

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE COUNCIL**

HELD ON 21 SEPTEMBER 2017 FROM 7.30 PM TO 10.30 PM

Members Present

Councillors: Rob Stanton (Mayor), John Kaiser (Deputy Mayor), Parry Batth, Laura Blumenthal, Chris Bowring, Prue Bray, UllaKarin Clark, Gary Cowan, Andy Croy, Richard Dolinski, Lindsay Ferris, Michael Firmager, Mike Haines, Pauline Helliard-Symons, Emma Hobbs, Tim Holton, John Jarvis, Philip Houldsworth, Clive Jones, Norman Jorgensen, Dianne King, Pauline Jorgensen, David Lee, Abdul Loyes, Charles Margetts, Ken Miall, Stuart Munro, Anthony Pollock, Angus Ross, Beth Rowland, Imogen Shepherd-DuBey, Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey, David Sleight, Chris Smith, Simon Weeks, Oliver Whittle and Shahid Younis

33. WELCOME TO INTERIM CHIEF EXECUTIVE

The Mayor welcomed Manjeet Gill, the Interim Chief Executive, to her first Council meeting.

The Interim Chief Executive commented that she was looking forward to working with Members.

34. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Alistair Auty, Mark Ashwell, Keith Baker, Kate Haines, Charlotte Haitham Taylor, John Halsall, Julian McGhee Sumner, Philip Mirfin, Barrie Patman, Ian Pittock, Malcolm Richards, Wayne Smith, Bill Soane, Alison Swaddle and Paul Swaddle.

35. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 20 July 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

36. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

37. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

It was moved by the Mayor and seconded by the Deputy Mayor that, in accordance with Procedure Rule 4.2.12n), Procedure Rule 4.2.9.1 be suspended to allow Public Question Time to be extended to 45 minutes.

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

37.1 Steve Bowers asked the Executive Member for Adults' Services the following question which in his absence was answered by the Deputy Executive Member for Adults' Services:

The Council is currently in breach of its Statutory Duties with actions taken under the 21st Century project, how do you propose to remedy this urgent situation?

The Statutory duties are clearly laid out in the HCA – The Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard

[\(https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/628396/](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/628396/)

[Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard.pdf](#)) particularly clause 2.2.3.

‘2.2.3 Where registered providers are proposing a change in landlord for one or more of their tenants or a significant change in their management arrangements, they shall consult with affected tenants in a fair, timely, appropriate and effective manner. Registered providers shall set out the proposals clearly and in an appropriate amount of detail and shall set out any actual or potential advantages and disadvantages (including costs) to tenants in the immediate and longer term. Registered providers must be able to demonstrate to affected tenants how they have taken the outcome of the consultation into account when reaching a decision.’

Phase 1 of the 21st Century has already seen the unilateral decision taken to split the Housing Service into strategic and operational services without any form of consultation.

This split between Strategic and Operational decision making has the potential to lead to some disastrous plans being put in place without the expertise of operational personnel. This sort of situation cannot be a good use of your existing resources, wasting time and money on inspirational projects that are impractical in the local environment and likely to lead to an even greater loss of credibility within the Borough.

We are already seeing the negative impact of Phase 1 within the Housing Service with the loss of experienced staff both permanent and short term. The replacements are short term contractors or agency temps which impacts on both the existing staff and the tenants. With Phase 2 being split into two tranches without an end date but tranche 1 only aiming for completion in April 2018 Housing are looking at another year of dealing with the fallout from lack of direction.

The Involved Tenant members of the Tenant & Landlord Improvement Panel (TLIP) a fully constituted group of WBC, a group charged with scrutinising the use of the HRA budget circa £15 million, have expressed concerns over many months to both the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive but no action has been taken to improve the situation in spite of promises made by both gentlemen.

Whilst we appreciate that the Council is under increasing pressure to reduce costs if the current trends continue you are in danger of losing what little trust that Wokingham residents have in your ability to run our affairs.

Answer

Wokingham Borough Council is fully aware of, and committed to our duties under the Homes and Communities Agency's Regulatory Standards, and we also value highly our relationship with TLIP. Improvements in Housing Services are directly linked with the partnership with the involved tenant structures over the last few years.

The Council acknowledges that you should have been consulted on Phase 1 as per the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard and apologise for this oversight. This oversight is, I suspect, attributable to the fact that the HRA was substantially located in Phase 2 of the programme. As such, no firm decisions have been made in respect of the HRA. I confirm that you will be engaged in Phase 2.

I can confirm that there is not an embargo on a recruitment of permanent staff during the implementation of the 21st Century programme. Managers have been asked to undertake careful management when filling vacancies to ensure that they minimise risk of future

redundancy, but where a post is vital to the continued delivery of service then it should be filled.

There are, however, certain posts that are difficult to fill, such as surveyors, but this is an issue about the competitive market for those positions rather than anything to do with the 21st Century programme.

The Operational Housing Services Team are almost fully staffed for the first time in a long time, albeit with a range of permanent and temporary staff and attempts continue to be made to fill these posts with permanent staff where appropriate.

With regards to the Housing Needs, Tenant Involvement and Housing Management Teams, all are virtually fully staffed, again with a mixture of temporary and permanent staff, based on judgement of the managers of the service.

Simon tells me that the staff levels and capacity of the team have improved over the last month and we are continually monitoring this issue not just in Housing, but across the Council. I hope this gives you some reassurance that there is a strong commitment in to continuing to provide the high level of service to tenants.

Finally I can confirm as of 22nd August the staff split within the Housing Service is as follows, 30 permanent, 10 fixed term contracts, 7 agency and 8 secondees of which 5 internal and 3 external to Housing Services. The rent team, which sits in another department, has 2 permanent and 2 agency staff.

Supplementary Question:

The Leader of the Council acknowledged the breach of duty in her letter to me of 24 August. This needs to be rectified within the week to avoid involving the Housing Ombudsman. Will that happen?

Supplementary Answer:

Yes, that will happen.

37.2 Jen Challis asked the Executive Member for Finance the following question:

When the 21st Century Council Project was first announced one of the key elements was to improve local coverage and reduce the costs associated with multiple personnel having to carry out visits to localities thus helping to improve community involvement and development. Is this still one of your priorities, as the opposite appears to be happening?

The Neighbourhood Officers, Rent Officers and the Community Development Officers are front line staff dealing with your customers on a daily basis and as such their roles are critical to local communities. However over the last six months we have seen these key staff leaving, being seconded to projects, having to attend multiple training sessions thus leaving gaps in availability. The recruitment of short term replacements with little local experience also adds to the pressure on existing staff whilst they are being trained. Long term some of these replacements may become valuable members but with the short term nature of their employment there is no commitment to either the area or the communities. Tenants are finding it increasingly difficult to know who to contact, in one case the Neighbourhood Officer who was introduced one week had left when they tried to contact a week later. This does not inspire confidence in Residents. The Rent department has seen a massive turnover of staff which is extremely frustrating for Tenants trying to make contact and get a problem resolved. Our overall impression is of total chaos with letters

being generated that no one understands even the staff whose signatures are on them. Rent arrears are a problem for the Council but the lack of credibility in your systems only frightens the innocent while the intentional non-payers just ignore them. This needs to be addressed sooner rather than later.

Answer

Thank you for your question. I can confirm that it is still a priority of the 21st Century Council Programme to deliver locality working. The Programme has been split into two phases with the initial stage (which has now completed) focusing on our back office systems and services. We have been making changes to how we serve each other within the Council first of all so that we could learn from this before we look at those services which directly serve our residents. This two-stage approach will explain why you feel you have not yet seen any direct improvements. The Programme will be seeking to make service delivery more customer focused and much easier for our residents to access our services.

With regards to staffing, there have been a number of moves in and out of the service, as you mention, and over the last few months some surgeries have unfortunately been cancelled, as there is currently only one Housing Officer in post. It is hoped surgeries will return to normal once we have recruited into the vacant post.

For the first time in a while the Asset Management Team is now almost fully staffed albeit with a range of permanent and temporary staff. Attempts continue to strike the appropriate balance and ensure that critical roles such as the Procurement and Contracts Manager role are occupied by permanent staff.

