

# Public Document Pack

## MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

HELD ON 21 FEBRUARY 2019 FROM 8.00 PM TO 11.00 PM

### Members Present

Councillors: John Kaiser (Mayor), Alistair Auty, Keith Baker, Parry Batth, Laura Blumenthal, Chris Bowring, Rachel Burgess, Jenny Cheng, UllaKarin Clark, Gary Cowan, Andy Croy, Richard Dolinski, Carl Doran, Lindsay Ferris, Guy Grandison, Kate Haines, Mike Haines, Charlotte Haitham Taylor, John Halsall, David Hare, Pauline Helliard-Symons, Emma Hobbs, Tim Holton, Philip Houldsworth, John Jarvis, Clive Jones, Norman Jorgensen, Pauline Jorgensen, Dianne King, Abdul Loyes, Julian McGhee-Sumner, Ken Miall, Philip Mirfin, Stuart Munro, Ian Pittock, Anthony Pollock, Malcolm Richards, Angus Ross, Daniel Sargeant, Imogen Shepherd-DuBey, Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey, Chris Smith, Simon Weeks and Shahid Younis

### 87. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor welcomed Sarah Kerr to her first Council meeting as a Member for Evendons Ward.

The Mayor then presented awards to the following three recipients of the Mayor's Roll of Honour:

John Prior, who was unable to attend the meeting, had been the Chair of Governors at the Addington School for the past ten years and was standing down at the end of the year after 23 year's involvement. John had demonstrated tremendous commitment to the school which had received an unprecedented three outstanding Ofsted assessments.

Gordon Bird had been involved with the Shinfield Players Theatre for 20 years. During that period Gordon had taught acting skills to young people aged 8-18 in the theatre youth groups. This included many disabled and underprivileged children. Gordon had also led the groups to success in international competitions.

Corrisande Bicknell received the award on behalf of the ABC to Read Volunteer Group which supported children in 10 local primary schools through weekly reading sessions. These sessions encouraged the children to read which boosted their communication skills and helped them to gain self-confidence and self-esteem.

### 88. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Prue Bray, Graham Howe, Barrie Patman, David Sleight, Wayne Smith, Bill Soane, and Oliver Whittle.

### 89. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The Mayor addressed the meeting and stated that the Minutes of Council meetings were drafted by Democratic Services staff without interference from Members. In accordance with custom and practice the Minutes were not a verbatim record but provided a sense of the discussions and an accurate record of decisions taken.

The Mayor stated that it was a matter for the Council to agree, by vote, whether or not Minutes provided an accurate record. In line with the Constitution any substantive changes to the accuracy of the Minutes should be proposed via a Motion in writing submitted to the Mayor. Finally, Council meetings were recorded and anyone wanting to hear or see the full discussion and debate could do so.

The Minutes of the Council meeting held on 22 November 2018 and the Extraordinary Council meeting held on 14 December 2018 were confirmed as correct records and signed by the Mayor.

In relation to the Minutes of the Extraordinary Council meeting held on 24 January 2019, Gary Cowan stated that the Minutes did not provide an accurate record of the events at the meeting and felt that additional details should be included. This view was shared by other Members.

The Mayor stated that, as a written Motion with proposed changes to the Minutes had not been submitted, the Council would simply vote on whether the Minutes of the Extraordinary Council meeting held on 24 January 2019 were a correct record of the meeting.

Prior to a vote being held, six Members, in accordance with Rule of Procedure 4.2.15.5, requested that a recorded vote be taken on the proposal.

The voting was as follows:

<b>FOR</b>	<b>AGAINST</b>	<b>ABSTAINED</b>
Alistair Auty	Rachel Burgess	Kate Haines
Keith Baker	Gary Cowan	Mike Haines
Parry Batth	Andy Croy	Tim Holton
Laura Blumenthal	Carl Doran	John Jarvis
Chris Bowring	Lindsay Ferris	John Kaiser
Jenny Cheng	David Hare	Sarah Kerr
UllaKarin Clark	Clive Jones	Ian Pittock
Richard Dolinski	Imogen Shepherd-Dubey	Malcolm Richards
Guy Grandison		Angus Ross
Charlotte Haitham Taylor		Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey
John Halsall		
Pauline Helliard-Symons		
Emma Hobbs		
Philip Houldsworth		
Norman Jorgensen		
Pauline Jorgensen		
Dianne King		
Abdul Loyes		
Julian McGhee-Sumner		
Ken Miall		
Philip Mirfin		
Stuart Munro		
Anthony Pollock		
Daniel Sargeant		
Chris Smith		
Simon Weeks		
Shahid Younis		

The Minutes of the Extraordinary Council meeting held on 24 January 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

## **90. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Lindsay Ferris stated that he had recently been appointed as a Non-Executive Director of Loddon Homes.

## **91. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

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

### **91.1 Spencer Deering had asked the Executive Member for Regeneration the following question. Due to his inability to attend a written answer was provided:**

Why was all of Denmark Street down to the roundabout at the Dukes Head not re-tarmacked when the regeneration work to the town centre was going on? The road surface is an absolute disgrace and I feel it would lift the look of the town centre nicely. Seems very odd that this opportunity was missed. But I guess as most of the roads in and around Wokingham are terrible it fits in nicely.

#### **Answer**

In line with the Town Centre Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) the Council does have aspirations to improve the Public Realm within the town on a number of routes. Market Place has been the start and we were planning to progress the south section of Denmark Street next. However, due to the current level of works being undertaken within the town and the disruption that this and Market Place has had, it has been decided through discussions and agreement with Members to pause these works until the regeneration areas of Peach Place and Elms Field have been completed.

### **91.2 Martin Branch asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question:**

A recent new window next door which overlooks me was stipulated on 22 November 2017 as fixed and obscured to protect me. However, retrospective permission was given omitting the 'fixed' requirement. As a result, I am seriously overlooked upstairs and downstairs including bedroom and bathroom with clear glass and downstairs living room. After complaining, the Council said 'one would have to be 6'2" to be able to view into my home'. To me, this merely exemplifies that one can see into my home.

I have learned that this salient omission of 'fixed' was more likely a mistake rather than a deliberate act. The Council has refused to answer two related questions I put to them and has also refused to answer any further correspondence from me. When will this mistake be rectified?

#### **Answer**

I understand that you were given a verbal indication by the Council that a condition would be placed on the planning permission for your neighbour's extension to ensure that the side window would be obscure glazed and non-opening but that the planning permission issued allowed an opening window. I am sorry that this is contrary to what you had expected to happen.

Council Officers have been to the property to check the position. Under normal circumstances, the Council would only restrict the opening of side windows if they are below 1.7m in height from floor level. Having measured your neighbour's property, the roof light in your neighbour's roof slope measures a minimum of 1.78m in height and is angled

in such a way that it does not allow the same views as a normal vertical window. I understand that there is also a distance of approximately 18m between your property and your neighbours and these factors have led the Council to consider that the roof window does not have an unacceptable impact on your property. I understand that you have been advised of the Council's view both verbally and at least twice in writing and, as the Local Government Ombudsman has declined to investigate your complaint, I am sorry but the Council is unable to take any further action.

**91.3 Philip Meadowcroft asked the Leader of the Council the following question:**

I believe that you and your Executive colleagues, and indeed the Full Council, need to focus on and consider the implications of what was actually said by three eminent Court of Appeal judges in respect of WBC's appeal against a ruling from Reading Crown Court halting this Council's Breach of Enforcement prosecution against eleven defendants associated with Hare Hatch Sheeplands.

