collections and payments, customer services and then Children's, Social Care and Early Help. It was also noted that the Member/Officer Group and the IT Reference Sub-Group had been merged to create a cross-party Member/Officer Working Group which would meet on a regular basis.

The Leader of Council felt it would be helpful if in future reports the percentage of respondents to any survey was included. Councillor Haitham Taylor highlighted that the 21st Century Council programme had been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on 11 July and this meeting had been attended by representatives from Unison. Councillor Haitham Taylor also advised that she had subsequently met with Unison and had made a commitment to meet with them every two months going through Phase 2 of the programme.

RESOLVED: That the progress in implementing the 21st Century Council programme be noted.

43. SHAREHOLDERS' REPORT

(Councillors David Lee, Norman Jorgensen and Stuart Munro declared personal interests in this item)

The Executive considered a report providing an operational update and the budget monitoring position of the Council Owned Companies for the month ending 31 July 2017.

During the Executive Member for Finance's introduction of the report he highlighted the revised report structure which had financial information on the companies and their subsidiaries separated from the operational reports. It was noted that the financial information contained in the reports showed very little variation from budget but it was of course early in the financial year and it was anticipated that profits would be generated in the next financial year.

Councillor Whittle was disappointed with the delay of the completion of both the Phoenix Avenue development and the Grovelands project but advised that it was expected that the delay costs would be recouped. Members were advised that Martin Farrow had been appointed as the permanent CEO for Optalis.

Councillor Lee highlighted that although the cumulative numbers set out in the profit and loss tables were all negatives the expectation was that for the year ending 2018 Wokingham Housing Ltd and its subsidiaries would be making a profit. In addition he congratulated the companies for the work they had done in providing 68 units at Phoenix Avenue, which would be occupied in early December, and the 34 units at Fosters Extra Care facility.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the budget monitoring position for the month ending 31 July 2017 be noted;
- 2) the operational update for the period to 31 July 2017 be noted.

44. WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL (WBC) CHILDCARE SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY 2017

The Executive considered a proposed Childcare Sufficiency Strategy which covered both the current sufficiency and satisfaction with childcare services across the Borough and the readiness of providers to meet the new additional 15 hour free Early Years' childcare entitlement for the children of working parents'.

Members were advised by the Executive Member for Children's Services that the Council had a statutory duty to ensure that there was sufficient childcare to meet the needs of working families and from this month there would be a universal entitlement for working parents to receive 30 Government funded free hours.

Councillor Ashwell stated that providers were responding positively to this entitlement and were developing offers to enable parents to secure this additional childcare and highlighted three capital projects that were underway to increase provision. He also reinforced the need to encourage private, voluntary and independent sector providers to increase supply within the fees now available.

The Leader of Council highlighted the lists of eligibility criteria for both 2 year old free entitlement funding and 3-4 year old provision, as set out in the Strategy, and asked the press attending the meeting if they could publicise these to ensure that as many people took up their entitlement as possible.

RESOLVED: That the Wokingham Borough Council Childcare Sufficiency Strategy 2017 be approved.

45. WOODLEY CAR PARKING TRIAL

The Executive considered a proposed extension to the current Woodley car parking trial beyond September 2017 to the end of January 2018 in order to allow further data to be collected from the trial.

The Executive Member for Highways and Transport reminded Members that in May 2016 the Executive had approved the implementation of evening and Sunday charges. During consultation of these charges the Woodley Town Centre Management Initiative (WTCMI) put forward a proposal to increase the 1 hour parking charge in the Woodley car parks from 70p to 80p instead of implementing evening and Sunday charges in these car parks. The Executive agreed to trial the proposal to September 2017 to ensure that this alternative tariff was financially viable and did not result in a reduction in revenue. The trial has been running for almost a year but needs to be extended so that Officers can collect

and process the necessary data in order to determine whether the trial has been successful. The proposal therefore is to extend the trial period until the end of January 2018.

RESOLVED: That an extension of the current Woodley car parking trial beyond September 2017, including the increase of the 1 hour parking charge increase in the Woodley car parks (Crockhamwell Road, Headley Road, Lytham Road East, and Lytham Road West from 70p to 80p which have been operating as part of the trial) be approved to the end of January 2018.

46. WASTE AND RECYCLING COLLECTION (SEPARATE COLLECTION OF FOOD WASTE)

(Councillor Norman Jorgensen declared a personal and prejudicial interest in this item)

The Executive considered a report setting out a proposal to introduce a separate collection of food waste on a weekly basis.

Councillor David Lee confirmed that the Council would still be retaining weekly refuse collection and the proposal was intended to increase recycling rates. It was noted that when the blue bags were checked it was found that approximately 30% of the contents of the bags was actually food waste. Therefore if 50% of this food waste was collected separately this would save money and improve the Council's recycling performance.

Councillor Lee explained that the Council would have to ensure that the proposal was operationally possible and financially viable. As an example of one of the areas that would need consideration was where the separate container that was required would be located on the bin lorries, particularly as they already had two compartments at the back; one which receives the blue bags and one that receives the recycling. In order to ensure that further consideration is given to these aspects and that the vehicles that are currently used are suitable and do not have to be replaced Councillor Lee proposed the following revised recommendation which was agreed by the Executive:

“That the introduction of weekly separate collection of food waste be approved as detailed in the report subject to:

- 1) it being operationally possible and financially viable with the final financial outcomes to be reported to a future meeting of the Executive;
- 2) options being investigated including benchmarking to cover cost savings or otherwise where food waste has been introduced in other authorities;
- 3) vehicle usage be further investigated and reported back to the Executive.

