

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF  
THE EXECUTIVE  
HELD ON 28 MAY 2020 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.25 PM**

**Committee Members Present**

Councillors: John Halsall (Chairman), John Kaiser, Parry Batth, UllaKarin Clark, Charlotte Haitham Taylor, Pauline Jorgensen, Charles Margetts, Stuart Munro, Gregor Murray and Wayne Smith

**Other Councillors Present**

Andy Croy  
Lindsay Ferris  
Guy Grandison  
Pauline Helliard-Symons  
Graham Howe  
Sarah Kerr  
Dianne King  
Tahir Maher  
Andrew Mickleburgh  
Angus Ross  
Imogen Shepherd-DuBey  
Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey

**118. ONE MINUTE SILENCE**

The Leader of Council acknowledged that tonight was the last “clapping for the NHS” and advised that although he would not be stopping the meeting at 8.00pm this was not intended to be an act of disrespect as the Council very much valued the work of NHS staff.

Councillor Halsall then led the meeting in a minutes silence for those who had sadly died and suffered during the Covid-19 pandemic.

**119. APOLOGIES**

There were no apologies for absence received.

**120. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 22 April 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and would be signed by the Leader of Council at a later date.

**121. DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

Councillors Stuart Munro and Gregor Murray declared prejudicial interests in Agenda Item 122, Small Business Discretionary Payment, by virtue of the fact that their businesses may be eligible for such a payment. Councillors Munro and Murray therefore left the meeting during consideration of the report and did not take part in any discussions or the vote.

**122. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

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

### **122.1 Simon Cooper asked the Leader of the Council the following question:**

#### **Question**

Following the fatal accident at my home in January and the one three years prior to that and the other five serious accidents outside my property in the last 7 years, please can the Council provide a thorough update as to the progress being made (please be very specific in your answer) and what timescales are being followed to resolve this matter, please also in your answer include the data gleaned from the speed surveys conducted in March (happy for the data to be anonymised to protect the innocent).

#### **Answer**

The Council notes your continued interest in the progress being made with regard to traffic safety in Mortimer Road, Grazeley and I can confirm that, despite the current public health demands we are coping with, the Council has met all of the commitments made to you in the previous Executive responses and this has been directly communicated to you in email communications by Officers.

In particular, traffic speed surveys have been concluded at four locations, as agreed with Thames Valley Police and as advised to you by Officers at a meeting on site. The data from these surveys have been analysed and results confirm that conditions remain much as they were prior to the fatal collision, with traffic speeds remaining broadly compliant with the speed limit. A copy of the survey data has also been provided to you in response to a Freedom of Information request that you made and the same data has also been passed to the Police, to assist in their undertaking of traffic management and fatal collision investigations which, as you are aware, have yet to be concluded.

The Council may not see the outcome of these investigations until reports are passed to the Coroner and it would be therefore inappropriate for it to take any specific action with regard to infrastructure improvement, until the outcome of any inquest is known along with any specific requirements for action that the Coroner might impose upon the Council in its role as the highways authority.

Notwithstanding this, you have been informed of the Council's investigation into the potential for average speed enforcement cameras, at appropriate locations along Mortimer Road, which has now concluded and I can advise you that we will be seeking both the support of the police and the local community through a formal public consultation process, once the outcome of the Coroner's inquest is known.

The Council's programmed resurfacing work for Mortimer Road is now rescheduled to be undertaken in June, following which road markings will be reinstated and this will reinforce the traffic safety measures already in place.

I would take this opportunity, once again, to acknowledge your continued anxiety and extend every sympathy in respect of the current circumstances. Members are just as keen to see the conclusion of this phase of the investigation as quickly as they are, in order that the next phase can move forward but, until that is possible, we must patiently await the police and Coroner's reports.

### **122.2 Mike Smith had asked the Leader of the Council a question but this was subsequently withdrawn following publication of the agenda.**

**122.3 Darryl Campbell asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:**

**Question**

It was with great delight that I met the Government's recent announcement that English authorities will receive advanced funding for walking and cycling to the tune of £250m. How does Wokingham Borough Council plan to spend this money?

**Answer**

Yes we were pleased too. We are currently considering options for using the funding. We have been in regular contact with the DfT and they have told us we should know what our allocation is likely to be very shortly. We anticipate that it is going to be a lump sum based on fixed criteria rather than a bidding process but we do not know actually how much money we have got yet. There is no time for a competitive process to take place.

Officers have been discussing a number of plans as well as considering ideas put forward from the public, businesses and elected Members and once we know the level of funding available we will be able to determine what we can achieve.