At the last Executive Meeting on January 31 Councillor Weeks chose to emphasise the over-arching importance of WBC bringing enforcement action against those who break planning regulations. Quite so, and this is not a matter on which any right-minded person would doubt; it's motherhood and apple pie. But we are now in a position where it is crucial WBC don't merely learn lessons (whether or not from an internal enquiry if such could be credibly undertaken).

As background to my question it is crucial to highlight two key points so clearly made in Lady Justice Hackett's summing up which I personally heard since I attended the entire proceedings:

1. The Court of Appeal was not engaged to conduct a re-run of the prosecution brought by WBC to Reading Crown Court last June. WBC had merely sought to appeal the collapse of the trial at Reading. Councillor Weeks' statement on January 31 that the Court of Appeal had been "inconsistent" with other WBC prosecutions is thus wholly irrelevant to the HHS issue.

2. The "unjust and unfair" verdict against WBC at Reading Crown Court was upheld without any difficulty by the Court of Appeal despite five grounds of appeal presented by WBC's QC because:

a) damning email evidence of the exchanges between Members and Officers over a lengthy period prior to breach of enforcement proceedings being instigated had been presented at Reading Crown Court, and

b) WBC had failed to follow the Code for Crown Prosecutors as shown by email evidence that WBC was planning to benefit from any Proceeds of Crime related to the case. Under the Code, when an LPA acts as a prosecutor it cannot at the same time be a beneficiary. The Court of Appeal found this failure to follow the Code particularly repugnant given that the defendants, if convicted, could have received jail sentences.

We have to thank the Court of Appeal for assembling and documenting in the 60-minute summing up just what went on in WBC's pursuit of the breach of enforcement action. I think it is relevant to let you know that the Court of Appeal judges took particular exception, expressed when the hearing commenced, to the unprofessional presentation of WBC's evidence bundle mentioning that emails were filed "all over the place" and indexing and tabbing "was in a mess".

WBC is now permanently tainted by this affair and the Court of Appeal's decision about WBC is very likely to be quoted in similar future cases in the Crown Court in the UK, the High Court, and the Court of Appeal. That is why you, Councillor McGhee-Sumner, as Leader, need to decide whether you are going to be part of the problem or whether you are going to be the originator of the solution.

Councillor McGhee-Sumner: Given the essential background I have presented, here is my question: will you please give urgent consideration to suspending from office all those Members and Officials named and shamed by the Court of Appeal for a series of actions and events of unacceptable culture and practice - such suspensions would only be lifted after the completion of an internal inquiry whose un-redacted report is openly published and fully debated by a Full Council Meeting with contributions from WBC council taxpayers? It is a simple choice and crucial to your standing as a respected and credible Leader of WBC.

### **Answer**

As I am sure you will have heard when my colleague, Simon Weeks, gave his answer to a similar question at the Executive earlier this evening, you will not be surprised by my response.

Wokingham Borough Council is not yet in possession of the Court of Appeal's transcript and therefore not in a position to comment on the details referenced.

However, I would reiterate my point that focussing on the latest in a long line of court processes misses the point that Wokingham Borough Council has, through a long and sustained effort, protected the Green Belt from unlawful development and upheld the integrity of the planning process. There are always lessons that can be learnt and we are looking at those but let us not lose sight of what this was really about – it is stopping illegal development, which we have done successfully.

Once we receive the judgement, have read it and reviewed it with our lawyers, we will be in a better position to make a decision.

### **Supplementary Question**

The lack of a transcript is due to a Ministry of Justice administration problem. But you do have the benefit of WBC's QC, Saira Sheikh, who could brief you fully. She was present for every minute of the court case and she, like I did, took extensive notes and you can be fully acquainted with what they say. The transcript will merely confirm it. I do not think that there are any unusual matters that will arise from it.

You want to wait for that, you say, and I cannot deny you that. But, notwithstanding the botched prosecution, botched by the behaviour and manner adopted by Councillor Kaiser and Councillor Halsall together with the Officers named and shamed, despite being supported by internal and external legal advisers who should have known better. Notwithstanding all that, you do not see any need for Councillors' or Officials' misconduct to be investigated or for any sanction or penalty to be imposed on those involved?

### **Supplementary Answer**

Given the nature of your complaint against the two Councillors it would be completely inappropriate for me, as Leader, having taken advice from our in-house Barrister, to do anything other than wait for the transcript from the Court of Appeal. I agree with you that

the Ministry of Justice is to blame for the delay in receiving this. I have spoken to our in-house Barrister and his view is that nothing untoward has happened in relation to the two Councillors you have mentioned, but we will look at it in detail and we will come back.

**91.4 Alison Swaddle asked the Executive Member for Business, Economic Development and Strategic Planning the following question:**

I am a member of the Earley and Woodley Town Councils Joint Working Party and we have been working together to protect the area known as Bulmershe Fields which is a Site of Urban Landscape Value (or SULV) from development. In the sites put forward for the Local Plan Update this area has had the category of "Leisure Services" added to the existing "Public Open Spaces" classification. This would mean that, if agreed, development could be carried out on this public space as long as the use is for leisure. Both Town Councils are adamant that this change should not be accepted especially as there is already a "campus" for leisure facilities close by with schools, football pitches and a new Bulmershe leisure centre being built. Will the Executive Member agree with me that this change is inappropriate and will be removed during the review of sites process?

**Answer**

Bulmershe Field is an important local amenity which is recognised in our planning policies through it being designated as a Site of Special Landscape Importance.

Residents are able to use the open space and there is no intention to change this, or provide any additional facilities. In light of this, I can confirm that the site has been withdrawn from the local plan process.

**91.5 Maria Gee asked the Executive Member for Finance and Corporate Resources the following question:**

I note that the agenda and documents, page 94, states "The Council's plans to make capital investment of **£484 million** over the next 10 years. Appendix C shows every scheme by asset type." Appendix C, page 12, shows spend of **almost £900m** (£'000 889,365) from 2019/20 to 2028/29. Why are these amounts different?

**Answer**

Thank you for taking the time to read such a long document, and for your scrutiny of its content. You are indeed correct, the sentence on page 94, below the table, should state £486m over 3 years and not 10 years. This text would then be consistent with the figures presented in the table above that sets out our planned capital investment over the 3 year period 2019 to 2022.

**Supplementary Question**

Thank you for explaining that this was an error. I am a bit worried about errors in the numbers. In the same Appendix C it shows that expenditure planned for the next four years on the Town Centre Regeneration is over £60m. Yet elsewhere it has been reported that WBC's regeneration project costs £12m. I am wondering whether that £12m is also an error?

**Supplementary Answer**

I think that the fundamental issue with the Town Centre redevelopment is that there is expenditure prior to the sale of the residential assets and, therefore, the net figures are less than the gross figures. I will look at the detail of what you ask and provide a written answer.

## 92. PETITIONS

There were no Petitions presented.

## 93. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN AND ASSOCIATED REPORTS

The Council considered four reports which together comprised a single Agenda item:

- the Housing Revenue Account Budget 2019/22, as set out on Agenda pages 77 to 92;
- the Capital Programme and Strategy 2019, as set out on Agenda pages 93 to 130;
- the Treasury Management Strategy 2019/22, as set out on Agenda pages 131 to 174;
- the Medium Term Financial Plan 2019/22 – Revenue Budget Submission 2019/22, as set out on Agenda pages 175 to 180.

The Mayor reminded Members that a total of 90 minutes would be set aside for the debate.

Julian McGhee-Sumner, Leader of the Council, made a statement on the 2019/20 Budget (attached as an Appendix to the Minutes).