It is recognised that there has been turnover in Housing, and that there has been some recruitment and retention issues. We are therefore having to employ agency staff to supplement our permanently employed staff but I can assure you however that the team is currently very close to full compliment.

A rent review project is already underway, overseen by our most senior Housing Officer, looking at all key processes with a view to adding capacity and stability, and improving the service offer for the benefit of all concerned. The rent review project has reinforced that additional staff are required in the rent team in order to provide the necessary focus on high level debt, continual non-payers, former tenant arrears etc. This will pick up the wording of all letters that you refer to. The outcome of the review will be reported to Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel in September and will be available on request.

Supplementary Question

As the HRA is already part of community houses and the rent team are currently under review, why does the Council not consider incorporating the rent and community development teams into a housing department, thus creating a fully holistic team for communities and tenants whilst saving officers general time?

Supplementary Answer

I think it is fair to say that as part of the 21st century Council project we will be looking at the way that all of these areas operate and looking to ensure that they work to the optimum.

37.3 Brian Lee asked the Executive Member for Adults' Services the following question which in his absence was answered by the Deputy Executive Member for Adults' Services :

The Council's 21st Century Project is having a major impact on the functions carried out by the Asset Management team within Housing Services. How much longer are we as Tenants expected to tolerate the growing staff shortages and the Council's failure to appreciate the problems that both the team and Tenants are having to tolerate?

The Council's embargo on the recruitment of permanent staff and the consequent use of agency or temporary contractors is costly in financial terms but also places pressure on the remaining staff who are unable to attract applications for the vacancies or retain experienced staff. Eventually the increased pressure will lead to increasing staff welfare issues and gaps appearing in the services to residents across the Borough. Prior to the start of the 21st Century project this team was a busy, proactive group who had improved the Council's property assets bringing 99% up to the Decent Homes Standard but are now in very real danger of collapse. They have let major contracts and monitored them effectively to ensure that the Council is achieving improved value for money and that tenant satisfaction continues to improve. We are now in the position where staff shortages mean that not all of these functions can be fully carried out. The Council needs to change their recruitment policy now before further damage is done and your assets depreciate.

Answer

Without being accused of repeating myself, the answer I will give will be the same as the one I gave to Steve's question because your question is very similar actually.

Again I can confirm that there is not an embargo on recruitment of permanent staff. Managers have been asked to undertake a careful management when filling vacancies to ensure that they minimise the risk of future redundancies, but where a post is vital, and I have already said this, to continued delivery of the service it should be filled and that is important.

There are certain posts as I have said, like surveyors that are difficult to fill, such as surveyors, where we are at the mercy of the market on that.

The Operational Housing Team are almost fully staffed as I have said. Yes, the majority we have got are permanent but we have got some temporary staff. That is not to say that our temporary staff are not excellent. We have got some very good temporary staff there and they might even migrate in to permanent staff, we do not know. It is all part of the 21st century.

With regards to the Housing Needs, Tenant Involvement and Housing Management Teams, as I said, are virtually fully staffed, and that is a welcome picture there, and as I said earlier on, I can confirm that as of 22nd August there are 30 permanent staff, 10 fixed term contracts, 7 agency and 8 secondees in there.

The capacity of the team has improved so maybe when you filed that question in your mind it probably was not, but it has improved over the last month. We are continually monitoring this issue not just in Housing, but across the whole Council.

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

The 21st Century Project is supposed to reduce staff costs whilst improving interaction

between the Council and residents primarily through the use of enhanced IT. How will this work when there has been no input from customers and the Council's website has been downgraded in a national survey by Better Connected from 3 Star to 2 Star while other local Councils are improving?

The Council are investing large sums of our money into IT systems and staff training but no one has bothered to ask us what we want to see improved. There are many residents in the Borough who are disabled or disadvantaged who cannot access your IT services and the helpline is less than helpful, nine times out of ten they don't know the answer nor do they know who might. Reporting problems on the website appears to be a complete waste of time with no acknowledgments at the time or later by email. Web pages over 5 years out of date, updated pages having incorrect information, the list is endless. The communications about 21st Century, even the minutes from the Scrutiny Committee, are all papering over the problems being experienced by your customers. Everything is supposedly on track, everyone is on board with the changes and the Council will save huge sums of money. No it's not. If two out of three, on track and on board, are false can you be sure that the predicted costs and savings are true. Involved Tenants have questioned changes to the Housing Service and yet again there is a total lack of communication or consultation on this area of your business. Rumours of the Housing Service splitting into multiple areas within the Council are hopefully just that because the destruction of the most organised, experienced and dedicated team will come back to haunt you. By all means change what needs to be changed, to improve services, but don't ruin the parts that work in your drive for change.

Answer

Thank you for your question, which covers a number of issues which I will group for ease:

The existing web page and service provided through our Customer Service Teams is the first topic. The Council regularly works with our residents to find out what they want from our website and to build the site based on this feedback as we believe, it is more important for us to find out what residents want, as opposed to a rating exercise based on categories.

In fact the Council scored better in this year's Better Connected survey than last years, showing a good direction of travel. However, we agree with the SOCITM's assessment of our online mapping services, and have already begun improving this area as part of the 21st Century Council Programme and this will be online shortly.

The Council's Customer Service team is able to resolve and manage a high proportion of calls that are received, however we recognise that this can be improved for residents by increasing the scope of the customer service remit and we are actively addressing this via the 21st Century Programme, which brings me on to the 21st Century programme.

This programme has been split into two phases with the initial and now completed stage focusing on our back office systems and services. We have been making changes to how we serve each other within the Council first so that we could learn from this before we look at those parts of the Council that directly serve our residents. This will explain why you feel you have not yet seen any direct improvements. The programme is seeking to make service delivery more customer focused and much easier for our residents to access. In particular, we will be looking at and prioritising the high volume processes that are regularly undertaken by our residents. However, whilst we will be looking to make these available online to meet customer demand, I can assure you there are no plans to remove

the option for residents to opt for “assisted delivery” via Customer Services when transacting with the Council, should they need to.

Finally, the Housing Service: - This Programme, as I have said before, has not yet considered how the services provided by our Housing teams can be enhanced through the programme. As in any change however I am aware that there has been speculation as to what might happen to the configuration of the service but I can assure you that the programme does not set out to reduce or diminish existing services, rather it is seeking efficiencies in the way the Council is organised to enable a much more joined up customer responsive service for all of our residents. As an important stakeholder group our involved tenants will be part of the design process.

Supplementary Question:

With the HRA being a standalone ring-fenced budget, ergo non-transferable to the General Fund, we the involved tenants on behalf of the 3,000 plus council tenants across the Borough, ask the Council to consider the views expressed by the four involved tenant chairs and instruct senior Council officers to listen to our opinion. Please do not become another Kensington and Chelsea Council, listen to your tenants.

Supplementary Answer:

I think it is fair to say that we do listen to the tenants. We pay attention to what they have to say, we have regular meetings with them and will continue to do so.

37.5 Keith Malvern asked the Executive Member for Strategic Highways and Planning the following question:

Why have you had to find an extra £400,000 this financial year to cover Local Plan activities when the schedule of work was already known?

Answer

You are quite right we have had to find this additional money because we have had a substantial number of sites which have been submitted by residents of this Borough. The number greatly exceeded that for which we had expectations when setting the original budget for the Local Plan.

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 to ensure we are fully aware of the opportunities and constraints to sustainable development, including in depth consideration of infrastructure delivery plans, 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 for delivery.

Supplementary Question:

Reference has been made to the Local Enterprise Partnership as those who have commented about some of the specific sites. I know little about the LEP other than the fact that they gave £1.5million of a government interest free loan to fund this Wokingham car park. Can you tell me why this publicly funded body has not already published reports about these three sites? Publicly funded equals public has a right to know.

Supplementary Answer:

You refer to the LEP. That was a document on which the former Leader of the Council sat on the LEP Board as a representative of all Berkshire councils and under that LEP while Keith was Leader here and representative, they carried out a full survey on Grazeley and on Twyford as potential development sites, and a detailed traffic assessment.

That was the position. There is nothing secret about it. It is a public document and if you do not have it Keith, I am more than happy to get you a copy but please make sure your facts are right. That was carried out by the Local Enterprise Partnership. It was not this Authority.

