

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF  
THE EXECUTIVE  
HELD ON 31 MAY 2018 FROM 7.30 PM TO 8.10 PM**

**Committee Members Present**

Councillors: Charlotte Haitham Taylor (Chairman), Keith Baker, Richard Dolinski, Norman Jorgensen, Pauline Jorgensen, Philip Mirfin, Stuart Munro and Simon Weeks

**Other Councillors Present**

Parry Batth  
Laura Blumenthal  
Gary Cowan  
Andy Croy  
Lindsay Ferris  
Charles Margetts  
Ian Pittock  
Helen Power  
Malcolm Richards  
Imogen Shepherd-DuBey  
Chris Smith  
Shahid Younis

**1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillors Pauline Helliard-Symons and Julian McGhee-Sumner.

Councillor Shahid Younis attended the meeting on behalf of Councillor Pauline Helliard-Symons and Councillor Charles Margetts on behalf of Julian McGhee-Sumner. In accordance with legislation Councillor Younis and Margetts could take part in any discussions but were not entitled to vote.

**2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 29 March 2018 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The Minutes of the Extraordinary Executive held on 16 May 2018 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman subject to the addition of Councillor Norman Jorgensen's apologies.

**3. DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

Councillor Norman Jorgensen declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 6 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.

Councillors Pauline Jorgensen and Stuart Munro declared personal interests in Agenda Item 6 Shareholders' Report by virtue of the fact that they were paid Non-Executive Director of WBC Holdings Ltd. Councillors Jorgensen and Munro remained in the meeting during discussions and voted on the matter.

Councillors Philip Mirfin and Charles Margetts declared personal interests in Agenda Item 6 Shareholders' Report by virtue of the fact that they were paid Non-Executive Directors of Optalis Holdings Ltd. Councillor Mirfin remained in the meeting during discussions and voted on the matter. Councillor Margetts remained in the meeting during discussions but in accordance with regulations did not vote on the matter.

#### **4. STATEMENT BY THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR REGENERATION**

Councillor Mirfin read out a statement relating to the incident at the former Paddocks Car Park on Bank Holiday Monday. Councillor Mirfin stated how shocked everyone had been to learn of the incident and how everyone's thoughts were very much with the victim during this difficult time. Wokingham was a safe town and incidents like this were rare but nonetheless reports of this nature would quite understandably cause concern in the community.

Councillor Mirfin advised that in the light of the incident the area was being reviewed and it was intended very shortly to install CCTV on the walk-way through from the former Paddocks Car Park. The Council would, of course, assist Thames Valley Police with the ongoing investigation as appropriate. Councillor Mirfin urged anyone who had any information relating to the case to call 101 or contact Crimestoppers anonymously.

#### **5. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

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

##### **5.1 Marina Stone had asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:**

##### **Question**

I would like to ask what has been put in place to manage the increased amount of referrals received in children services as a result of the increasing Wokingham population and the recent government campaign encouraging the public to report child abuse? Although I support this campaign there would have surely been some thought into how this would be managed. Currently social workers are already feeling pressured carrying a high caseload of children and working an unreasonable amount of hours which is impacting on their emotional and physical health and also the service they would like to provide for families. We need more social workers or social worker assistants so that we can "Improve the customer experience when accessing Council services".

##### **Answer**

As Ms Stone was unable to attend the meeting the following written answer was provided:

In line with national level trends the department is acutely aware of the increase in the demand for statutory services, which has seen an ongoing rise since September 2017. There is no supporting evidence to underpin any suggestions that there is a direct correlation between government campaigns and increase demand. Evidence illustrates that the increased demand in the main is more likely to be underpinned by a range of complex socio-economic factors, which has been impacting most Children's Services Departments across the region and country over the last 12 to 18 months.

The Assistant Director for Children's Social Care has developed an evidenced based business case for additional staff. This has been scoped based upon current and projected demand across the service. The increased service staffing capacity will enable the service

to be better positioned to respond to the changing needs and demand for children's social care services locally.

The business case requests additional qualified social work staff for key areas of statutory services.

In the meantime there has been additional staffing provided to teams over and above current workforce.

We value our social workers and the work they do in our communities, having to work anti-social hours, under complex and challenging circumstances.