Lindsay Ferris, Leader of the Opposition, then made a Budget statement on behalf of the Liberal Democrat Group (attached as an Appendix to the Minutes).

At the conclusion of his Budget Statement, it was moved by Lindsay Ferris and seconded by Clive Jones that the Medium Term Financial Plan be amended by inserting the Opposition Budget Proposals set out in the Appendix to the Minutes.

Prior to a vote being held, six Members, in accordance with Rule of Procedure 4.2.15.5, requested that a recorded vote be taken on the proposed amendment.

The voting was as follows:

<b>FOR</b>	<b>AGAINST</b>	<b>ABSTAINED</b>
Gary Cowan	Alistair Auty	Rachel Burgess
Lindsay Ferris	Keith Baker	Andy Croy
David Hare	Parry Batth	Carl Doran
Clive Jones	Laura Blumenthal	John Kaiser
Sarah Kerr	Chris Bowring	
Ian Pittock	Jenny Cheng	
Imogen Shepherd-Dubey	UllaKarin Clark	
Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey	Richard Dolinski	
	Guy Grandison	
	Kate Haines	
	Mike Haines	
	Charlotte Haitham Taylor	
	John Halsall	
	Pauline Helliard-Symons	
	Emma Hobbs	
	Tim Holton	
	Philip Houldsworth	

	John Jarvis	
	Norman Jorgensen	
	Pauline Jorgensen	
	Dianne King	
	Abdul Loyes	
	Julian McGhee-Sumner	
	Ken Miall	
	Philip Mirfin	
	Stuart Munro	
	Anthony Pollock	
	Malcolm Richards	
	Angus Ross	
	Daniel Sargeant	
	Chris Smith	
	Simon Weeks	
	Shahid Younis	

On being put to the vote, the amendment was declared by the Mayor to have been lost.

Following the two Budget statements and debate on the proposed amendment, Members discussed the various aspects of the proposed Budget in detail.

At 9.50pm, as the debate was still ongoing, it was moved, in accordance with Rule 4.2.13.11 (g), that the time limit for speeches on the Medium Term Financial Plan item be extended by 30 minutes. This proposal was moved by Keith Baker and seconded by Julian McGhee-Sumner.

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

### **93.1 Housing Revenue Account Budget 2019/22**

It was proposed by Julian McGhee-Sumner and seconded by Anthony Pollock that the recommendations, set out on Agenda page 77, be approved.

Upon being put to the vote it was:

**RESOLVED** That the following be approved:

- 1) the Housing Revenue Account budget;
- 2) Council house dwelling rents be reduced by 1% effective from April 2019 in line with the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2015;
- 3) garage rents be increased by 3.70% effective from April 2019 in line with Council fees and charges;
- 4) Shared Equity Rents be increased by 3.27% based on September RPI, effective from April 2019;
- 5) Tenant Service Charges are set in line with estimated costs.
- 6) the Housing Major Repairs (Capital) programme for 2019/20, as set out in Appendix C to the report;



- 7) Sheltered room guest charges be increased from £9.00 per night to £9.50 per night.

### **93.2 Capital Programme and Strategy 2019/22**

It was proposed by Julian McGhee-Sumner and seconded by Anthony Pollock that the Capital Programme and Strategy for 2019/22, as set out on Agenda pages 93 to 130, be approved.

Upon being put to the vote it was:

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) the Capital Strategy for 2019/22, as set out in Appendix A to the report, be approved;
- 2) the three year Capital Programme for 2019/22, as set out in Appendix B to the report, be approved;
- 3) the draft Vision for Capital Investment over the next 10 years, as set out in Appendix C to the report, be noted;
- 4) the developer contributions, S106 and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), as set out in Appendix D to the report, be approved (noting that the S106 and CIL values are estimated and approval was sought up to the scheme budget);
- 5) the commercial activities of the Council, as set out in Appendix E to the report, be noted.

### **93.3 Treasury Management Strategy 2019/20 - 2021/22**

It was proposed by Julian McGhee-Sumner and seconded by Anthony Pollock that the Treasury Management Strategy for 2019/22, as set out on Agenda pages 131 to 174, be approved.

Upon being put to the vote it was:

**RESOLVED** That the following be approved:

- 1) Capital Prudential Indicators, 2019/20;
- 2) Borrowing Strategy 2019/20;
- 3) Annual Investment Strategy 2019/20;
- 4) Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy;
- 5) Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy;
- 6) Treasury Indicators: limits to borrowing activity 2019/20.

### **93.4 Medium Term Financial Plan 2019/22**

Following the Budget debate, it was proposed by Julian McGhee-Sumner and seconded by Anthony Pollock that the Medium Term Financial Plan for 2019/22, including the

Revenue Budget Submission for 2019/20 and the Statutory Resolution setting out the 2019/20 Council Tax levels, be approved.

In line with the requirements of the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014, a recorded vote was taken.

The voting was as follows:

<b>FOR</b>	<b>AGAINST</b>	<b>ABSTAINED</b>
Alistair Auty	Rachel Burgess	John Kaiser
Keith Baker	Gary Cowan	
Parry Batth	Andy Croy	
Laura Blumenthal	Carl Doran	
Chris Bowring	Lindsay Ferris	
Jenny Cheng	David Hare	
UllaKarin Clark	Clive Jones	
Richard Dolinski	Sarah Kerr	
Guy Grandison	Ian Pittock	
Kate Haines	Imogen Shepherd-Dubey	
Mike Haines	Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey	
Charlotte Haitham Taylor		
John Halsall		
Pauline Helliari-Symons		
Tim Holton		
Philip Houldsworth		
John Jarvis		
Norman Jorgensen		
Pauline Jorgensen		
Dianne King		
Abdul Loyes		
Julian McGhee-Sumner		
Ken Miall		
Philip Mirfin		
Stuart Munro		
Anthony Pollock		
Malcolm Richards		
Angus Ross		
Daniel Sargeant		
Chris Smith		
Simon Weeks		
Shahid Younis		

Upon being put to the vote it was:

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2019/22, including the Budget submission for 2019/20 and the changes put forward at the meeting, be approved;
- 2) the Statutory Resolution that sets out the 2019/20 Council Tax levels, as set out in the revised Appendix A (as tabled at the meeting) be approved;

- 3) in the event that there are any changes to the provisional precept for the Fire Authority or Parishes, arising from the precept setting meetings being held before the end of February 2019, the Deputy Chief Executive (S151 Officer) be delegated authority to enact all relevant changes to the MTFP, Statutory Resolution and Council Tax levels;
- 4) it be noted that, at its meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> December 2018, Council calculated the following amounts for the year 2019/20 in accordance with regulations made under Section 31B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, as amended by the Localism Act 2011 and the Local government Finance Act 2012;
- a) 70,176.60 being the amount calculated by the Council (Item T) in accordance with Regulation 31B of the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 1992 (as amended by the Localism Act 2011 and the Local Government Finance Act 2012);

b) Part of the Council's area:

Arborfield and	
Newland	1,292.3
Barkham	1,687.1
Charvil	1,411.9
Earley	11,894.1
Finchampstead	5,933.3
Remenham	326.3
Ruscombe	498.8
St. Nicholas Hurst	1,064.4
Shinfield	5,656.8
Sonning	817.6
Swallowfield	1,069.9
Twyford	3,011.8
Wargrave	2,119.6
Winnersh	4,117.7
Wokingham	15,513.8
Wokingham Without	3,232.4
Woodley	10,528.8
	<hr/>
	70,176.6

being the amounts calculated by the Council, in accordance with Regulation 6 of the Regulations, as the amounts of its Council Tax base for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which a Parish precept relates;