37.6 Helen Power asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question which in his absence was answered by the Deputy Executive Member for Children's Services:

Will the Executive Member please advise why the number of pupils per year (Published Admission Number) for Bohunt School has changed from the agreed 180 (September 2016) to 240 a year, which means the present buildings are only big enough to accommodate 11-16 year olds, not 11-18 year olds, as was intended, with the increase in pupils meaning consequent impacts for other local schools and a presumed requirement to build the additional wing to accommodate the sixth form pupils which the current buildings were supposed to cater for?

Answer

The Council's intention was to establish a 1,200 place 11 to 18 school, which implies an admission number in the order of 180 places. The increased admission number, which means the capacity will be required for the planned 11 to 16 roll, has been set by the school itself. Bohunt Wokingham School is an Academy and as such an "own admission authority" school responsible for setting its own Admission Number. National policy supports schools increasing the number of places they offer in response to parental preference, so this Council had no grounds to object to this decision.

I can also confirm that there is no presumption that Wokingham Borough Council will invest to enable the current students to progress into a sixth form on site. My understanding is the school has a funding agreement with the Department for Education as an 11 to 16 school. The expansion issue will be addressed at a later date taking account of the Council's resources and priorities at that point, as well as the school's ambitions and other potential funding sources.

Supplementary Question:

Bohunt School cost well over £30million to provide education to 11 to 18 year olds but now they have increased the number of pupils per year, they will need more money and they will be taking 60 children a year away from other Wokingham schools, leaving these schools with less money coming in when they are already struggling with budgets because they are the lowest funded in the country. It looks like Bohunt is getting all the privileges and the rest of our schools will be worse off as a result. What are you doing to help the rest of our schools?

Supplementary Answer:

That is a question which will be requiring a written response, so that will be sent to you.

37.7 Peter Humphreys asked the Executive Member for Finance the following question:

Back in April I phoned the Council and was reluctantly put through to the finance department as I wished to ask some questions about the accounts extract published in WBC's Borough News. My key question was how much in total WBC had received in developer contributions (s106 and CIL) in 2016/17 and was expecting for 2017/18. I was told by an Officer that he didn't have the information immediately to hand but that he would get back to me.

A month later, well past the target response time, I received an email stating my questions were "not a valid request as they were asking for an opinion/explanation/justification, not for recorded information held by the Council". That response is of course complete nonsense to put me off asking embarrassing questions. I pursued the matter with WBC's legal department.

After various exchanges of emails the officer presumably read the definition of the word "question" in the OED and had a change of heart and my other queries were accepted and answered but not the key question re developer contributions.

Contrary to stated official policy the officer has not subsequently replied to my follow-up email. I thus wish to know who within the Council (officer or / and councillor (s)) issued the edict to block this information from public view.

Answer

I am sorry that you did not receive the answers to the question in a timely manner.

You have, I am assured, now received a response to your questions, including actual developer contributions receipts for 2016/17 and forecast developer contributions receipts for 2017/18.

To answer your specific question anyway:

- Section 106 – In 2016/17, the Council raised £21m, of which £6m was outstanding as at year end. Therefore, cash received in year was £15m;
- For CIL – In 2016/17, the Council received £4.7m;
- As far as expected contributions are concerned for 2017/18 for Section 106 according to the latest forecast, the Council expects to raise £32m and for CIL, the Council expects to raise £6.2m.

I should emphasise that forecasts are totally dependent on developers bringing forward housing development and if development does not commence, related contributions are not received as planned.

Forecasts are updated quarterly. They are therefore subject to change if developments do not come forward and/or if there are changes to the scope of development projects.

And finally, the CIL/S106 team are happy to provide non-commercially sensitive information on request, and I understand that you now have a contact in the Council's specialist team dealing with this issue. Furthermore, annual reports containing this information are available on the Council's website.

Supplementary Question:

Thank you for the answer. I did actually obtain them from a different person in the Council and I did actually get different figures including for last year which should be definitive and audited by now. I can accept that forecasts do vary. This is not the first time that this has happened when I have asked questions about public information. Who in the Council is blocking this information and what steps are being taken to train officers now they are aware of this situation, that they will not block information in the future and they are aware of the Freedom of Information Act? Now we are aware of this situation, are staff going to be trained so that they will answer legitimate questions in the future?

Supplementary Answer:

I cannot provide you with the total reassurance but what I can tell you is that you have been given a very specific named person to answer the questions on Section 106 and CIL monies and areas around that within Finance. We should be able to answer questions. Sometimes it is difficult to know actually who to put the questions through to.

37.8 Diane Heyes had asked the Executive Member for Adults' Services the following question but as she was unable to attend the meeting her question was asked by Richard Gregory. In the Executive Member for Adults' Services absence the question was answered by the Deputy Executive Member for Adults' Services:

The buildings insurance premiums for about 250 shared ownership and leasehold tenants which under our lease agreement have to be negotiated on the tenants behalf by the Council has trebled over the last few years. Our bill this year is £490 for a 2 bedroom semi detached which is buildings insurance only. This is apparently due to the small size of the overall pool and a small number of significant claims. The rises have created a significant difference between shared ownership tenants and neighbouring fully owned properties who have the benefit of insuring through a much larger pool.

Please would the Council take steps to provide cost effective insurance on our properties and ensure that the premiums do not rise faster than the general market rate for household insurance. If this is not possible please would the Council allow its tenants and shared equity owners to purchase cheaper insurance in the general private market themselves.

Answer

The Council has taken and continues to take steps to try to provide the best cover at the best price available. This cover was tendered in 2010 with a 5-year term. Cover was re-tendered in 2015. The insurers were appointed for a second 5-year term, and that is reviewed annually.

This is a niche area of insurance with a very small number of insurers willing to quote for this type of business: in 2015 only 3 insurers responded to the tender. The successful bidder's quote was by far the most competitive.

Claims under this policy have, however, been increasing significantly. The headline figure is now that for every £1 the insurers have received in premium they have paid out £1.85 in claims.

It is not possible for those affected to self-insure as it is in a term of their leases that the Council insures these assets. Officers looked into this issue as part of the review and decided the risk of allowing this cohort to insure themselves was a risk to the Council.

Wokingham Borough Council owns the freehold of leasehold homes, and owns up to 50% of shared ownership properties so must make sure that its assets are protected.

37.9 Ian Young asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Reference Hyde End Road Shinfield. Bearing in mind:

1. That Hyde End Road is a busy commuter route, for Wokingham and local residents travelling to and from Basingstoke and Junction 11 of the M4. A significant section of the road is only just over 5 metres wide instead of the standard 7.3 metres.
2. The recent photographic evidence, sent to the Council, showing HGVs and buses mounting the pavement to avoid each other, and endangering the lives of pedestrians. This section of road has a blind bend, and the introduction of a new bus service, using buses 3 metres wide, is making the problem much worse

Does the Council accept the need to provide an improved and safer route for pedestrians, and a wider road for vehicles?

Answer

As you will be aware there is committed strategic development in line with the Council's adopted Core Strategy being delivered in this area which is currently affecting the network whilst the associated infrastructure is being delivered.

Some of these works include the need for construction traffic to use Hyde End Road which has added to other pressures resulted from other roadworks and closures which have been or are currently taking place on Basingstoke Road and Church Lane and the continued associated works with the Eastern Relief Road. Furthermore the Leopard bus service is now routed along Hyde End Road as an interim arrangement to serve the first phase of the Spencers Wood development.

The current redistribution of traffic, and particularly levels of construction traffic will reduce once the major developments and their associated transport interventions are completed which will result in the construction traffic being removed and allow the bus service to be rerouted through the newly constructed housing developments.

You mention a 'standard 7.3m road width' in your question, which is incorrect. Firstly, there is no requirement to build all the new main roads to this width and there is certainly no requirement to widen the historic road network universally to 7.3m, including bus routes. Excessively wide roads encourage higher vehicle speeds and attract overall greater volumes of traffic to use the route, which is not what the Council, nor would I expect what the local residents would want, for Hyde End Road. That said, the Council recognises the current situation and narrow road width particularly on bends, then that is raising some concerns on a particular stretch of Hyde End Road and we are looking into various measures to improve the current unsatisfactory situation.