The Children's Social Care management team are reviewing all case-loads and cases to ensure that essential and appropriate work is held by case holding social workers, with proportionate levels of oversight and supervision being provided for practitioners to reduce the potential for risk.

## **6. MEMBER QUESTION TIME**

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

### **6.1 Ian Pittock asked the Deputy Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:**

#### **Question**

Can the appropriate new Executive Member for Children's Services advise me what arrangements have been made for public access to the new leisure facilities at Arborfield Green, in particular during school hours?

#### **Answer**

Having recently signed our new 15 year Leisure Contract with Places for People, we are delighted to say that from Monday 15<sup>th</sup> May 2018, Arborfield Leisure Centre is in full operation to members of the public. A full programme of activities has now been developed including spinning, aerobics, a 50 station gym, eight badminton courts which are also marked out for netball, basketball, football and handball, with an outstanding climbing wall ready to use. As well as a new 3G pitch, two netball courts and three tennis courts all with floodlights. Grass football pitches will be available from September 2018 ready for the new 2018/19 Football Season.

Opening hours for the gym, studio and spinning studios are from 7.30am-10.00pm Monday to Friday, and on Saturday 7.30am-6.00pm, and on Sunday 8.00am-8.00pm. The sports hall will be available to the public from 5.30pm-10.30pm Monday to Friday, and all day at the weekends. Taking fully into account the lease arrangements and safeguarding with Bohunt School the ground floor will be available to the School Monday to Friday during the school term.

If members of the public wish to view these new facilities, I will arrange for a member of staff to show potential members around the Leisure Centre.

#### **Supplementary Question**

I am glad to see them open they are excellent. Residents were promised that if we kept the huge MOD gym rather than knock it down and build a standard school gym that

residents would be given access to the main hall containing the rock wall during the school day. They would not be locked out from this overly large hall. Aren't your arrangements contrary to the promises made to residents?

### **Supplementary Answer**

Can I come back to you on that one so that I can give you a more detailed and considered response.

## **6.2 Gary Cowan asked the Leader of the Council the following question:**

### **Question**

With the unfortunate loss of the one person who was putting effort into sorting the current and future transport problems around Wokingham in line with the overwhelming support from Council which are only set to get much worse who will now lead on this?

### **Answer**

As per my announcement at Full Council last week Councillor Keith Baker will continue to lead on highways, which will now also include strategic transport matters. For highways issues related specifically to Wokingham Town Centre regeneration Philip Mirfin will lead on these matters.

### **Supplementary Question**

I was very impressed with the press release on progress with the pretty pictures but it raised the point was there, or is there, a set end date for this work and if so what is, or was it?

I asked a very similar question of Officers for the Shinfield by-pass and I said is there a scheduled date for the completion of this works. The answer I got was that we are only the licensing authority we have no say in the end date. The point I am trying to make is the work that is going on in the town centre which is causing all the chaos. I am assuming that as a Council that when you put that contract in place you actually agreed with the developer that there would be an end date for that work and I am just asking you what is, or what was, the end date for that contract?

### **Supplementary Answer**

You eluded first of all to the Shinfield Eastern Relief Road with that we were not the contractor but Hochtief was contracted by the University of Reading so we were not in control of that contract.

With regards to the town centre, as you no doubt will be aware, once they started to uncover what was underneath in the town centre there was a huge number of pipes and a complete spaghetti of different works being laid on top of each other over decades and decades. It was a lot more complicated than originally thought so it has taken longer than was expected.

In terms of the final date the schedule at the moment is to finish at the end of July.

## **6.3 Chris Smith asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:**

### **Question**

Can I have an update on recent and planned works on bus stops in Earley?

## **Answer**

First of all I must sincerely apologise to Councillors for my incomplete answer to your question at last week's Full Council around road activity in Hillside. My answer was given in good faith based on the information provided to me. I was as surprised as you were when comments on social media indicated activity on a bus stop further down Ryehill Way. I have escalated this to the highest level as withholding information, either deliberately or by accident, is simply not acceptable. A full-scale investigation is currently underway by the relevant Director and local Councillors will be kept fully informed of any outcome from this.

Now the project around bus stops in Earley has almost been completed. In all cases other than the two on Ryehill Way the other laybys simple required a refreshment of the markings and have been completed. So, what about these two laybys – why are they different.