- 5) the Council Tax requirement for the Council's own purposes for 2019/20 (excluding Parish precepts) is £104,137,162. This includes £7,363,631 in respect of the Adult Social care precept for 2019/20; this is based on a 0.5% increase on the 2018/19 Council Tax;
- 6) the following amounts be now calculated by the Council for the year 2019/20 in accordance with Sections 32 to 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, amended by the Localism Act 2011. However, the precepts shown below for the Parishes of Earley and Winnersh are provisional and are subject to approval at the Parishes annual precept meetings by the end of February 2019. The precept shown

below for the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority is also provisional subject to approval at a meeting of the Fire Authority on 25 February 2019:

£295,419,141	being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(2)(a) to (f) of the Act taking into account all precepts issued to it by Parish Councils
(£186,903,124)	being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(3)(a) to (d) of the Act
£108,516,017	being the amount by which the aggregate at 3(a) above, exceeds the aggregate at 3(b) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31A(4) of the Act, as its Council Tax requirement for the year (Item R)
£1,546.33	being the amount at 3(c) above (Item R), all divided by 1(a) above (Item T), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31B of the Act, as the 'basic amount of its Council Tax for the year (including Parish precepts).
£4,378,855	being the aggregate amount of all special items (Parish precepts) referred to in Section 34(1) of the Act (as per the table below):

	2019/20			2018/19			Council Tax Increase
	TAX BASE	PARISH PRECEPT	PARISH BAND D	TAX BASE	PARISH PRECEPT	PARISH BAND D	
		£	£		£	£	
Arborfield and Newland	1,292.3	105,020	81.27	1,272.4	100,231	78.77	3.17
Barkham	1,687.1	54,858	32.52	1,594.4	50,318	31.56	3.04
Charvil	1,411.9	48,684	34.48	1,409.7	47,070	33.39	3.26
Earley	11,894.1	881,817	74.14	11,842.5	859,700	72.59	2.14
Finchampstead	5,933.3	153,698	25.90	5,769.5	139,638	24.20	7.02
Remenham	326.3	24,919	76.37	320.0	24,076	75.24	1.50
Ruscombe	498.8	33,725	67.61	496.8	35,500	71.46	(5.39)
St. Nicholas Hurst	1,064.4	41,600	39.08	1,058.1	40,000	37.80	3.39
Shinfield	5,656.8	412,500	72.92	5,371.7	356,144	66.30	9.98
Sonning	817.6	37,187	45.48	815.3	36,280	44.50	2.20
Swallowfield	1,069.9	20,530	19.19	1,041.4	19,984	19.19	0.00
Twyford	3,011.8	85,360	28.34	3,004.9	81,645	27.17	4.31
Wargrave	2,119.6	184,373	86.98	2,110.3	175,660	83.24	4.49
Winnersh	4,117.7	137,314	33.35	4,011.3	113,760	28.36	17.60
Wokingham	15,513.8	853,332	55.00	15,052.5	809,335	53.77	2.29
Wokingham Without	3,232.4	180,409	55.81	3,179.5	163,673	51.48	8.41
Woodley	10,528.8	1,123,528	106.71	10,318.8	1,101,119	106.71	0.00
Total / Average	70,176.6	4,378,855	<b>62.40</b>	68,669.1	4,154,134	<b>60.49</b>	<b>3.15</b>

£1,483.93	being the amount at 3(d) above less the result given by dividing the amount at 3(e) above by the amount at 1(a) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34(2) of the Act, as the basic amount of its council tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which no special items relates.
-----------	--

7) That it be noted that for the year 2019/2020 the Police and Crime Commissioner for the Thames Valley has issued a precept to the Council in accordance with Section 40 of

the Local Government Finance Act 1992 for each category of dwellings in the Council's area as indicated in the table below. The Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Authority is due to approve its precept on 25th February 2019, and their provisional precept has been used below.

8) That the Council in accordance with Sections 30 and 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, hereby sets the aggregate amounts shown in the tables below as the amounts of Council Tax for 2019/2020 for each part of its area and for each of the categories of dwellings.

### SUMMARY OF COUNCIL TAX 2019/20

#### Valuation Bands

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Wokingham Borough Council	989.29	1,154.17	1,319.05	1,483.93	1,813.69	2,143.45	2,473.22	2,967.86
Thames Valley Police Authority	137.52	160.44	183.36	206.28	252.12	297.96	343.80	412.56
Royal Berkshire Fire Authority	44.19	51.55	58.92	66.28	81.01	95.74	110.47	132.56

#### Aggregate of Council Tax Requirement for each Parish and the Borough for each part of the Council's area:

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Arborfield and Newland	1,043.47	1,217.38	1,391.29	1,565.20	1,913.02	2,260.84	2,608.67	3,130.40
Barkham	1,010.97	1,179.46	1,347.96	1,516.45	1,853.44	2,190.42	2,527.42	3,032.90
Charvil	1,012.28	1,180.99	1,349.70	1,518.41	1,855.83	2,193.25	2,530.69	3,036.82
Earley	1,038.72	1,211.83	1,384.95	1,558.07	1,904.31	2,250.54	2,596.79	3,116.14
Finchampstead	1,006.56	1,174.31	1,342.07	1,509.83	1,845.35	2,180.86	2,516.39	3,019.66
Remenham	1,040.20	1,213.57	1,386.93	1,560.30	1,907.03	2,253.76	2,600.50	3,120.60
Ruscombe	1,034.36	1,206.76	1,379.15	1,551.54	1,896.32	2,241.11	2,585.90	3,103.08
St. Nicholas Hurst	1,015.34	1,184.57	1,353.79	1,523.01	1,861.45	2,199.90	2,538.35	3,046.02
Shinfield	1,037.90	1,210.89	1,383.87	1,556.85	1,902.81	2,248.78	2,594.75	3,113.70
Sonning	1,019.61	1,189.54	1,359.48	1,529.41	1,869.28	2,209.14	2,549.02	3,058.82
Swallowfield	1,002.08	1,169.10	1,336.11	1,503.12	1,837.14	2,171.17	2,505.20	3,006.24
Twyford	1,008.18	1,176.21	1,344.24	1,512.27	1,848.33	2,184.39	2,520.45	3,024.54
Wargrave	1,047.28	1,221.82	1,396.37	1,570.91	1,920.00	2,269.09	2,618.19	3,141.82
Winnersh	1,011.52	1,180.11	1,348.69	1,517.28	1,854.45	2,191.62	2,528.80	3,034.56
Wokingham	1,025.96	1,196.95	1,367.94	1,538.93	1,880.91	2,222.89	2,564.89	3,077.86
Wokingham Without	1,026.50	1,197.58	1,368.66	1,539.74	1,881.90	2,224.06	2,566.24	3,079.48
Woodley	1,060.43	1,237.17	1,413.90	1,590.64	1,944.11	2,297.59	2,651.07	3,181.28