As you know we have got an excellent active modes of sustainable transport team called My Journey who were recently awarded Local Authority /SGO Host School Partner of the Year at the 2020 national Bikeability Awards, beating Manchester and Lincolnshire CC who were joint runners-up. We want to continue this excellent track record and continue to provide the skills needed as well as the facilities such as Greenways and the London Road Cycle route, currently under construction. I am sure we will be able to utilise this funding to make a difference in the short term but I also hope that there will be a legacy so what we would like to do is do something that improves cycling now and also improves it in the future. I would be interested in your ideas actually.

**122.4 Sam Turvey had asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question but due to his inability to attend the meeting a written response was provided:**

**Question**

Given the recent spate of burglaries across the Borough, and rising crime rates more generally over the last year, is the Executive satisfied that recent increases in council tax bills for policing and crime prevention has been money well spent?

**Answer**

Thank you for your question, firstly I would like to clarify that policing is not a direct responsibility of this Council and the costs associated with the police force does not sit within the Council Tax for Wokingham Borough Council, these costs fall within a precept we collect on behalf of Thames Valley Police. We do however work in partnership with the Police and other agencies to reduce crime where we can.

Fortunately, Wokingham remains a very safe place to live and work. However due to the affluent nature of the Borough it remains an attractive place for traveling criminals to target.

**123. MEMBER QUESTION TIME**

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

**123.1 Imogen Shepherd-DuBey asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question:**

**Question**

We realise the Council Finances are being severely affected by the Coronavirus Crisis. Please can you detail what affect this will have on WBC's Capital Projects? Will any works be delayed or affected?

**Answer**

It is likely that there are going to be some delays in the capital projects within the programme, as the Covid-19 pandemic will undoubtedly affect the supply chain for the Council's various contractors. This is also the same for the builders and the providers for some of the S106 money. However early signs are that the economy is starting to move again and the construction industry is returning to work, in accordance with the guidance on social distancing, and following the key messages of 'stay alert, control the virus and save lives'.

The Council's senior leadership are currently reviewing the capital programme with a view to considering any impact of Covid-19 on resourcing and potential changes to the service requirements. Proposed changes to the Capital Programme will be reported back to Executive if there are any.

**Supplementary Question**

Obviously I mean we see John Halsall's statement on the front of the Wokingham paper this week and we obviously know that the Council's finances are going to be affected. I would like to know some idea of where you are going to recoup some of the money that we obviously need to scrape back from the Covid crisis?

**Supplementary Answer**

The simple answer to that Imogen is that we do not know the extent of the issue. Obviously we cannot if we do have a problem recovering CIL and S106 from developers, and there is no saying that we will, if we do it may be a deferral which will mean that we will have to fund that somewhat longer. Unfortunately, or fortunately depending on where you are standing, we decide to forward fund as much as we possibly can. So roads and that sort of thing we would like to try and get those in before the development. Of course that means that we have to borrow that money albeit at a decent rate until we get the payment from the developers.

Now if we find ourselves in the situation there may be some of the nice to do things that we have got in our Capital Programme, which enhances the ambiance and the culture of the Borough, which we may have to seriously think hard about. I would hope that we do not stop anything. We may just find ourselves in the situation where we have to delay some of the stuff in the programme.

**123.2 Angus Ross asked the Leader of the Council the following question:**

**Question**

Please can you let me know the status of the Local Plan?

## **Answer**

As you know the Core Strategy Local Plan and the Managing Development Delivery (MDD) Local Plan, alongside the joint minerals and waste focused local plans, form the statutory development plan for the Borough. Planning law requires that planning applications are determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. We need an up to date and fully approved Local Plan to ensure that we have a defence against speculative development. At the moment our position is that we do not know what the Covid crisis will have done to our 5-year land supply.

Both the Core Strategy and the MDD are working to manage development in ways which meet the objectives of the Government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). They are therefore broadly up-to-date.

Work continues on preparing new local plans. When completed, the Local Plan Update will replace both the Core Strategy and the MDD, and the Joint Central and East Berkshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan will replace the current joint minerals and waste plans.

The NPPF confirms that emerging plans are a material consideration and that weight may be given to relevant policies according to:

- a) the stage of preparation of the emerging plan;
- b) the extent to which there are unresolved objections to relevant policies; and
- c) the degree of consistency of the relevant policies in the emerging plan to the NPPF.

As you know we prepared a Local Plan update consultation. Responses were received from residents and other interested parties. The update was contingent on certain paradigms: the existing economic environments; the development of Grazeley would be infrastructure led with £1¼bn HIF bid for infrastructure; and no adverse consequence from the review of the AWE emergency plan action zone. The emergency plan action zone has been extended well into our Borough and encompasses what was included in the Plan as the Grazeley settlement. Notwithstanding Homes for England working with us for some considerable time and the Government's declaration of a garden settlement at Grazeley the HIF bid failed.