We sincerely apologise again for the unexpected and unavoidable delay in completing the works at Ryehill Way bus layby and the works that are now taking place at Rosemary Ave.

To give you a brief overview of what has caused the delays at Ryehill Way, a standard design, which had been implemented elsewhere across the Borough, was used as part of the construction originally and no unusual issues were identified at the time. However, undulations on the surface were brought to our attention and deeper excavation took place which identified unexpected and unusual ground conditions.

Our contractor undertook ground testing of the exposed problem area and based on these results a final solution was agreed and the works were completed last week.

Both Ryehill Way and Rosemary Ave bus la-bys were originally part of the same project and the initial works were carried out at the same time. When the ground testing was carried out at the other bus layby the team decided, as a precaution, it would be wise to check the Rosemary Ave bus layby as well. Similar undulations were also found in Rosemary Avenue.

Testing was also carried out and the results came back similar to that of the Ryehill Way bus layby but not as severe. However, to avoid another long and drawn out situation, it was decided that the same successful resolution used at Ryehill should be carried out at the Rosemary Ave bus layby. Furthermore it should be started as soon as possible which was this week with a scheduled completion of Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> June subject to weather conditions.

## **Supplementary Question**

Firstly thank you for arranging most of the works during half term. That is a busy road that leads up to one of the main primary schools in Hillside so at least a lot of the works will be less disruptive.

Given the issues with the Ryehill Way bus stop, particularly the lack of communications I and my fellow Councillors in the Ward received, I was incredibly disappointed to find out about the works on the bus stop only once they had started. Indeed I received a written response from you at 6.15 on the Tuesday stating that there were no planned works other than the Redhatch Drive resurfacing at which point the contractors would already have

been on site and had equipment there. So what will be changed to ensure I and other Councillors are kept informed about these works in the future?

### **Supplementary Answer**

I have already said that a detailed investigation at the highest level is going on and as soon as the outcome of that is known I will communicate that with the Hillside Councillors so that they understand what happened and I am expecting the Directors to put in place measures to make sure that that never happens again. I felt extremely embarrassed giving an answer that was not complete and I never want to be in that position again and I will make sure that it doesn't happen.

### **6.4 Parry Batth asked the Deputy Executive Member for Finance the following question:**

#### **Question**

WBC Housing Companies such as WHL, Loddon Homes etc. have been building affordable homes for some time but little exposure is available to the outside world. Would the Exec Member please provide details of the current and future build plans and provide details of the types of houses rented or sold?

#### **Answer:**

Last year was a landmark year for the Council's housing companies with 123 affordable homes reaching completion. Whilst there is not time to go through all of this I would mention in particular the 68 general needs homes at Phoenix, 34 rented extra care homes at Fosters and a supported housing scheme for nine vulnerable young people in Reading Road.

Wokingham Housing is firming up proposals for its future development programme which includes 140 new homes, with 30 homes currently on site across the Borough, eg Norton Road in Wokingham three houses to rent and six apartments for shared ownership, as well as two shared ownership homes in Ruscombe. Also the housing companies will purchase 22 apartments at Peach Place for key workers.

Looking ahead of course there is the Gorse Ride estate in Finchampstead which will be a major project for our housing companies. A planning application for Phase 1 in Arnett Avenue is expected next month, while work continues on the rest of the programme. The overall regeneration project at Gorse Ride will provide a total of around 290 new homes, a net gain of 80. And of course as they say there is always more to come.

#### **Supplementary Question**

There were actually four affordable flats built in my Ward in Anson Walk on wasteland that was being misused by kids and anti-social behaviour was rife. The locals actually asked me what we could do with this piece of land and I identified that plot of land to WHL and they very successfully built four flats there and they were completed in January. I believe some of them are unoccupied and I was just wondering why are they still unoccupied. It is now the end of May. When will they be occupied?

#### **Supplementary Answer**

I do not know the answer to that at the moment but I will be very happy to find out and come back to you directly.

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

### **Question**

I would like to ask the following question on the Revenue Monitoring 2017\2018 Outturn:

Page 43 of the General Fund Summary - Carry Forwards refers to School Crossing Patrollers. It states that the Budget spend is aligned with the phased approach to ending the delivery of the SCP Service.

Does this mean that Wokingham Borough Council is intending to remove ALL School Crossing Patrollers regardless of the results of the consultations and the concerns of parents and local residents?