The measures at this time include; over the next two weekends, via Sunday road closures, the Council will be installing advanced warning signs and cutting back vegetation to provide some initial improvement. The Council are also engaging with local developers to minimise the routing of construction vehicles on Hyde End Road.

In the medium term the Council are looking at options to provide a new footpath on the

north side of Hyde End Road between Croft Road and Millworth Lane, on land currently owned by the University of Reading, which is behind the existing hedgerow, so segregated from live traffic.

Longer term solutions are being investigated by officers. Widening the road would need to consider the acquisition of land and the relocation of the statutory undertakers equipment like gas and electricity. A major scheme would need to balance any local benefits against the possibility that continuous road widening could increase vehicle speeds and significantly increase the volume of the traffic using Hyde End Road, which the local Council and we assume local residents and businesses would wish to avoid. Long term options proposed will be subject to consultation with local Members, the parish councils, local businesses and residents.

Supplementary Question:

Given that the dedicated bus route will not be available until 2020 and the construction traffic will be there until 2024, are you happy that we can live with this Hyde End Road situation?

Supplementary Answer:

Well, we are doing what we can in the short term as I explained and then we have medium and longer term ideas that we will look into but I cannot be sure what will happen yet. Officers are working on it and we will be keeping local residents informed.

37.10 Guy Grandison has asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Can the Executive Member for Highways give an update on the Bus Service down Silverdale Road and why the morning peak services were removed?

Answer

The morning peak journeys were operated commercially by Reading Buses so did not form part of the recent renegotiation of the 19a and the 19c bus services which have now been combined into the number 12, the subsidised part of that coming from Wokingham Borough Council. These journeys benefited by sharing vehicles with another commercial route to keep service costs down. Regrettably Reading Buses were unable to continue to share the vehicles as per the previous arrangement, and due to increased service costs were no longer able to provide the morning peak services along Silverdale Road.

Reading Buses are a partner of the Council and have made an approach regarding the reduced service. Since the approach the Council have been investigating various options to support and enhance this reduced service, and discussions continue and will shortly include a consultation with effected residents. Financial contributions to support bus services are substantial, and the Council needs to be assured that any financial support offered represents value for money to the Borough's residents before a formal agreement can be entered into.

Supplementary Question:

I am very pleased to hear about continuing investigations in this area, an issue which is a key topic for everyone down Silverdale Road and Maiden Erlegh at the moment. In fact I am working on a campaign to support a business case on this, so can I count on the Council's support on that?

Supplementary Answer:

I am very grateful Guy for any help you can give in that area.

37.11 Simon Cooper asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

As a result of an accident that occurred at my property on the 21 January that sadly resulted in the loss of life of a passenger of the vehicle and the subsequent two serious accidents, the continued speeding issues that have been reported to both Thames Valley Police and Wokingham Borough Council. Please can the member responsible for Highways Chris Bowring advise on what actions will be taken and by when to resolve the speeding issues that plague Grazeley residents before another serious accident occurs and can Chris please advise what would be required to lower the speed limit in the village?

Answer

From your previous discussions with the Highways Team on the matter you will be aware the responsibility to enforce the existing 40mph speed limit lies with the Police, as the speed enforcement agency.

Regarding the regrettable fatal accident that occurred in January this year, Police record state that the primary factor was “travelling too fast for the conditions”. The 40mph speed restriction is the limit, and drivers should travel at an appropriate speed for the traffic, road conditions and weather along the route they are travelling at any given time.

Although the Council and Police consider the 40mph speed limit appropriate for this location, the Council have recently installed mobile speed-limit Vehicle Activated Signs that should encourage motorists to restrict their speed to below 40mph.

Additionally the Council have agreed to undertake speed surveys in this locality within the next few months. If there are problem areas identified from these surveys, then the Council will engage with the Police and agree appropriate measures to remedy the problem.

Supplementary Question:

Just a point of clarity, there is no speed indicators in the locality. As Thames Valley Police have now identified the need for and established a problem solving plan, can I confirm that the Council will assist the Police in their quest to resolve this issue by providing the necessary resources such as speed monitoring strips in Grazeley?

Supplementary Answer:

Yes, as I indicated the Council is aware of the problem and will certainly work with the Police to find a resolution.

38. PETITIONS

The following member of the public presented a petition in relation to the matter indicated.

The Mayor’s decision as to the action to be taken is set out against each petition.

Mr Geoff Smith	Mr Smith presented a petition of approximately 230 signatures regarding road safety on Reading Road, Wokingham.
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39. PRESENTATION BY THE CHIEF CONSTABLE, FRANCIS HABGOOD AND THE DEPUTY POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER FOR THAMES VALLEY, MATTHEW BARBER

The Council received presentations from Matthew Barber, Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley and Francis Habgood, Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police.

In his presentation the Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner referred to 2016-17 Crime Performance Headlines. It was noted that crime was on the increase across the country; however, the overall increase in crime remained low in the Thames Valley. He also highlighted the Police and Crime Commissioner's Strategic Priorities for 2017 – 21.

In his presentation the Chief Constable outlined how Thames Valley Police was working and would continue to work to meet its priorities. He also highlighted the priorities for 2017/18, including cutting crimes of most concern, protecting vulnerable people, reducing repeat demand and bringing offenders to justice.

Following the presentations, Members asked a number of questions relating to:

- Restoring confidence amongst residents in Loddon and what ward Members could do to assist the Neighbourhood Team in building relationships;
- Progress with sharing facilities with other Blue Light services, councils and other agencies;
- Submission of evidence of bad driving;
- Funding and resources dedicated to dealing with terrorism and security matters;
- Equipping officers appropriately in the event of a terror attack locally;
- Powers regarding traveller incursions;
- How to ensure that cyclists wore reflective clothing and had lights on their bikes during the winter months;
- Rural crime;
- How Thames Valley Police dealt with reports of those with mental health issues in crisis;
- Cybercrime.

The Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner and the Chief Constable answered these questions at the meeting.

Members thanked the Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner and the Chief Constable for their presentations.

40. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor informed the meeting that he and the Deputy Mayor had attended several fetes during the summer and had been impressed by the work of a number of charities.

The Mayor invited Members to an event that he would be hosting on 17 February 2018 at the Hilton Hotel to help raise money to enable the purchase of a portable cancer scanner for the Royal Berkshire Hospital.

41. TREASURY MANAGEMENT OUTTURN REPORT 2016-17

The Council received the Treasury Management Outturn Report 2016-17 as set out on pages 45 to 74 of the agenda.

Oliver Whittle in presenting the report highlighted the role of the Council's Treasurer. It was noted that the Council's debt had increased from £47.8m to £65.8m. The Housing Revenue debts had reduced from £85m to £81.5m. It was also noted that Capital Expenditure had been £72m for the General Fund and £4.9m for the Housing Revenue Account. Details on the Council's return on investments were also provided.

It was proposed by Oliver Whittle and seconded by Charles Margetts that the recommendations contained within the report be agreed.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) it be noted that this report was presented to the Audit Committee on 13 June 2017 and the Executive on the 27 July 2017;
- 2) the following be approved:
 - (a) the Treasury Management Annual Report for 2016/17; and
 - (b) the actual 2016/17 prudential indicators within the report.

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

David Lee, Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Strategic Highways and Planning

I just want to mention a few things about planning which seems to be making all the running in the newspapers at the moment. Just to remind everybody that we are a planning authority and we must comply with the law which requires us to assess our future housing need and determine where this housing should go and ensure that we achieve the vital infrastructure. This is called establishing a Local Plan.

We are currently updating our existing Local Plan to take us up to 2036. The first stage in this review is to determine objectively our housing numbers which has been calculated at 856 per annum. A new national method from the Government which will be brought in formally in April potentially shows this needs to be 879. We then have to determine where these houses should go and we request landowners in the Borough to submit their proposed sites for consideration. We received 263 such sites. Our role now is to assess all these sites to arrive at a considered and professionally researched opinion as to the best sites to accommodate these numbers.