More importantly however the Coronavirus emergency has completely changed the economic environment. Because of the replies received and the changes in the paradigms we shall need to review our Plan update and hope to be in the condition to publish a revised Plan as soon as possible.

## **Supplementary Question**

Thank you for that detailed update of where we are Mr Chairman I think I was asking about really what the status of that Local Plan update is. I think you have mainly covered it but perhaps just to say what we should be seeing next.

## **Supplementary Answer**

There is a lot of work going on at the Council as to what we should do given the response to the consultation and we shall publish something, a revised plan, as soon as possible. We need to do so because we have already had threatening noises from speculative developers and I understand that several applications are being considered. So we need to put our defences up and the only absolute defence against speculative development is an up to date and fully developed Local Plan.

**123.3 UllaKarin Clark asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question:**

**Question**

Do you feel that the care homes in the Borough have done all they can to limit the spread of Coronavirus and is our statistical base now solid?

**Answer**

Our care homes have worked tirelessly through this extremely difficult time to help support their residents and I would like to voice my thanks to all of them.

Care homes in Wokingham are usually run by private or voluntary sector service providers. Private care homes are run for profit by private organisations and individuals. Voluntary sector homes are not-for-profit and are run by registered charities, sometimes religious organisations and housing associations.

There are 53 CQC registered care home settings within Wokingham; this is a broad definition and includes many different services i.e. older people care homes, residential and nursing, and learning disability.

Wokingham Borough Council has taken ground-breaking action to help protect its care homes during the Covid-19 crisis.

Last month the Borough Council took the unprecedented decision to go against national Government guidelines by refusing to take patients discharged from hospital into care homes unless it was certain they did not have coronavirus. At the same time, the Council with its partners in the health service, set up a 'task force' of specialists to work with care homes to make sure they were ready to cope with patients who had the virus and that their infection control procedures were of the highest standards. The 'task force' has now worked with 14 care homes in our Borough to make sure they can start to take hospital discharges again.

As with all care homes across the country, those in Wokingham have been coping with a very difficult situation. People have died of Covid-19 in our homes and our thoughts are with them, their loved ones and the staff who are the people who care for them.

In the first period of the pandemic we became very concerned that the situation in care homes was worsening so we lobbied our MPs and the Local Resilience Forum for increased testing of those discharged from hospital, for those in homes, the staff and for improved supplies of PPE. We increased our support to local care homes providing emergency supplies of PPE and forming a 'task force', which I mentioned before.

Despite this lobbying Government guidelines continued to allow the discharge of patients which is why we took the decision to stop discharges unless the patient has tested negative, is without symptoms or our 'task forc'e was certain the care home could cope with positive cases.

We now, as I said, have visited 14 care homes and they are at a place where we can take people safely into these homes. I would like to personally thank all the care home staff and management for the immense effort they have put in to keep people supported in the most difficult of situations.

We have also supported care homes in other ways:

- We have offered an improved funding deal for care homes who we contract to with the ability to get additional temporary funding;
- We have offered help with the supply of PPE. 231,000 pieces of PPE have been supplied to our care homes;
- We have offered regular advice and guidance. We have been ringing the management and staff regularly to provide support. Over 300 calls to registered care homes;
- We have tested staff with symptoms, more than 250 so far plus others who have self-referred themselves; and
- The offer of access to staff in an emergency and infection control hotline has been established.

**123.4 Guy Grandison asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:**

**Question**

How have Children's Services managed to continue to deliver services in these challenging times especially in respect to our most vulnerable families?

**Answer**

In response to Covid-19, Children's Social Care has adapted and amended how we deliver our services to ensure that both children and workers are safe and the risks are mitigated. Our changes are based on the Government's advice and guidance such as: social distancing, good hygiene and not undertaking unnecessary journeys. The changes to our practice and service delivery could be summarised as:

- Risk assessments and mitigation of risks;
- Visiting the families we are most worried about and having the correct Protective Equipment when necessary, such as masks and gloves;
- Adapting our offer and supporting families differently depending on their needs; and
- Of course we now have digital technology which has supported us in our engagement with families; and
- Also of course remote working.

We are focused on keeping children safe and keeping our staff safe as well as our statutory duties. This is, as you can imagine, a delicate balancing process.

Most workers are now working from home and this has been possible because of the new IT equipment we have. We have also changed the way we do recording so that we accurately capture how our visits are taking place; if it was by phone, video call or face to face.