### **Answer**

Your proposition that the lack of a budget item automatically means ignoring the results of a consultation is unfortunately way too simplistic. All consultation responses are extensively reviewed to see if they are appropriate first and if so how extensive is that view.

As an example, in April 2017 from phase 1 of this action a significant proportion of the comments received related to general road safety issues, i.e. poor driving, speeding vehicles, inconsiderate parking.

In the current consultation, which is currently being finalised, the general road safety issues raised were dangerous driving, speeding vehicles again and poor parking. None of these issues are reduced or removed by the presence of a School Crossing Patroller so therefore those issues are not appropriate for this particular action.

Phase 1 patrollers were removed from the eight locations where they were operating on some form of pedestrian crossing. May I remind you that a pedestrian crossing has far more "power" to stop traffic than a patroller, often putting their lives at risk, stepping into the road to stop the traffic. All drivers are used to stopping when someone steps onto the crossing as they encounter them all over the Borough and all over the country. Unlike a patroller where there are only 15 of them initially across the whole Borough so a driver may never, ever, have encountered one.

They are also available 24 hours a day and not just around school times so the overall safety of crossing that road is improved significantly. So, all residents benefit not just the parents and children.

Importantly this change has been successfully implemented in phase 1 with no recorded increase in safety issues.

In 2015 this Council made a decision to remove all patrollers but only where there was a viable safe mechanism of crossing the road for parents and children. This requirement was a key reason for the delay you mentioned. That work has now been completed and each of the locations where the remaining seven patrollers operate are planned to have pedestrian crossings of some form before the start of the new academic year, in September. As with phase 1, when they have been installed the patrollers will then be phased out.

### **Supplementary Question**

I am afraid I rather disagree with your statement. No way can an automated crossing anticipate how children are going to behave and how cars are going to behave. It just is impossible.

When are the parents going to see the results of the consultation and will they be involved in it?

### **Supplementary Answer**

As I said already the consultation is currently being put together and that will be made public probably in the next couple of weeks, something like that. But may I remind you that the decision has already been taken to take the action so the people who have commented will clearly be interested but there are no grounds for changing our action.

### **6.6 Lindsay Ferris asked the Deputy Executive Member for Finance the following question:**

#### **Question**

Page 44 of the Agenda clearly shows how the Council is eating into its reserves.

As of 31/03/2017 the Council's reserves stood at £10,036m. At this meeting this figure (as of 31/03/2018) now stands at £7,525m, a drop of £2.511m over the last 12 months. This represents a fall of over 25% in the General Fund Balance (also known as reserves). This £2.511m also represents an overspend of circa 3% in Council Tax.

Clearly the ruling administration is losing control of costs, can the Executive Member explain how he intends to rectify this issue?

#### **Answer**

I don't think it will come as a surprise to you that I do not accept that the ruling Administration is losing control of its costs.

The first point I would like to make is that the like for like comparison to the £10m reserves you quote at 31/3/17, is £9.1m at 31/3/18 and not £7.5m. This is a reduction of less than 10%, not the 25% as you claim.

Throughout the year we have reported the significant budget pressures faced as a result of the increases in Adults' and Children's costs. To give you some headlines for that, basically to stand behind it, our demand for child protection plans up to April 2017 50 children; up to April 2018 139 children – 178% increase. Children in care April 2017 73, March 2018 106 – 45% increase.

The same is replicated across adult services also. Core adult mental health assessment quarter 3 2017-18 199 assessments for all of 2016- 202 and a 40% increase on top of that over the last three years generally in people accessing adult social care services. These are all statutory services so that we have to accept the demand basically that is coming in.

We have a long standing record of strong financial management, at this Council, which includes the close monitoring of our expenditure and putting measures in place to control escalating costs, and ensuring that we have a safe level of reserves. I am confident we will continue to do this, despite the severely escalating care needs of the community; which as



I am sure you are aware is an issue which is national and not simply related to Wokingham Borough.

### **Supplementary Question**

I would like you to turn to page 44 because on page 44 it says General Fund Balance at 31/3/17 £10.036m (in Appendix C) and a bit further down it says General Fund Balance 31/3/18 after carry forwards £7.525m. I therefore challenge your figures which you have just said to me and I would like you to explain why my comments are incorrect because I cannot see any difference - £10.036m and £7.525m is £2.511m. So I significantly challenge your figures and I think it shows that the Council cannot add up.