If we do not carry out such a robust assessment when our Plan is publicly examined we will lose arguments put forward by aggrieved landowners whose sites have not been approved, nor properly assessed. The research that we do will cover all aspects; are they near transport hubs, doctors' surgeries, flood areas etc. including the impact on the countryside and Green Belt. We have commissioned Master Planners to help with this review and they will be starting with the three largest sites submitted; Grazeley, Barkham Square and Twyford. In terms of having pre agreed any of these, which we keep hearing we have, please note paragraph 3.23 of the tender document, taking as an example

Twyford, if the sites are to be allocated a major part of the evidence base would be to justify why growth here i.e. the Green Belt, and not elsewhere in the Borough instead should take place. No decisions have been taken.

We are assessing sites which have been put forward by landowners in this Borough. In the case of Grazeley, this is a joint submission with Wokingham Council, Reading Council and West Berkshire Council. The logic behind this large application is an attempt to establish, with Government approval, a large site to protect as much as possible of our much valued countryside. Much has been said in the past about leaked documents and secret plans of this Authority. We have no secret plans nor have we identified where some 20,000 houses should go by 2036. What we are doing is to determine the best possible locations which causes the least damage. 20,000 houses will cause damage there is no doubt about that. We could use the approach of simply ignoring the law and leave all the decision making to opportunistic developers and a distant Planning Inspector from Bristol or work together to get the best for all our residents. This should not be a political football. We have to do this, we have to get the best for all our residents. We are Borough representatives here. We are not Parish councillors, we have to look after 168,000 residents. I fully intend to do my best for all residents. In my own Ward we have already suffered an extra 33% more units than required even under the current Plan and congestion in Wokingham town is getting near breaking point.

The only light at the end of the tunnel is the fact that five new bypasses are coming on-stream in the next few years. This was achieved by planning where the current batch of houses should go. Councillor Cowan, who is here tonight, was instrumental in achieving this much needed infrastructure for all our residents. So we have got the five new bypasses, a new secondary school and I think it is seven new primary schools and many country parks; one of which was damaged my question earlier to the Police. We can work together as a team of Town, Parish and Borough councillors and residents' groups to do the same for this plan, or divide and try and protect our own patches and the developers will have won. By working together and establishing a robust Plan we will have minimised the damage and maximised the infrastructure. So please work together to achieve the best possible outcome for every resident and stop trying to make political gain.

Simon Weeks, Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement

Last Wednesday, Councillor David Lee and I had a meeting in Parliament with the Housing and Planning Minister, Alok Sharma. We drew his attention to the 13,000 new houses which already have planning permission across the Borough, many of which have yet to be built. Wokingham Borough Council's responsibility is to develop a Local Plan for new homes and ensure that appropriate infrastructure is included prior to granting planning permission. We have already done this. Unfortunately developers are not building these permitted new homes at the rate that is meeting either local demand or government expectations. This situation is attracting speculative developers to submit applications to develop unsuitable and inappropriate applications. Such applications are likely to be refused by Wokingham if they are not compliant with our Local Plan, particularly as we currently have an adequate five year land supply. Developers then challenge our refusals at appeal and Planning Inspectors are sometimes persuaded that Wokingham is not providing sufficient homes, so they allow the appeal. This does not help address the shortfall in new homes at all. It simply adds further to the 13,000 permitted but unbuilt homes. It also contradicts and undermines the NPPF, which emphasises that planning decisions should be made at a local level by elected representatives. We explained that this situation was unsustainable and the Minister agreed to look at the detailed information we provided.

Chris Bowring, Executive Member for Highways and Transport

I am very keen to liaise effectively with Town and Parish Councils, and where possible and appropriate, to devolve powers to them. Two examples of devolution are taking place in Highways and Transport at the present time. At the request of Woodley Town Council we have been carrying out a 12 month experiment in Woodley using car park tariffs which differ from the rest of the Borough. Wokingham Borough Council's concern in doing this was that the revenue from the car parks might fall because of the changed tariffs. From the data received so far this does not appear to have happened, although we will of course complete the 12 month period of the assessment. Should the Woodley tariffs become permanent I would encourage other towns and parishes to propose their own schemes should they so wish. I believe that Town and Parish councils are ultimately the local experts in many matters and a strong relationship between them and this Council can only be of benefit to both.

Next month too, Civil Parking Enforcement comes into force and again there is an element of devolution here whereby Town and Parish councils can purchase extra enforcement and comment on the suitability of enforcement in their area. Indeed one Parish Councillor asked me recently whether his Parish Council could run its own Civil Parking Enforcement. I've asked Officers to consider this idea, one which, at least to me, is an attractive one. Finally, can I remind the Members of the Civil Parking Enforcement presentation which takes place next Monday? I hope many councillors are able to attend.

Norman Jorgensen, Executive Member for Environment, Sports, Environmental Health, Leisure and Libraries

We had another successful Marvellous Festival on the weekend of the 29th and 30th July and despite some wet weather, numbers were roughly the same as last year.

Construction work on the California Greenway is practically complete and officers are now working on a lighting scheme for our section of the route. They are also working on designs for phase 2 of the California Greenway that will deliver the link to Nine Mile Ride equestrian.

Thirdly, the first phase of major improvements work commenced earlier this month at California Country Park in Finchampstead. The first phase will include an improved car park layout providing easier parking, a new canopy to provide an all-weather outdoor covered café seating area, and a new two-way road to give better vehicle access. We plan to keep disruption to a minimum and that the project will aim to be completed around Easter 2018. There will be further improvements planned to the park after that.

Turning to libraries, the number of children joining in the Summer Reading Challenge was 2,426 – this is about the same as last year. During that time we issued 109,457 Children's books and stock; this was an 8% increase on the books issued last year. 375 new members joined because of the Summer Reading Challenge. Also, we held a number of events over the summer for children and 1,356 children attended 98 separate events. Finally on that the usage of our self-service kiosks continues to be positive, last week it was at 52% across our libraries.

The final topic I would like to raise is related to recycling. You will be aware from having read the agenda for the Executive meeting next week that there is a paper proposing the separate collection of food waste which if approved will significantly increase the amount of material we recycle in this Borough.

Richard Dolinski, Deputy Executive Member for Adults' Services, Health, Wellbeing and Housing

A week ago I was scanning through our local paper and I saw a quote from Councillor Croy who was actually calling for more council houses and I could not agree with him more. I am pleased to say that the number of affordable housing completions during 2016-17 was 212 and the number predicted to complete in 2017-18 is estimated at around 500. That is a make-up of both social housing and shared ownership.

Our other achievements and progress to date. The Council housing stock has successfully achieved a high standard of decency shown by 90% of the stock currently meeting the Decent Homes Standards; as I think one of our residents pointed out earlier on. Furthermore, there are regular stock condition surveys which enable the service to plan and monitor those that do fall out and require work needing to bring them back to standard.

New flatlets used for temporary accommodation at Foxwood site are now being developed and families will be moving in mid-September of this year. This will help towards achieving the goal of self-sufficiency for temporary accommodation.

The Tape Lane project has now been approved and work on decanting residents and temporary contracts has commenced.

The Gorse Ride regeneration project is developing and approval received from the Executive for Cockayne Court and Arnett Avenue bungalows to be demolished and the site to be redeveloped. A Project Manager has been appointed and will be progressing this scheme and we are actually very lucky to have this person, who is very, very highly qualified. 52 Reading Road, progress is continuing at a fast pace. The tender process for service support specifications is now underway and the tenders are due to be evaluated in October 2017.

Last two points. Ecomotive has been commissioned to undertake the follow on from the initial feasibility work carried out by John Broome Associates on potential self-build projects. This will commence in October 2017 and will complete by March 2018. Finally, Wokingham Borough Council in partnership with Housing Solutions, Thames Valley Housing and Bracknell Forest Homes run a successful Strive project with 20 people graduating from the course. Feedback showed that all graduates rated this course as either 'excellent' or 'good.'

Stuart Munro, Executive Member for Business and Economic Development and Regeneration

Bit of good news. The third phase of the superfast broadband project is now underway after contracts were awarded to BT and Gigaclear. This will extend superfast coverage to more than 99.5% of properties in Berkshire by the end of 2019, making it one of the best served counties for superfast broadband across the UK, benefiting residents and businesses alike. In Wokingham coverage will reach 99.53% by the end of the third phase of the project; well up on the 90.4% in 2013 and 91.8% currently.