## Aggregate of Council Tax Requirements for each part of the Council's area:

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Arborfield and Newland	1,225.18	1,429.37	1,633.57	1,837.76	2,246.15	2,654.54	3,062.94	3,675.52
Barkham	1,192.68	1,391.45	1,590.24	1,789.01	2,186.57	2,584.12	2,981.69	3,578.02
Charvil	1,193.99	1,392.98	1,591.98	1,790.97	2,188.96	2,586.95	2,984.96	3,581.94
Earley	1,220.43	1,423.82	1,627.23	1,830.63	2,237.44	2,644.24	3,051.06	3,661.26
Finchampstead	1,188.27	1,386.30	1,584.35	1,782.39	2,178.48	2,574.56	2,970.66	3,564.78
Remenham	1,221.91	1,425.56	1,629.21	1,832.86	2,240.16	2,647.46	3,054.77	3,665.72
Ruscombe	1,216.07	1,418.75	1,621.43	1,824.10	2,229.45	2,634.81	3,040.17	3,648.20
St. Nicholas Hurst	1,197.05	1,396.56	1,596.07	1,795.57	2,194.58	2,593.60	2,992.62	3,591.14
Shinfield	1,219.61	1,422.88	1,626.15	1,829.41	2,235.94	2,642.48	3,049.02	3,658.82
Sonning	1,201.32	1,401.53	1,601.76	1,801.97	2,202.41	2,602.84	3,003.29	3,603.94
Swallowfield	1,183.79	1,381.09	1,578.39	1,775.68	2,170.27	2,564.87	2,959.47	3,551.36
Twyford	1,189.89	1,388.20	1,586.52	1,784.83	2,181.46	2,578.09	2,974.72	3,569.66
Wargrave	1,228.99	1,433.81	1,638.65	1,843.47	2,253.13	2,662.79	3,072.46	3,686.94
Winnersh	1,193.23	1,392.10	1,590.97	1,789.84	2,187.58	2,585.32	2,983.07	3,579.68
Wokingham	1,207.67	1,408.94	1,610.22	1,811.49	2,214.04	2,616.59	3,019.16	3,622.98
Wokingham Without	1,208.21	1,409.57	1,610.94	1,812.30	2,215.03	2,617.76	3,020.51	3,624.60
Woodley	1,242.14	1,449.16	1,656.18	1,863.20	2,277.24	2,691.29	3,105.34	3,726.40

### 94. CONTINUATION OF THE MEETING

At this point in the meeting, 10.20pm, in accordance with Procedure Rule 4.2.12 (m) the Council considered a Motion to continue the meeting beyond 10.30pm for a maximum of 30 minutes to enable further business on the Agenda to be transacted. This was proposed by the Mayor and seconded by Julian McGhee-Sumner.

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

### 95. TREASURY MANAGEMENT - MID YEAR REPORT 2018/19

The Council considered the Treasury Management Mid-Year Report for 2018/19, as set out on Agenda pages 181 to 206. The report gave details of Treasury Management operations during the first six months of the 2018/19 Municipal Year.

The report stated that, as at September 2018, the Council was forecast to exceed its investment return budget and there had been no external loans taken out in the first six months of 2018/19. It also confirmed that there had been no breaches of the Treasury Management Strategy in the first six months of the year.

It was proposed by Anthony Pollock and seconded by Chris Smith that the recommendations set out on Agenda page 181, be approved.

Upon being put to the vote it was:

#### RESOLVED that:

- 1) the Treasury Management Mid-Year Report for 2018/19 be approved;
- 2) the actual 2018/19 Prudential Indicators, as set out in the report, be noted.

## **96. COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME 2019 / 2020**

The Council considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 207 to 212, which gave further consideration to the adoption of a Localised Council Tax Reduction Scheme. The matter was considered initially at the Extraordinary Council meeting on 24 January 2019. Following that meeting, the Leader of the Council requested that the scheme approved by the Council be brought back for further consideration. In line with the Council's Constitution, 14 Members had signed a Motion to rescind the original decision.

The amended scheme, set out in the report, addressed concerns expressed by Members at the previous meeting, for example the way in which child maintenance income was considered.

It was proposed by Lindsay Ferris and seconded by David Hare that the report be amended by adding a second recommendation in relation to the establishment of a Safety Net Fund, as follows:

"That Council agree:

- 1) the proposed Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2019/20;
- 2) to set up a Safety Net Fund in the sum of £100k to support vulnerable residents who may not be able to afford even the reduced Council Tax they are expected to pay."

Julian McGhee-Sumner stated that he accepted the proposed amendment.

Anthony Pollock stated that, due to the improvements to the scheme set out in the report, it was likely that a Safety Net Fund would only be called upon in extremis.

Chris Smith apologised for any distress caused to vulnerable residents over the past month and confirmed that the development of future Council Tax Reduction Schemes would be the subject of detailed cross party scrutiny.

Andy Croy stated that there were still issues of concern in the amended scheme, such as the disregard of Carers' allowances, which should be addressed in the development of the scheme for 2020/21.

It was proposed by Julian McGhee-Sumner and seconded by Pauline Jorgensen that the recommendation set out in the report, as amended, be approved.

Upon being put to the vote it was:

**RESOLVED** that:

- 1) the proposed Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2019/20 be approved;
- 2) a Safety Net Fund in the sum of £100k be set up to support vulnerable residents who may not be able to afford even the reduced Council Tax they are expected to pay.

## **97. TIMETABLE OF MEETINGS**

The Council considered the proposed Timetable of Meetings for the 2019/20 Municipal Year, as set out on Agenda page 271.

It was proposed by Julian McGhee-Sumner and seconded by John Halsall that the 2019/20 Timetable of Meetings be approved.

Upon being put to the vote it was:

**RESOLVED:** That the Timetable of Meetings for the 2019/20 Municipal Year, as set out on page 271 of the Agenda, be approved.

#### **98. CHANGES TO THE CONSTITUTION**

The Council considered a report, set out on Agenda pages 213 to 270, relating to changes to the Constitution as recommended by the Constitution Review Working Group.

Gary Cowan expressed concern about the proposed changes to Section 3.5.4.2 “Debating a Petition at a Council meeting” in relation to the 10 day deadline for the submission of a Motion linked to a petition.

Keith Baker stated that the proposed changes to Section 3.5.4.2 would increase transparency and openness. Councillor Baker felt that petitioners would be able to work with a nominated Member to amend the submitted Motion to reflect the Council debate.

Lindsay Ferris commented that the 10 day deadline could be given further consideration by the Constitution Review Working Group but the proposed changes relating to petitions should be implemented. If the changes did not make the process more effective, further amendments could be considered as necessary at a later date.

Andy Croy expressed concern that petitioners were generally not aware of the Council’s rules and procedures and it was important to ensure that they were given control over the Motion to be considered by Council.

Carl Doran expressed concern that the proposals relating to Section 6.3.29 “Call-In” could introduce a lengthy delay in the process for holding the Executive to account.

Chris Bowring stated that the Council’s Constitution was evolving over time. If any of the proposed changes did not achieve their stated aims, the issue/s could be given further consideration by the Constitution Review Working Group before discussion and agreement at full Council.

It was proposed by Julian McGhee-Sumner and seconded by Chris Bowring that the recommendations set out in the report be approved.

Prior to a vote being held, six Members, in accordance with Rule of Procedure 4.2.15.5, requested that a recorded vote be taken on the proposal.