All Child Protection visits in the Borough are ongoing and are face to face using all safety precautions as required. Child Protection Conferences and Looked After Reviews are taking place remotely via conference calls.

All 'Looked After Children' cases have been reviewed and where possible visit time frames amended; in line with the statutory requirement of each case. The availability of new apps

and software has supported the use of video calling to communicate with children regularly. In addition to this the Bridges Resource Centre is continuing to offer a residential respite service, although it has been slightly reduced.

All court applications for Public Law (where we need to protect a child) and Youth Justice are being completed remotely via video link. The number of contacts made to our 'front door' i.e. duty, triage and assessment has reduced and we are using some of the capacity created to support pressures and gaps in other teams and assist with visits.

Finally we are meeting weekly with the Berkshire West Safeguarding Children's Partnership, which includes Health and the Police, to identify and address any issues or themes as they arise.

### **Supplementary question**

It sounds like you are doing good work. In the question you mentioned technology but one part I did not catch you speaking about there in regard to schooling. So how has the virtual school been performing in this time period within the children in their cohort?

### **Supplementary Answer**

Students are provided with work packages and on-line learning materials and in addition our Looked After Children, as you know we are all in locum parentis as a Councillor i.e. Corporate Parents and for them we have provided on line encyclopaedia, and they also have 1:1 tutoring.

## **123.5 Graham Howe asked the Leader of the Council the following question:**

### **Question**

Whist there is much to congratulate the Officers and participating Members for their dedication and action during the Covid emergency, it has invoked much change in priorities, operations and outcomes.

Can the Leader outline what the Council has done well, not done well, that is within and outside the Council's control and as part of the answer, could the Leader outline lessons that have been learnt for the future operations of the Council?

### **Answer**

It is almost three months to the day that I was first notified of a Covid case in Wokingham Borough. It has been a long three months.

The Chief Executive, Directors and the Members of the Executive have been magnificent. All our Officers have been exemplary during this period and prepared to turn their hands to anything. The voluntary sector worked with our Officers to achieve the unachievable and I am hugely grateful to both. Residents have volunteered in huge numbers and largely espoused the conditions which have been forced upon them. There have been innumerable local volunteer groups supporting each other. Councillors from all parties have contributed massively to our efforts and suspended political activities although I know they are creeping back. A big thank you to you all.

The impact of Covid-19 on Council services has been very profound. It has affected all the aspects of the Borough Council and the Borough. We have focussed on the very immediate matters such as supporting care homes and working with our valuable partners on our community response. We have sought to deliver our universal services in the same

way as far as possible. We have redeployed staff extensively throughout the organisation to ensure we have staff in the right places and flexible arrangements to ensure we can easily change should that be required.

My Executive colleagues will all have covered in more detail our actions regarding care homes, our community response and Children's Services and my focus will be on our universal services and lessons learnt.

We have done all that we can to keep those services going that most affect, if not all of our residents eg. waste collection and recycling, and highways maintenance. We have not only achieved this in most services, we have also escalated improvement and repair work to the Borough's highways, taking advantage of the opportunity of far fewer cars on the network. This has included 'hard to do' works including Showcase Roundabout. Works have started on a programme of seventeen accelerated carriageway resurfacing schemes on 6th April 2020 and should be completed by mid-June. At the same time we quickly suspended civil parking enforcement.

We decided to continue to collect garden waste, and as a result, whilst the Re3 Partnership was forced to close the household waste recycling centres, which have now re-opened, we have not seen exceptional increases in fly-tipping that have been reported elsewhere in the country. Our Localities Enforcement Team have continued working and dealing with a full range of issues.

We have kept our country parks open, unlike our neighbours, allowing residents to enjoy open space and whilst we have had to close the car parks for the early weeks of the emergency, we have now reopened them and provided additional staff resources to ensure that social distancing is maintained.

Despite most of our staff working from home we have managed to maintain a full front-line service to residents contacting the Borough through our Customer Delivery service, with staff dealing with online and telephone requests. We are largely paperless and can access the information we need. We have only stopped those services such as weddings, citizenship ceremonies and birth registrations where the Government has requested us to do so.

We acted fast to provide safe emergency accommodation for homeless households, rough sleepers, children in care and repatriated residents as well as temporary accommodation for key workers. We have liaised with local bus operators to ensure that the much reduced levels of service still meet the essential needs of residents and key workers.

Whilst we have had to close our libraries in line with Government restrictions we have expanded and promoted our range of online services to include electronic books and magazines, added free music streaming and a whole series of online virtual events. A large proportion of the library staff were rapidly redeployed to provide additional assistance to the most vulnerable.