43. STATEMENTS FROM COUNCIL OWNED COMPANIES

Gary Cowan, Non-Executive Director Loddon Homes Limited

As well as managing our existing units, our other key focus is working with Wokingham Borough Council and Optalis on the arrangements for the housing management and care provision at Fosters Extra Care scheme. Letting plans are being carefully co-ordinated with WBC, who are having to take account of letting Housing Solutions' Extra Care scheme at the Birches, also in Wokingham, and how best to re-house Cockayne Court residents, which is due to close at the end of this year.

Promotion of Fosters to make sure all Borough residents and professionals are aware of the scheme continues. The latest event took place in August where we hosted an event which was very well attended with around 25 professionals attending and we anticipate that this will further spread the word about Extra Care coming soon to Woodley.

The latest business plan has been produced and discussed at our September Board which shows the company has a strong future in meeting its key objectives of providing affordable homes for those in need within the Borough; while also providing a sound ongoing income stream for Council services.

We were pleased to see the new dedicated WBC Housing Officer working on our stock who started in August and we believe that this will help us deliver a service to our existing and new tenants, which I hope will be very good.

We are also looking forward to the recruitment of a Service and Compliance Officer jointly with Berry Brook Homes, to make sure that the Boards can be fully reassured about the services provided by our managing agent to the residents. We are keen to see the post in place as early as possible.

David Lee, Non-Executive Director WBC (Holdings) Limited

I wonder if I could just make a comment on what Gary has said. I think they have done an excellent job. There will now be two superb Extra Care buildings in Woodley and I would urge any Member who wants to see round this, especially bearing in mind the problems we had when we wanted to replace the Fosters home, and I think it would be very good to invite anyone round.

Stuart Munro on behalf of Alistair Auty, Non-Executive Director Wokingham Housing Limited

Some good news items I think and some concerning items. At present Wokingham Housing has 112 homes under construction over 7 sites. To date we passed over the management to Loddon Homes and Berry Brook Homes of 35 new homes and one refurbished scheme of 3 units. A further 19 units at Phoenix Avenue have been handed over this week to Berry Brook Homes so we are getting there. The delays on Phoenix Avenue means that while the majority of the 68 homes will be completed and handed over before the end of October, we will not deliver the last 8 homes until early December, which is frustrating. We are now applying for full liquidated and ascertained damages (LADs as they are called) to invoice each month which in total is estimated to be between £65-75,000.

Fosters Extra Care which you have already heard about continues to progress well and is on budget. The contractor Leafields have been let down by the lift supplier, Stannah, who are not fitting the 2 lifts until the end of November. The development should be complete

by mid-October but we will not be able to let the first floor units until the lift has been installed.

As you heard earlier from Richard, 52 Reading Road is progressing well and is on time and budget. Anson Walk flats continue to progress well, although we have no further information of any additional costs likely to be involved in moving the electrical cable, also found unexpectedly across the site. Again additional costs will be recouped from the surveying company. Grovelands has a similar situation with another of these cables again. Elizabeth Road and Barrett Crescent sites are progressing well and are on time and to budget. The contract for Norton Road has now been let to LifeBuild following the necessary Board approvals and will begin construction in early November. We also expect to be able to appoint the contractor for 2 shared ownership homes to be built at Finch Road shortly, as part of the joint venture with Burrwood Development, to build 6 homes on the joint site. Several future potential sites are currently being considered in close consultation with WBC and the Commissioner.

Anthony Pollock, Non-Executive Director Optalis Holdings Limited

I wanted to inform Council that we have appointed a new Chief Executive at Optalis, Martin Farrow, who started work on 4 September and I am very pleased with his appointment. I am confident that he will provide the leadership which the company requires during the current project of integrating the service of the Royal Borough with the Wokingham Borough services already being provided by Optalis. The integration project is on track and I would like to pay tribute to the hard work and commitment of Optalis staff to the successful creation of one organisation through this integration programme.

Finances are on track and we expect a small profit in the current year. Work is underway publicising the merger of Wokingham and Royal Borough's Adult Social Care Services and at the national conference in October in Bournemouth we will use the event to publicise the benefits of Optalis delivering services to both councils. I believe that our experiences and those of other local authority trading companies will lead to at least one other council considering joining Optalis in the future.

44. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

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

Page 68 of the July Executive Report (Local Plan Update Options Development) relates to a duty to co-operate and it states that the Council has been and continues to work closely with other local authorities. Can I have dates these meetings took place, who was present and copies of all the meeting notes?

Answer

Local Plans cannot be completed in isolation with many planning issues requiring discussion and cooperation over a wider area. The Council has been and continues to work closely with other local authorities and organisations. A number of joint evidence studies have been commissioned, notably those relating to the need for housing and economic development such as the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) and the Economic Development Needs Assessment (EDNA). What I have done is I have got hard copies for you. I can give you those tonight for some light reading tonight in bed. I do not think you want me to read all of this out. If you want I shall send you a soft copy.

Supplementary Question:

With respects to working closely with other councils, at the last Executive meeting Councillor Lee did say that we would talk to all the various parish councils, resident groups etc. about what the Local Plan involves, yet there was a press release completely unexpectedly which mentioned the potential evaluation by Master Planners of Barkham, Grazeley and Twyford, and I just wondered what meetings he had had with the local Borough councillors, Parish councillors and residents in those wards?

Supplementary Answer:

We have had no meetings as yet but we will be meeting, and I think I mentioned it earlier on, we will be meeting with Ward Members, with Parish and Town Members and Residents' Groups. We are setting out a list of sites that we are going to look at over a period of time and everyone will be invited to those.

44.2 Lindsay Ferris asked the Executive Member for Adults' Services the following question which in his absence was answered by the Deputy Executive Member for Adult's Services:

It has come to my attention that a number of our residents, who are leaseholders of WBC owned properties, have been hit with increases of over 100% in their Household Buildings Insurance for the year 2017/2018. Many people are struggling to make ends meet at the moment and such a large increase could cause significant financial problems for such residents. It would also appear that these residents are unable to find their own Insurance due to various policies within WBC thereby leaving them with an unreasonable take it or leave it, anti-competitive approach from this Council. What is the Executive Member going to do to rectify this position?

Answer

A number of possibilities are being looked at, at the moment, to try to reduce the premiums. However, the retendering of the insurance for 2018 is not recommended. There are currently just 4 insurers that is all, just 4 insurers who provide this type of business. One of these is new to the market and is not providing competitive quotes, one is very commercially focused and will often not quote for these types of risks in isolation. Therefore given the claims history and no improvements in the overall risk the two most likely outcomes are that no insurers will quote and we will be left without any cover and we just cannot be left in that position or there is only one or two insurers who might respond but purely on a commercial basis, meaning another very significant premium increase.

Supplementary Question:

I know there are only these 4 companies but is there any way the Council can think about allowing individuals to do their own house insurance? I understand that there are some issues but if you could give me a written reply and I will see about that. At the moment the residents seem to have got stuffed.

Supplementary Answer:

I am very happy to do that.

44.3 Prue Bray asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

How does the income so far received from the charging for overnight and Sunday parking compare to the income predicted? Please include information on the trial in Woodley, which substituted an additional charge for the first hour instead of Sunday and overnight

charges, and provide the figures by individual car park.

Answer

Early signs are encouraging in that the Sunday and Evening car parking charges are meeting their financial expectations and income from the Woodley car parking trial broadly mirrors what was expected.

The Council requires more parking data to be available to be certain, and plans to assess one full year's data from the Woodley trial before making a permanent decision. To allow sufficient time for this the Executive will next week be asked to approve a recommendation to extend the Woodley Car Parking Trial until January 2018, so a permanent decision regarding Woodley can be made at that time.

Regarding your request for detailed figures and analysis for individual car parks across the Borough, the Parking Team have been understandably prioritising Civil Parking Enforcement which goes live from October 2017, so this manual data extraction and analysis exercise has not been a priority for the team. However, as we move into Phase 2 of the 21st Century Council over the next 6 months with improved IT, plus the increased resources and parking IT from our Civil Parking Enforcement contractors NSL, this detailed parking data and analysis will be more readily available moving forward.