The voting was as follows:

<b>FOR</b>	<b>AGAINST</b>	<b>ABSTAINED</b>
Keith Baker	Gary Cowan	Rachel Burgess
Parry Batth		Andy Croy
Laura Blumenthal		Carl Doran
Chris Bowring		John Kaiser
Jenny Cheng		



UllaKarin Clark		
Richard Dolinski		
Lindsay Ferris		
Guy Grandison		
Charlotte Haitham Taylor		
John Halsall		
David Hare		
Pauline Helliard-Symons		
Tim Holton		
Philip Houldsworth		
John Jarvis		
Clive Jones		
Norman Jorgensen		
Pauline Jorgensen		
Sarah Kerr		
Dianne King		
Abdul Loyes		
Julian McGhee-Sumner		
Ken Miall		
Philip Mirfin		
Stuart Munro		
Anthony Pollock		
Malcolm Richards		
Angus Ross		
Daniel Sargeant		
Imogen Shepherd-Dubey		
Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey		
Chris Smith		
Simon Weeks		
Shahid Younis		

Upon being put to the vote it was:

**RESOLVED:** That the following changes to the Constitution, as recommended by the Constitution Review Working Group, be approved:

- 1) that Section 4.2.9.7 “Asking the question at the meeting (Council) and Section 5.4.31 “Asking the question at the meeting (Executive) be amended as set out in Paragraph 1 of the report;
- 2) that Section 4.2.11 “Motions on Notice” be amended as set out in Paragraph 2 of the report;
- 3) that Section 3.5.4.2 “Debating a Petition at a Council meeting” be amended as set out in Appendix 1 to the report;
- 4) that Sections 6.3.29 “Call-In” and 6.3.36 “Dispute” be amended as set out in Appendix 2 to the report;
- 5) that Section 8.4 “Licensing and Appeals Committee Procedure Rules be amended as set out in Appendix 3 to the report;

- 6) that Section 11 “Officers” be amended as set out in Appendix 4 to the report;
- 7) that Sections 1.6.4 Authentication of Documents” and 13.3.3.2 Table – Acceptance of Tenders and Signing Contracts” be amended as set out in Paragraph 7 and Appendix 5 to the report.

## **Budget Statement by Julian McGhee-Sumner – Leader of the Council**

Before I move on to talking about the Budget, I would like to welcome our newest Councillor to the chamber - Councillor Sarah Kerr. Welcome. I'm sure you will make a valued contribution to the opposition benches and to this Council.

### **General Financial Picture**

As most of us in this chamber will know we have been the worst funded authority in the country for a considerable number of years and we went into the 2019/20 settlement period with the very distinct possibility of seeing our Revenue Support Grant (RSG) turning negative to the tune of £7.2 million which would have not been helpful to us in continuing to provide the services valued by our residents and which they have come to expect. Just when we thought in that the Government couldn't reduce our grant below zero, we found that they could.

However, following consistent representations by this authority and successive Leaders of the Council, including my predecessor Charlotte Haitham Taylor, we have been successful in persuading the Government that this course of action is not good or helpful to our residents and it has been confirmed that our RSG will not turn negative in 2019/20.

However, we will need to continue making representations since the agreement is only for one year and any change in the methodology for calculating our spending power could see this reduction in our income return next year in a different guise. History has taught us that it is more likely to happen than not.

It is useful to put our funding into context – the average unitary authority has seen a reduction in RSG of 41.28%. However, in Wokingham we have seen a reduction of 100%.

Because of the way the Government settlement operates the assessment of our finances has changed in such a way that Council Tax now accounts for 100% towards the calculation of our spending power. It is, therefore, vital that we continue to see a healthy income from Council Tax and we are fortunate, then, that we have a strong tax base, and that we have efficient officers whose collection rate of 98.85%, is one of the highest in the country.

### **Budget Pressures**

Increases in demand for Children's Services and Adult Social Care continue to place budget pressures across these services and it is, therefore, vital that we continue to spend the limited resources we have wisely. We must look after those who need our services the most whilst protecting future generations who will need this Council to help and support them in the future.

Whilst all budgets continue to be robustly challenged before being approved and each Director and Executive Member have to sign off on their budget prior to approval, it is worth noting that we have made savings of £26m (or 33%) over the last 5 years. But when you factor in inflation at 2% and growth in demand at 6.8% you can see from these pressures why we need a long term robust financial plan if we are to continue to deliver all the services our residents expect.

My fellow Executive Members have worked hard to get to this final Budget. They have had to be extremely flexible as the financial landscape has changed. I would like to thank them and their Officers for their efforts and continued focus.

We know we will continue to face challenges ahead, particularly as our population grows and gets older and it is, therefore, vital that this authority takes every opportunity to be flexible and innovative in its approach.

### **Response - 21CC**

Two years ago, the Council realised that making efficiencies in individual service areas in isolation, euphemistically called “salami slicing”, was no longer viable and a major change in our processes was necessary.

WBC is the first Borough Council in the country to adopt the ambitious 21CC programme. As part of this every single process within the Council has been examined and streamlined wherever possible, whilst having the same common aim – to deliver better for our residents.

The aim of 21CC was twofold:

- 1) To deliver better customer service to residents by enabling them to access services digitally and by simplifying our processes to ensure their request is passed to the person best placed to deal with it;
- 2) To save money through better systems and investment.

Progressive technology will continue to be introduced so that the Localities Team accessing the Borough systems can manage the majority of calls in real time at the first point of contact. A key integral part of 21CC is that 85% of all calls from residents are resolved at the first point of contact.

Customers are now able to deal with all their Council Tax issues, order blue bags, report fly tipping and report potholes (to name just a few) on line, which makes the lives of our residents easier and us more efficient.

The programme is expected to save £4m every financial year once it is fully implemented. Phases 1 and 2 have already been delivered. The principles and methodology will continue in Phase 3 which will now focus on adult and children’s services.

### **Housing**

In line with the Government’s 2015 budget settlement our Council House tenants’ rents continue to be reduced by 1% per annum with the last period for this settlement occurring in 2019/20. Whilst this is indeed good news for our tenants, it places additional pressure on our housing maintenance programme. I am, however, pleased to announce that we have managed to deliver our maintenance programme with continued investment from our reduced rental income whilst maintaining a safe and prudent budget.

We continue to focus on delivering more affordable housing for our Borough and Wokingham Housing Ltd. (WHL), our private housing company, are in the process of reviewing the next sites so we can deliver more sites like Phoenix Avenue. Building 21st Century housing that meets the needs of a modern family will continue to be a priority for this Council.

### **Capital Investment**

We on this side of the chamber know that it is our duty, even in times of financial difficulty, to invest. By investing in our infrastructure and services, we are investing in our residents' future and wellbeing.

This Budget includes a significant level of new capital investment in the Borough for 2019/20. A total of £500 million shows our commitment to the provision of infrastructure, regeneration across the Borough and the creation of an investment portfolio. Each of these areas are based on sound financial principles and comes with income streams which will repay any borrowings and deliver a surplus for investment back into Council services. All of our borrowing is undertaken at fixed interest rates, at a time when these rates are incredibly low – so there is no danger of the Council being affected by a sudden rise in interest rates.

### **Infrastructure**

Much of this is funded by developer contributions or forward funded by borrowings which will be repaid in future years from S106 and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). The Town Centre Regeneration will transform Wokingham Town and the work around the town hall in partnership with Wokingham Town Council has been at zero cost to the Council Tax payer.

All communities across the Borough will benefit from this Capital Investment Strategy. They will get the benefit of improved highways infrastructure, new school places in our high performing schools and leisure facilities – all at a time when other authorities are reducing or closing theirs. This shows the ambition this Council has for regenerating the Borough and our innovative ways of generating Capital funding.

### **Wokingham Town Centre**

Wokingham Town Centre regeneration is nearing completion with two tenants already operating and five others exchanged with more in the pipeline. Wokingham Town residents told us in no uncertain terms that the town centre was dying and that more needed to be done if we were to have a thriving town centre and night time economy and, although we have borrowed to regenerate Wokingham Town Centre, we have an asset that is appreciating and we have the flexibility to reduce debt should we decided to do so. If we choose not to sell, we can service the debt whilst generating additional income for this authority and provide options of where we can invest the income in other parts of the Borough or Council services.