During discussion of the item Councillor Whittle emphasised that not only would the proposal increase recycling it would bring the Council closer to the 50% Government recycling target which if not achieved would lead to substantial fines. Councillor Haitham Taylor also highlighted that the proposal also included collection of additional materials eg pots, tubs, trays etc which were not currently able to be recycled.

RESOLVED: That the introduction of weekly separate collection of food waste be approved as detailed in the report subject to:

- 1) it being operationally possible and financially viable with the final financial outcomes to be reported to a future meeting of the Executive;
- 2) options being investigated including benchmarking to cover cost savings or otherwise where food waste has been introduced in other authorities;
- 3) vehicle usage be further investigated and reported back to the Executive.

47. PEACH PLACE RESIDENTIAL

The Executive considered a report relating to the transfer of 22 apartments at Peach Place, Wokingham to a Council-owned housing company which would assist in meeting housing needs through the provision of high quality affordable housing for essential workers.

Members' attention was drawn to the fact that "the scheme would be open to a range of low income key workers who were vital to the delivery of public services and/or support the local economy" and were not exclusively for public sector employees.

The Leader of Council was pleased to note the delivery of 22 key worker houses that were right in the middle of the Town Centre with good transport links.

RESOLVED that the following be approved:

- 1) the Council transfers the completed 22 apartments at Peach Place, Wokingham to a Council-owned housing company on terms to be agreed by the Director of Corporate Services in consultation with the Leader of the Council;
- 2) the proposed funding model, including the allocation of Section 106 receipts for the provision of affordable housing;
- 3) the proposed tenure mix;
- 4) the delegation of any further related and subsidiary decisions if required to complete the transaction to the Chief Executive in conjunction with the Leader.

48. WOKINGHAM TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION - LETTING OF ELMS FIELD BUILDING CONTRACT

The Executive considered a report setting out the outcome of the procurement process to appoint a building contractor for the Elms Field scheme.

Members were advised that the procurement process had followed a two-stage process and four reputable contractors had tendered for the works. It was important for a contractor to be appointed in order to meet the relevant dates for the key leases that had already been signed. Councillor Munro therefore recommended the contractor, as set out in the Part 2 report, for the Elms Field scheme.

Due to the fact that Members wished to discuss the information in the Part 2 sheets it was agreed that the item be further discussed in Part 2.

49. PROPERTY PORTFOLIO INVESTMENT STRATEGY

The Executive considered a report setting out a proposed Property Portfolio Investment Strategy which would preserve and improve the financial resources available to the Council by generating revenue income from capital investment.

The Executive Member for Finance advised that the report proposed a strategy for two types of investment; development on Council owned land and also purchasing or developing assets that could generate an income or be resold at a profit. In order to limit the risk and uncertainty the Council would seek to acquire a range of property types, sizes, building conditions, locations and covenant strengths in order to provide a spread risk and balanced portfolio and the first priority would be development of Council owned land.

The Leader of Council advised that the Council had a strong record of prudent investments in commercial assets such as properties within the Borough and they were providing good commercial returns. There were many other local authorities who had property portfolio investment strategies and they were already investing in commercial opportunities in order to produce revenue streams that could be used to address some of the ongoing and relentless austerity measures that local government face. The financial position was expected to be bleak leading over the next few years to a total of £20m to find so it was necessary to look at possible revenue funding streams and this Strategy would go some way to addressing that issue.

Due to the fact that Members wished to discuss the information in the Part 2 sheets it was agreed that the item be further discussed in Part 2.

50. PROPERTY CHARGES TO EARLY YEARS PROVIDERS

The Executive considered a report relating to property charges to Early Years' providers which followed a request from two Early Years' providers that their assessed land and premises use and charges be abated to ensure that their activities were sustainable.

The Executive Member for Children's Services went through the report and highlighted again that the Council had a statutory duty to ensure that there was sufficient childcare to meet the needs of working families. The Council was the custodian of the Government grant that provided the 30 hours free entitlement, as mentioned earlier, and there was limited opportunity to fund any other capital costs that were required to provide this service.

RESOLVED: That the reduced charges for two Early Years' providers for use of Wokingham Borough Council owned premises, as set out in Part 2 of the report, be approved.

51. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED That under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of the Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act as appropriate.

52. WOKINGHAM TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION - LETTING OF ELMS FIELD BUILDING CONTRACT

The Executive considered the exempt information contained in the report.

RESOLVED: That the letting of the contract as set out in Part 2 of the report be confirmed to enable the Regeneration project to continue and enable the outcomes as identified in the report.

53. PROPERTY PORTFOLIO INVESTMENT STRATEGY

The Executive considered the exempt information contained in the report.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the broad principles of the Property Portfolio Investment Strategy as set out in Part 2 of the report be endorsed;
- 2) delegated authority be given to the Director of Corporate Services, in consultation with the Leader, Executive Member for Finance and the Executive Member for Business, Economic Development and Regeneration, for purchases totalling up to £100m;
- 3) Council be recommended to agree that up to £100m borrowing powers are delegated to the Director of Corporate Services, in consultation with the Leader, Executive Member for Finance and the Executive Member for Business, Economic Development and Regeneration;
- 4) it be noted that the cost of borrowing will be funded by the investment income from the commercial assets;
- 5) it be noted that developments on Council owned land will be brought back individually to Executive on a case by case basis.