Supplementary Question:

That was a very interesting answer in which I note that there were no figures. In August we asked Officers for information about the income and were told it was not available for the exact reasons you specified, the team that deals with this has been reduced so much, no one had the time or ability to produce any detailed figures, and I notice the Woodley car park trial is going on. Can you tell me how it is possible to manage Council's car parks properly if no one can look at the details of the income for several months?

Supplementary Answer:

I think we need to take a long term view on that. It is quite understandable that in many areas of the Council that during the 21st Century Council implementation there are going to be resources that we are not entirely lacking. I am quite happy that this is a small hiatus and that we will be back to normal and will have full figures available to you in the near future.

44.4 Tim Holton asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

I and the residents of Hawkedon are concerned that the junction with Hatch Farm and Earley Way North, which is already very congested, will become even worse if that is possible. I have already spoken at length with the Executive Member on this issue and I would like confirmation that the lights at this junction and Showcase roundabout can be linked to ensure the free flow of traffic.

Answer

Both the existing traffic lights at Showcase Roundabout and the new junction on Lower Earley Way will be utilising Microprocessor Optimised Vehicular Actuation otherwise known as MOVA.

MOVA optimises signal timings based on the incoming traffic on a cycle by cycle basis. Linking the two sets of lights will restrict the ability for MOVA to react to changes in traffic demand on each of the various approaches and could ultimately increase delays during

peak times.

The congestion currently experienced along Lower Earley Way, from Showcase towards Sindlesham Roundabout, will not be removed by the introduction of the Lower Earley Way Junction, although there is a scheme planned for 2019 which will deliver some improvements. Regrettably there are likely to be times during peak periods when traffic backs through the junction and a link as suggested will not alleviate this. However, I am grateful you did mention the possibility of putting some sort of link in if things do not work out as expected. As part of the current works there are no plans to establish a physical link but in the future it should be possible to put in a virtual link which would be established by utilising an Urban Traffic Control system, which both junctions will be connected to via broadband communications.

Supplementary Question:

Will Lower Earley Way North have priority at the Showcase roundabout over the Wokingham Road from Wokingham as this will very much now be a secondary road?

Supplementary Answer:

The roundabout will benefit from MOVA. The MOVA system allows the prioritisation you suggest. However prioritisation will form part of the detailed design process and will be subject to refinement and modification to provide optimum traffic flows once the new scheme is fully operational so the system learns as it goes along.

44.5 Rachele Shepherd-DuBey asked the Executive Member for Finance the following question:

What departments have been included and already participating in phase 2 of 21st-Century Council?

Answer

As a member of the Officer/Member working group you will know that Phase 2 of the programme has begun. This Phase will be split into two parts and the rationale for this is that as Phase 2 is larger and more complex than Phase 1 it makes sense to ensure a safe transition. The departments in scope in each of the two parts of Phase 2 are:

For the first part

- Environment
- Income, Assessments, Collection and Payments Service
- Customer Services and
- Children's Social Care and Early Help

And for Part 2:

- Adult Social Care
- Integrated Mental Health
- Education
- Housing
- Public Health and
- Leisure

Supplementary Question:

How will the new CEO and the interim CEO be involved in this project?

Supplementary Answer:

I cannot answer for any new CEO or Chief Executive but the interim Chief Executive is involved and indeed I had an extensive meeting with her yesterday.

44.6 John Jarvis had asked the Executive Member for Environment the following question but in his absence a written answer was provided:

Could the Executive Member explain the Council's approach to grass-cutting for the benefit of residents who are writing to me concerned about the failure to cut grass until it is so long the resultant mulch is both unsightly and prevents use of the landscaped areas? There are particular concerns that during this summer holidays grass cutting of playgrounds etc did not occur until after the children had returned to school.

Answer

The Grounds Maintenance Contract is not based around frequency of cutting but instead around outcomes which, in the case of residential areas, means that it should not grow any longer than five inches.

If the grass is longer when cut on a play area (an allocated area where ball games etc. can be played) we can deploy alternative machinery to rectify the issue of laying grass if that occurs.

We will be meeting with ISS to discuss the current cutting season and will be looking at ways to improve the service further. While recognising that not all areas can be cut at the same time, I would like designated play areas to be cut at the start of the Summer School holiday, so that will be one issue to be discussed.

44.7 Dianne King asked the Executive Member for Environment the following question which was answered by the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement:

I have read that some Councils are threatening fines of up to £2500 if residents overload bins or put them out late or too early amongst other things. Could I ask the Executive Member to reassure my residents that this will not be happening in Wokingham?

Answer

We are fortunate that we have high levels of resident support and participation in our weekly waste and recycling services. However, Officers visit and give advice to any household that are identified as needing guidance on using our services more efficiently and effectively, so we have not needed to invoke penalties in the Borough thanks to our residents' understanding and cooperation.

45. MINUTES OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS AND WARD MATTERS

45.1 Parry Batth asked the Executive Member for Environment the following question:

Question:

HMO applications, both licenses and planning, in my ward Shinfield North, are being approved by West Berkshire. Currently when considering these applications parking congestion is not considered at all, although inevitably HMO's add additional parking burden on the estates such as Shinfield Park in my ward. Can I ask the Executive Member for Planning that he exercises his full authority and change the rules and insist that parking congestion is taken into account when considering HMO applications?

Answer:

This is mainly a licensing issue rather than a planning one, hence I will take it. The applications of course go into our shared licensing service so it is not West Berkshire as such, it is our shared licensing service. Under the HMO process parking is not one of the issues that can be looked at under the licensing application. As Parry is aware we looked at this under the scrutiny committee a number of times during 2015 and 2016 and clearly parking in the Shinfield Park Estate is a major issue. I really do sympathise with the residents there. It was planned, and the application went in, under the John Prescott scheme, where despite him having 2 cars, he thought everybody else could make do with half a car. It is built on that basis and there is a parking issue there. One of the things that scrutiny came up with was to see if there was any other space that could be used for parking and that is an ongoing thing. If residents or the Parish Council can identify space that might be a way forward. The Borough Council, alas, does not have money in its budget for that. So at the moment parking is not one of the issues that we look at when we get an application. We have got to just look at whether the house is suitable and all the conditions are met. I think to try and get a change in the policy, rather than us locally doing it, we need to ensure that the Government changes the rules so I would encourage you to write to our MP and if you need my support, I am happy to do that as well. I think that needs to come from there rather than locally but I really do sympathise with residents on that estate.

45.2 Gary Cowan asked the Executive Member for Environment the following question:**Question:**

I received the planning notification number 172284 for the removal of 2 TPO trees on 13 September. I immediately asked for some more information but I never got a reply. The listed determination date was 9 October. I chased it up with the PC only to get an email stating it was approved on 9 September which was actually before the consultation ever started. I found this odd so I contacted the Manager responsible only for him to state that work to remove healthy trees to implant a planning permission is acceptable and there is no requirement to consult. He added that any comment on this received would have made no difference to the decision. The Manager also stated that there is no legislation requiring consultation with Borough and Parish councillors on TPO applications. The concern I have for this is if this is how Borough and Parish councillors are treated by ignoring localism then what hope have residents got of protecting any healthy tree in conservation areas that are at risk of removal and could Norman assure me that he will look into this matter and report back to the Council?

Answer:

I think it is important to say that Gary has quite an exchange of emails with the Officers responsible so probably nothing much that I say will be a surprise to him but just to put it on the record. I think that the Officer did say that if there had been a response it may have made no difference rather than would have no difference, just to correct that one point.

Under the TPO Regulations there is no requirement to undertake consultation with the public, Members or Town and Parish councils in respect of tree work applications. This is primarily due to the technical nature of the application. This approach is not a Wokingham Borough Council decision but set out in the legislation.

There is an 8 week period for determining a Tree Works Application (TWA) and this is to allow the authority time to assess the specification, visit the trees and respond with a

decision notice. It is incumbent upon councils to determine the TWAs as quickly as possible and there is no formal consultation period. Once a full assessment of the Tree Works Application is undertaken, the Council can determine this.

While the Council does not consult on TWAs, they are given a planning application number and appear on the Council's website for audit purposes and transparency. The Council also notifies Town and Parish Councils and Ward Members for information only and this is made clear on the notification email. This is to inform members of what is going on in their area and also so they are aware that works to trees are authorised.