My question now is that we have lost a quarter of our balances by those figures in one year. Do you feel, and I accept the aspects of the figures and increased responsibilities and I understand the constraints but we have to bear that, I would actually say then do you consider both the February 17 and the February 18 budgets to have been safe?

### **Supplementary Answer**

The answer to your question is the difference between the figure you are using and the figure I quoted is the 17/18 carry forward request total which is listed in the bottom line but one on there but if you wish to discuss that further I am very happy to continue that discussion outside this meeting.

In the final answer to your question yes from all the information I have seen and all the information I am aware of I do believe that the budget is safe.

## **6.7 Andy Croy asked the Executive Member for Regeneration the following question:**

### **Question**

Referring to Agenda Item 6 Page 34 of the Agenda states "*Managing the defects at Phoenix with the contractor continues to be hard work.....*"

Can the defects at Phoenix be quantified and why is managing them hard work?

### **Answer**

I have got a lot of detail here which I am happy to share with you if it would help as it would take more than two minutes for me to go through all the detail.

Yes you are right the scale of defects at Phoenix Avenue can be quantified and has been an area of priority for WHL.

It has also been challenging because we had concerns that not all reports of defects from our tenants were being recorded by the contractors so we have got involved in that as well and that even when definitely recorded, little or no action was being taken by Hill. We have had some difficulty with this contractor in this regard.

WHL have also invested time in working directly with the tenants without getting involved in the detail so that no defects are missed by the contractor and we now have a weekly update session with them.

As a result all but three of the currently known about reported defects have appointments booked to have the issues attended to and WHL's ongoing monitoring suggest that all

defects reported by tenants are now effectively being recorded by the contractor. I will share with you a lot more of the detail.

### **Supplementary Question**

Given the, what I am guessing, quite extensive list of defects was the Prime Minister told about them when she visited?

### **Supplementary Answer**

Councillor Pauline Jorgensen gave the following answer:

The Prime Minister spent a lot of time talking to a lot of residents and I am sure that any residents that were upset about any defects would have taken the opportunity to share that with her. Generally what I saw when I talked to the residents was that they were delighted with their new houses and were really pleased to have somewhere decent to live that we have provided rather than the previous sofa surfing and spare bedrooms that they were using and I really think it is a really good development. We need to fix the issues but I am sure that the residents will have shared any issues they had directly with the Prime Minister. They certainly had plenty of time to talk to her.

The Leader of Council responded:

I would like to state that the number of defects are not huge bearing in mind the number of houses that have been provided on that estate. We will share the data with you. Just in case anyone was going away with a different impression.

## **6.8 Carl Doran had asked the Executive Member for Finance the following question:**

### **Question**

Referring to Agenda item 6 (page 34 of the agenda reports) the "Berry Brook Homes Limited (BBHL)" section reports this:

*"The Berry Brook Board have been further considering the strategic direction of the company and developing their Business Plan. These discussions will be worked in to the current draft plan with a view to further refining this at an away day in mid-June."*

Can I ask what the financial cost will be for this "away day"?

### **Answer**

As Councillor Doran was unable to attend the meeting the following written answer was provided:

The financial cost of the away day to Berry Brook Homes will be £243, plus expenses for travel of around £80. This is a third of the cost of the venue hire including lunch and all refreshments, which between all three companies is £730.

## **7. SHAREHOLDERS' REPORT**

*(Councillors Norman Jorgensen, Pauline Jorgensen, Charles Margetts, Philip Mirfin and Stuart Munro declared personal interests in this item)*

The Executive considered a report which provided the budget monitoring position for the month ending 31 March 2018 and the operational update for the period to 31 March 2018.

The Deputy Executive Member for Finance went through the report and was pleased to report that Wokingham Housing (WHL) had now handed over 125 new homes in the last

financial year to its sister housing companies Loddon and Berry Brook Homes which would generate a profit of £1.1m. In 2018/19 WHL were expected to hand over a further 60 new homes with a profit of just short of £1m.

Councillor Margetts reminded Members of why Optalis had been established and advised that today over £1m per annum costs had been reduced from the cost of the Council and the business had expanded from approximately £11-40m per annum following the merger with the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead.