Whilst there are still residents who are unhappy to see the regeneration, many residents are actually pleased that the Council has undertaken this work at a time when other towns are declining and although the work hasn't always proceeded as we would have hoped we have learnt the lessons so we can better deliver these projects in the future.

### **Property Investment**

The Council has an investment programme, similar to other councils, in commercial assets in order to build up additional future capital assets and new sources of rental income which, though not currently included in this MTFP 2019/22 to support services to residents, could in future years be used to support services to residents in the event that a future Government removes even more of the Council's business rates and Council Tax to support other councils' services in other parts of the country. This is a prudent approach to long term financial planning at a time of rising needs.

### **Local Authority Trading Companies (LATCO's)**

Our Council owned companies continue to grow and mature, setting a high standard for local authority companies across the country.

Windsor and Maidenhead joined Optalis in 2017, making it a £50 million company, with the consequent improvement in service quality and resilience in service delivery. We are the only LATCO who deliver the full range of local authority adult social care services, including statutory services, in the country. A first for us! Optalis has had detailed discussions with other local authorities interested in the Optalis model and we are hopeful that they will be keen to utilise the service model which has been successfully developed as an adult social care provider which will increase turnover providing greater security to the company, its staff and the quality of services it provides. Optalis is a great success that will save our taxpayers' money whilst improving our social care services.

Wokingham Housing continues to build on the excellent work completed at Phoenix and Fosters. They have already identified sites for their next phase of housing developments which will see further social housing delivered for our residents.

### **Sustainable Alternative Natural Green Spaces (SANGS)**

We are investing in approaching the magic figure of 100 hectares of new country parks (or SANGS) paid for by developer contributions. It is important to note that residents can get a lot of their daily exercise by simply walking for short periods of time which they will be able to do in these new parks.

### **Leisure Centres**

The Leisure contract for managing the Council's leisure centres has been renewed and we are pleased with our new leisure partner. This contract includes provision of a capital budget to upgrade or rebuild existing centres such as Ryeish Green Leisure Centre, opened last September, Arborfield Green Leisure Centre opened in Summer 2017, Bulmershe Leisure Centre and the further investment in Loddon Valley and Carnival Pool. These are sizeable investments and will provide a significant upgrade to the facilities which Wokingham residents have available and contrasts with the closure of facilities in neighbouring Reading. Wokingham invests rather than closes.

### **Waste**

Our residents have consistently told us that they value the retention of the weekly waste collection and want to see more opportunities for recycling. This Council

remains committed to improving our recycling rates and to aid us in this delivery we will be introducing the collection of Food Waste starting in April. By recycling food waste we can divert up to 30% of the current contents of blue bags away from landfill. This equates to 100,000 tonnes annually saving £100 per tonne. Our target is to increase our recycling rate year on year with the aim of achieving at least 50%.

### **Community Hubs**

Our Community Hubs saw 470,000 visits to our libraries last year. In January 2019 there were 58,248 items out on loan, 2,687 computer sessions booked, 75 event sessions for adults and 31 for families and young people. Again we are investing in our ten libraries compared to other local authorities which are either closing or reducing the library service.

Mr Mayor, this is a highly ambitious, safe and practical budget and I hope all of this chamber will support it.

### **Note:**

At the conclusion of the meeting Councillor McGhee-Sumner notified the Council that Norman Jorgensen would be joining the Executive as the Executive Member for Housing.

This page is intentionally left blank



## **Budget Statement by Lindsay Ferris – Leader of the Opposition**

I would like to echo the welcome to Sarah Kerr. I would also like to say a thank you to Helen Power and wish her well.

This year will, I trust, be the last time the Opposition is not directly involved in producing or scrutinising the budget. It is nigh on impossible to produce an alternative in the limited time currently given. However this year, at the end of my speech we will be submitting an amendment to this Budget.

I have been asked recently how we would run the Council differently if we were given that chance. After a short period of reflection I said ‘we would run the Council for the benefit of our residents, not for the benefit of the Council or developers’.

In our view this Council has increasingly become a ‘we know best and dismissive’ organisation with many residents, whether petitioners or anyone who dares to question their actions being brushed aside and ignored or given near meaningless answers. Such arrogance.

This year, and probably this year only, we benefit to the tune of circa £10m because the threat of Negative Rate Support Grant has been temporarily removed, we are also involved in a Berkshire-wide Business Rates pilot plus we have an increased income from the New Homes Bonus. Without this injection of income we fear WBC could have been heading in the same direction as Northamptonshire and nobody wants this.

However this windfall gives the council opportunity to support some additional projects which otherwise would not have been possible.

There are three major issues that need to be addressed now because if they are not they will have severe consequences for the future of this Borough. They are:

- The number of properties Wokingham Borough is expected to build over the next 20 years or so;
- The second is the rapidly rising level of debt this Council is racking up;
- The third is the level of services that WBC will be able to provide in the future.

### **Housing Numbers**

In the case of housing numbers we, on this side, feel the numbers are far too high and do not believe the Council has fought hard enough to keep this level down.

The way the Council treated both the Barkham and Shinfield debates seeking to limit housing numbers gives us no confidence that the ruling Conservative Group will do anything about it.

The Lib Dem Group have, therefore, decided to take up this challenge.

**We have, as of this month, launched a petition on the Government Website objecting to the large number of properties being pushed onto the Wokingham Borough:**

## ***'Keep housing numbers under control in already heavily developed areas'***

Link to the petition <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/237564>

Whilst we understand the need for homes, the ones currently being built by developers are not of the right type. The Council should be leading here, not just responding to developer demands. We need more 1, 2 and 3 bedroom homes for our local people, truly affordable homes – not more 4, 5 and 6 bed detached houses, and we need bungalows for our older community.

**We have made this one of the main themes of our updated Manifesto for 2019 called 'Homes for Local People' to highlight the importance of getting the balance right.**

### **Debt Levels**

Regarding the rapidly rising level of debt being incurred, not only does the cost of borrowing increase as the Council borrows more, the interest paid reduces the ability of the Council to provide services for our residents. Instead of providing services, the Council would be paying off debt, this is not the way to run a Council.

Without a significant adjustment downwards we believe this debt will become unsustainable, with all the consequences this could have. Remember it is the Council Tax payer who is the last resort for the Council.

### **Services**

Regarding services, we believe this is the main reason a Council exists. Once they stop providing these services one has to question what is the purpose of a Council?

If at any point the costs of any new infrastructure plus the costs of borrowing outstrips the Council income, then our services will be decimated.

We, as residents, would end up paying ever increasing levels of Council Tax for an ever decreasing level of service. This is what creates a perfect storm.

Over the last two Budgets I have raised considerable concerns about the increasing levels of debt on this Council. The Council has continued to increase its borrowing, increasing the amount of interest rates repayable. Two years ago the Council could borrow at rates below 2%, now the average is over 3.3% and rising. At some point this level of interest will have severe ramifications for the Council and its ability to provide services. Borrowing has grown from circa £50m only a few years ago to a forecast of £538m for 2021/22.

**To help cut the level of debt we will instigate an immediate moratorium on the Council's commercial borrowing and reduce the level of this fund from £100m to £25m with immediate effect. We would also review the procedures adopted.** Standards of performance at WBC have dropped particularly over the past couple of years. The Council has produced business cases (that is when they did them) with only half the required information and consultations have become a farce. I am sure many of you will remember the school crossing patrol consultation when 97% of

those who responded objected to losing their School Crossing Patrollers, only to be ignored because they did not use the correct word – ‘safety’ What arrogance!!