In this case, the removal of the trees was necessary to implement a planning application. As consultation was undertaken in respect of the planning application, the Parish Council were given the opportunity to make representations at that time.

With regard to the application not being on the website, I will look into this further and come back to you Gary.

45.3 Prue Bray asked the Executive Member of Highways and Transport the following question:

Question:

Southern Gas Networks have been working in Churchill Drive in Winnersh since June, putting in new replacement gas mains and they have dug up the road, they have dug up the verge and they have taken out some trees. What can you do to make sure they reinstate things properly including replacing the trees that they have removed?

Answer:

I will talk to the appropriate officer first thing in the morning.

45.4 Andy Croy asked the Deputy Executive Member for Adults' Services the following question which was answered by the Executive Member for Strategic Highways and Planning:

Question:

When I am door knocking in my Ward people often ask me 'when will I get my council house?' I asked the Housing department a couple of months ago how many people were waiting for the council houses and the answer was about 1700. Yesterday Councillor Pauline Jorgensen published information which said that we would complete 100 council houses by April next year and about 50-70 per year after. Given those two sets of numbers what reassurances can you give me Councillor Dolinski that residents in my Ward would not have to wait 25 to 30 years before they get a council house?

Answer:

I will take that as I am on the Holding Company which is a subsidiary of the Housing Company.

I am quite happy to actually come back to you in terms of the numbers we are building but it will be more than that. We have a 35% requirement on all applications, and as was mentioned earlier by Simon, there are 13,000 current applications outstanding. So I cannot comment on what someone has said somewhere else. I can tell you what the facts are. We have a housing company which has substantial commuted sums available to it and borrowings to build council housing of all types. You also heard, I think earlier too, that we have got 500, 100 of which will be built by our own housing company. So I can get you the figures, happy to have a chat with you, but we are building substantial numbers of

affordable housing in this Borough.

45.5 Philip Houldsworth asked the Executive Member for Finance the following question:

Question:

I am very conscious now that Members are being offered training under the 21st century programme and I would like to see that extended to parish councillors as well, which I am sure will enhance the valuable duty they do already.

Answer:

I can assure you that we will be providing training to parish and town councillors at the appropriate time.

45.6 Clive Jones asked the Executive Member for Environment the following question:

Question:

Several Hawkedon residents have expressed concerns to me that the new development at Hatch Farm Dairy will cause flooding in their homes in Hawkedon ward. Will you guarantee to these residents that their homes will not be flooded?

Answer:

As you might expect it is not really within my remit to guarantee that they will not be flooded. The site went through the planning approval process and provided that everything was done properly in that process then it should not result in any more flooding than otherwise would have been the case.

45.7 Pauline Jorgensen asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question:

I have had quite a lot of questions from local residents prompted by changes to the 19a and 19c bus services and some confusing and maybe inaccurate information provided apparently by Reading Buses to local residents about bus funding. I met the Executive Member and Officers to discuss the situation last week and I wonder if Chris could give us an update on what is being done to resolve the issues?

Answer:

The extension of the contract between the Council and Reading Buses of the 19a and 19c buses, now renamed the 12 bus, succeeded in maintaining a good offpeak service. The Council committed to a larger subsidy to do this. However, some of the well-used peak services have been removed by the bus company, which is owned by the Labour controlled Reading Borough Council. This was of particular inconvenience to people having early morning hospital appointments at the Royal Berkshire Hospital. The Council is using its best endeavours to remedy this unfortunate position which has arisen despite the Council's willingness to commit funds to help some of our most vulnerable residents, but unfortunately I have been advised that the Council is not allowed to subsidise commercial services, which this service is.

45.8 Anthony Pollock asked the Executive Member for Strategic Highways and Planning the following question:

Question:

I have a question on the Shinfield East relief road. Rumour has it, I was told today, that Hochtief have said that it will not be completed by Christmas and it might not be completed

until next summer. I hear rumours that when testing the drains on this road that some of them have been discovered to have collapsed already before any traffic has gone through it. I realise that this is not one of our projects. I realise that this is that wonderful institution called Reading University who rape and pillage my ward for as much money as they can raise, but that is another matter. I wondered whether the relevant Executive Member had any knowledge of this, or could give me any reassurance that perhaps it is not as bad as I have been led to believe?

Answer:

I attended a forum last night at the Three Mile Cross Church. The Reading University had their stand right beside Hochtief. I think everyone was a bit embarrassed and no, they did not give any firm date. I think if we went for Christmas maybe next year that might be sort of near the date. It is a bit of a mess. It is maybe an example of why we should actually make sure that we do the roads ourselves in the future. I also had a conversation with the University chap about exactly what you said, the 'raping and pillaging' of your particular area because it is from a very environmentally aware university who are only aware when it is somewhere else and not their land. I have every sympathy with the residents trying to get on to that road but there is very little that we can do about it.

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

Question:

Many residents in my ward see regular press releases regarding a lot of money being spent on Wokingham Town centre and Carnival Pool. However, they do not see anything at all about Bulmershe Pool redevelopment, which seems to have dropped off whatever list it was on. Please will you tell me when the proposed redevelopment of this valued Woodley pool will begin?

Answer:

I think if you look at the Executive Forward Programme you will see that the plan is to bring a paper to the October Executive regarding the Bulmershe Leisure Centre, so there should be information available to you very shortly.

45.10 Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey asked the Executive Member for Environment the following question:

Question:

Can someone explain to me why the parks in Winnersh have not had their grass cut but the parks in Wokingham have? Have you subbed it out to Hochtief or something like this to do the work?

Answer:

It is difficult to answer generic questions like that. I think I need specifics about which parks and when. It would be useful to have such information in writing when it arises rather than bringing it up at a Council meeting like this just to try and catch me on the hop.

The parks are cut regularly and if there are problems with it, please write to me and let me know.

45.11 Imogen Shepherd-DuBey asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question:

Question:

Within Emmbrook in Toutley Depot there has appeared this concrete batching plant that is 3 stories tall. I understand that it has been agreed that it should have planning enforcement on it but unfortunately Wokingham Borough Council own the depot so therefore they cannot enforce against themselves. It has now gone to Property to look at because it is obviously to do with the lease. In the meantime residents in my ward have been putting up with the concrete bashing plant kicking in at all time of day making concrete and trucks trundling up and down Forest Road picking up the concrete. Can I ask when we are likely to see the end of this concrete bashing plant and have it removed?

Answer:

It is quite a detailed question so I will give you a written answer.

46. MOTIONS

46.1 Motion 398 submitted by Lindsay Ferris

The Council considered the following Notice of Motion submitted by Lindsay Ferris and seconded by Prue Bray.

‘There are areas within the 21C project that do need to be introduced. However the general view is that many aspects of the 21C project have yet to be proven.

The current morale of staff at Wokingham is extremely low. In addition not only have staff been made redundant, (under Phase 1), but a significant number of staff have just left due to the uncertainty caused by such a dramatic change. In addition many Members are still unclear as to what is the correct way to proceed and how it impacts their relationship with the Council and the wider Public.

The Council is about to recruit a new Chief Executive with an expected timescale of early 2018 before any chosen candidate is likely to be in post. Any new Chief Executive would want to review the 21C project on his/her appointment. It is therefore proposed that Phase 2 of the 21C programme be delayed until after the appointment of the new Chief Executive. This would give time to review how Phase 1 has progressed and to resolve any issues arising.’

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

46.2 Motion 399 submitted by Charlotte Haitham Taylor

The Council considered the following Notice of Motion submitted by David Lee on behalf of Charlotte Haitham Taylor in accordance with Procedure Rule 4.2.13.10, and seconded by Simon Weeks.

‘This Council reaffirms its commitment to condemn all forms of discrimination designed to exclude individuals or groups from social and public life. This Council will further agree to review its existing practices to ensure that discrimination does not occur within our Borough, except where there is a legal or moral requirement to focus on or exclude a particular group or groups.’

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

be carried.

RESOLVED: That this Council reaffirms its commitment to condemn all forms of discrimination designed to exclude individuals or groups from social and public life. This Council will further agree to review its existing practices to ensure that discrimination does not occur within our Borough, except where there is a legal or moral requirement to focus on or exclude a particular group or groups.