In addition Councillor Margetts drew Members' attention to the operational section of the report which set out the progress with the various sites.

The Leader of Council highlighted the extra care homes and key worker homes that had been provided by WHL and specifically mentioned the homes that were being provided for care leavers. Given that the housing companies had only been operating for a relatively short time Councillor Haitham Taylor felt that this was a tremendous achievement.

**RESOLVED** that:

- 1) the budget monitoring position for the month ending 31 March 2018 be noted:
- 2) the operational update for the period to 31 March 2018 be noted.

**8. REVENUE MONITORING 2017/18 - OUTTURN**

The Executive considered a report setting out the outturn position of the revenue budget and the level of balances in respect of the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account, Schools Block and the Authority's investment portfolio.

Whilst introducing the report the Deputy Executive Member for Finance highlighted the General Fund outturn position which showed an £814k overspend, which was actually £523k lower than the figure reported at the last quarter to the Executive. The Housing Revenue outturn position was just under budget. With regard to the Schools' Block outturn although this was overspent by £453k, which was as a result of high needs pressures, this was also more favourable than reported in January.

Councillor Margetts drew Members' attention to the budget carry forwards, as set out in Appendix B, which represented planned activities for 2018-19.

Councillor Mirfin queried whether any more detail was available on the demand affecting the adverse variance in People Services. Councillor Margetts reminded the meeting of the statutory costs that the Council had to bear in terms of social care provision as mentioned earlier in the meeting and the fact that demand was increasing rapidly which was something that was expected to continue.

**RESOLVED** that:

- 1) the outturn position of the revenue budget and the level of balances in respect of the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account, Schools' Block and the Authority's investment portfolio be noted:
- 2) the General Fund carry forward requests of £1,598,670, as set out in Appendix B to the report, be agreed.

## **9. CAPITAL OUTTURN 2017-18**

The Executive considered a report setting out the Capital Budget Outturn for 2017-18 which included a number of carry forwards into future financial years.

The Executive Member for Finance reminded Members that there had been £89m of investment in the year on things such as highways infrastructure, regeneration, schools and affordable homes and highlighted that what was being delivered was five times as much as the Council delivered 4-5 years ago. The capital programme had also been delivered within budget with an actual underspend of £2.6m which showed that the Council had the ability to undertake such a large programme and keep control of the costs.

Councillor Margetts also highlighted the carry forwards for schemes into 2018/19, as listed in Table 2.3 of Appendix A which consisted of planned work which had been rolled forward.

The Leader of Council highlighted the largescale projects, including schools and country parks that were being undertaken and stated that unfortunately when delivering such large projects there was often disruption. Councillor Haitham Taylor asked residents to bear with the Council during these periods.

**RESOLVED** that:

- 1) the Capital Outturn, as set out in Appendix A to the report, be noted;
- 2) the carry forwards into future financial years, as set out in Appendix A to the report, be approved.

## **10. 21ST CENTURY COUNCIL - UPDATE**

The Executive considered a report relating to the progress of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Council Programme which was the change programme the aim of which was to transform the way that services were delivered and offer more options for residents to take up these services.

The Deputy Executive Member for Finance went through the report and highlighted a number of areas that had been delivered or were due to be delivered shortly including: online applications for school admissions and blue badges; a new planning search and planning map search facility which would give residents the opportunity to review an area and see related planning applications; an improved customer account facility which around 30k residents had already signed up for; and various online payment systems.

With regard to the Members' intranet site, which was currently at prototype stage, this was designed to place all the information Councillors might require in one area which should make Members more responsive and give a better service to residents.

Councillor Dolinski raised concerns about those residents who did not have access to or were uncomfortable using IT facilities and wanted to ensure that they wouldn't be disadvantaged. Councillor Margetts confirmed that the programme was not just about improving digital services but also about reviewing all the processes within the Council and streamlining them as much as possible. Residents were not obliged to use electronic facilities and there would still be a Customer Services Team to help people who required Council services. Councillor Margetts advised that from data he had recently seen call centre demand remained static but IT demand was increasing and with an increase in

customer services staff this meant that the Council had more capability to deal with more enquiries and respond quicker.

**RESOLVED** that the progress in implementing the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Council programme be noted.