**I will now make our first Revenue Budget proposal tonight – we will reintroduce the School Crossing Patrollers at the sites where residents, parents and schools clearly indicate they wish this to happen.**

The Council has even ignored the Local Ombudsman and recently lost a High Court and Court of Appeal hearing where the words ‘abuse of process’ by the Council was used by the senior judges involved. So it is not only local people it ignores.

### **Wokingham Regeneration**

The regeneration project is managed as a stand-alone project. Any additional costs are ploughed back into the project making it ever more costly. We understand this project has some allowances for this increase in costs as they used a 3.5% interest rate to provide this safety net flexibility. However, as just mentioned, the Council is now borrowing at 3.3% (and rising) so that safety net is rapidly disappearing. The uncertainty in the High Street could have serious financial implications for the Council and I feel little or no account is being taken of this position. The way the local businesses in Market Place and surrounding areas were treated during the lengthy delay in the works, many of whom lost thousands of pounds of business during this period with little recompense, is a disgrace.

### **Support for Local Businesses**

**To help these businesses and others across the Borough we propose to introduce 2 hours Free Parking in our town centres on Saturdays.**

The introduction of Free 2 hours parking would have to wait until new ticket machines are available. This could be up and running later this year. The Government has launched a ‘Future High Street Challenge Fund’ of £675m, available for all Councils to apply for with a deadline of 22<sup>nd</sup> March. Included in the Challenge Fund are options to include innovative parking strategies to help the High Street. We on this side press the Council to apply to this fund and to include proposals for assistance with parking schemes. We are willing to assist.

The Challenge Fund could possibly cover any projected loss in parking income. We have however included an assessment of the cost of our proposal should WBC choose not to apply to this fund, or do so unsuccessfully.

Failure to help our High Street would mean a number of businesses may not be with us next year. This would not only impact on our towns as a whole but could lead to reduced business rate revenues for the Council. It is in everyone’s interest to reduce car parking charges. Such a change, we believe, would help our struggling High Streets and attract more visitors to our towns.

### **Leisure**

**We would also offer Free Parking at Dinton Pastures and California Country Park on Bank Holidays, (only), and after 6pm.**

Local residents should be able to enjoy their local parks without the threat of parking tickets. Remember, they do actually own the sites. The parks department would be provided with any additional resources needed to support their services should this policy generate a reduced income.

## Highways

The Council has received a grant of over £1.1m for Highways. This we welcome as it will enable the Council to repair a number of roads that were not in the original list for 2019/20.

**We propose that £300k be added to this figure to enable additional roads and also footpaths and pavements to be repaired. Many footpaths have seen little or no maintenance for many a year. Some are in extremely poor condition and are now dangerous.**

## Staffing Issues

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century restructure has been running over the past 3 years. In our view it has been naive and has not achieved what was intended. Throughout this restructure the Council has employed a large number of interim and temporary staff which has all but destroyed staff morale. This combined with what could be considered as a bullying culture has had a significant impact on the performance of the Council. Our staff are our most important resource, the culture of this Council has to **change** to become more supportive of them. If the current ruling Group is unable or unwilling to change it, then we will.

**We have two proposals:**

- 1. A reduction in the budget for interim/temporary staff by £500k for 2019/20. We believe the existing staff should be supported wherever possible to cover some of the vacancies, rather than recruit expensive interim staff, it is simply not good business. Only those posts considered essential would be allowed to be temporarily filled;**
- 2. At last, it has been realised that neither Children's Services nor Adult Social Care are suitable areas for the 21C programme. 'We therefore propose to suspend the 21C Programme for these two areas'.**

## Children's Services

Children's Services, in particular, requires rebuilding and a period of stability. To assist in this rebuilding we propose to increase the revenue budget in this area by a further £300k this year. We would allocate £230k of this for Children and Adolescents Mental Health Scheme (CAMHS) and a further £70k for Special Educational Needs (SEN) inclusion. We believe the extra provision for CAMHS would in only a short time save the Council considerably more than this extra investment.

We must also improve relationships with our schools.

## Adult Social Services

Adult Social Services is experiencing increasing level of demand. It has consistently had an overspend, some of which has been difficult to understand. Before any decision is made regarding our future relationship with Optalis we need a root and branch reassessment as to how the budgets for this area have been used, and where any efficiencies and improvements can be made. It is far too important a service for political dogma to interfere with the safety and wellbeing of our residents,

particularly our older residents. We on this side are willing to work with those involved to achieve the best solutions for our residents.

### **Council Tax Reduction Scheme**

Some vulnerable residents may not be able to afford even the reduced Council Tax they are expected to pay. **To assist we propose to introduce a Safety Net Fund. For 2019/20 we propose this fund to be £100k.**

### **Libraries**

I have one final area I would like to mention. This is something relating to my own ward of Twyford. For many years the residents have been promised a new library but this has not materialised.

**We would provide an initial sum of £400k to enable this project to restart and move towards the provision of a new library and community hub.**

**I would like to now move the Liberal Democrat amendment to the 2019/20 Council Budget.**

This page is intentionally left blank

## LIBERAL DEMOCRATS GROUP - OPPOSITION BUDGET PROPOSALS

	Group Lead	2019/2020 £'000	Comments
<b>Revenue Growth</b>			
Provide 2 hours free parking on Saturdays (borough-wide)	LF	240	One-off - part year
Provide all-day free parking at Dinton Pastures on bank holidays	ISD	25	Ongoing - full year effect is £50k
Extra funding for CAMHS	DH	230	Ongoing
Extra funding for SEN inclusion	DH	70	Ongoing
Restore the schools crossing patrollers (SCP) at those sites where the school, parents and residents clearly indicate that they want them returned	ISD	50	Ongoing
Restore Health Watch Funding to previous levels and more	CJ	38	Ongoing
Additional funding for the CTRS scheme to provide extra support for those in the lowest banding	LF	100	Ongoing
<b>Total Growth</b>		<b>753</b>	

<b>Revenue efficiencies</b>			
Reduce staffing budget for temporary/interim staff	LF	(500)	Ongoing
<b>Total service efficiencies</b>		<b>(500)</b>	

<b>Capital expenditure growth</b>			
Provide disabled van space in Wokingham Town Centre and bus ramps in Rose Street, Wokingham	SK	15	One-off capital project
Provide library facilities in Twyford	LF	400	£600k in year 2
Extra investment in road resurfacing and pavements	RSD	300	One-off capital project
Housing - additional funding for Lodden Homes Limited (LHL)	IP	200	One-off capital project
<b>Total capital expenditure (CAPEX) growth</b>		<b>915</b>	

<b>Capital expenditure reduction</b>			
Moratorium on the Commercial Property Fund (hold at current spend level)	CJ	(75,000)	Reduction in borrowing requirement
<b>Total capital expenditure (CAPEX) growth</b>		<b>(75,000)</b>	

**Summary position**

Revenue Growth		753	
Revenue efficiencies		(500)	
<b>Net growth/(efficiencies)</b>		<b>253</b>	Funded from general fund reserves

Capital Expenditure growth		915	
Capital programme reduction		(75,000)	
<b>Net change in capital programme</b>		<b>(74,085)</b>	Reduced capital financing requirement

Balance on general revenue fund as a result of these proposals **9,612**

Balance of general fund if capex increase funded by revenue contributions **8,697**

From 2020/21, the ongoing funding pressure of £513k (associated with the revised proposal) would need to be managed, together with the £2.1m reoccurring pressures funded from balances already contained within the existing MTFP proposal. This would form part of future years' budget setting processes.'

This page is intentionally left blank