Using staff redeployed from services which have had to scale down this has meant that funding crucial for their survival has been allocated quickly and efficiently.

Lessons learnt for future operations. Fundamentally we have learnt that our resilience and business continuity plans are sound, and have worked well. The Council's investment in

digital technology to enable our staff to work from home has proved its worth beyond doubt.

We have also learnt that we are able to flex and adapt fast and that our vital relationships with key contractors, such as our waste and highways contractors, are strong and have enabled us to keep delivering when some other authorities have struggled or stopped.

Our experience of social distancing will be built into all future arrangements including reception points and libraries when they reopen.

We hope to continue to build on and expand our range of online and telephone assisted services and continue to offer organised telephone/video appointments going forward for the convenience of our residents and customers.

In the future we will develop our relationships with local businesses further particularly regarding promoting and accessing grants, and assisting with health checks, and look to see how we can build on any benefits/opportunities around climate emergency.

Similarly the fantastic work that we have built with the voluntary and community sector will be the foundation of our future relationship. At the same time because our contact with vulnerable people in the Borough has been extensive, using many extra staff, we now know much about the community which can be fed into our future thinking about service provision.

As we are still very much in the midst of our response, we are not in a position to have identified all the lessons; we will do this in the coming weeks and months.

### **Supplementary Question**

Thanks for that answer which covers a great breadth of work done by the Council and it is, as you say, early days and very much a work in progress to make change. As unlocking and understanding the new norm evolves it would be easy to slip back into the old ways and lose momentum in making improvements for all Wokingham Borough's residents. What do you think we should be putting in place to avoid any such slippage?

### **Supplementary Answer**

This Administration has been in post for just 12 months and a key ambition was to build morale within the Council staff and create a can-do attitude where staff are encouraged to make decisions and take risks, learn from mistakes and be open about them. Our response to Coronavirus has been just that. Officers at all levels took decisions quickly and courageously. They did and are continuing to do a magnificent job.

Another key ambition was to focus on serving our residents and I am sure that everybody will agree that the Borough was an exemplary. We will not go back to our old ways we will build a Council where Officers are proud to serve our residents who in turn are proud of their Borough Council.

I am pleased to announce that we have created a new post, with a Director Keeley Clements, to focus on our resident services and localities and Keeley started this week.

Another key ambition was to create a new environment to work with our voluntary sector partners and so during the next few months we will be working hard as our current level of support diminishes to ensure that the co-operation achieved continues.

But it does not end there we have been working well with our excellent GPs, throughout the Borough, and NHS partners with whom we wish to extend this relationship.

Lastly, but not least, we need to build on the excellent relationships we have enjoyed with the Police and other blue light services.

**123.6 Dianne King asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question:**

**Question**

Please could you give us an update on Wokingham's community response to Covid-19?

**Answer**

I can confidently say that I have been amazed and humbled by the speed and quality of the response the Council and its community partners have delivered at this difficult time. It is a real credit to Wokingham that we have been able to support our vulnerable so well and I would like to thank every single person who has been involved.

The Wokingham Borough Community Response (WBCR) provides a single point of contact for residents to access support during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Citizens Advice Wokingham provides a 'One Front Door' service for residents. Wokingham Borough Council staff and Citizens Advice staff and volunteers, take phone calls and respond to emails requesting support. They work together to assess residents' needs, provide advice and get people support from the right scheme and directing them to services such as:

- the Link Visiting Scheme's Talking Buddies programme for people feeling isolated and lonely;
- the Wokingham Foodbank for those struggling to access food;
- Wokingham Volunteer Centre have supported collecting and delivering pharmacy prescriptions as well as helping to track down other volunteers; and
- First Days Children's Charity has supported the Food Hub to deliver food parcels across the Borough.

Wokingham Volunteer Centre and The Link have supported the recruitment of 600 additional volunteers. AgeUK has expanded their Home from Hospital Service to provide additional support.

Now to give you the latest up to date figures, because obviously the figures which are in the press pack are going to be two weeks out of date. So far we have helped:

- 1,922 households;
- Delivered nearly 3,700 food parcels to 872 households;
- 677 people aged 70 or plus have received food parcels;
- 438 households have received regular deliveries;
- Dealt with 744 prescription referrals;
- Called almost 7,500 people basically on a regular basis to check that they are ok.
- Those people who needed welfare support and 45 people supported at home on the Home to Hospital Scheme.

You find out what a community is all about basically when it is an issue like this and I know from comments I have had from other people, outside of this Borough, what we have here is something we should all be very proud of.

### **Supplementary Question**

I would like to echo your thanks to all those amazing organisations and individuals that have gone out of their way to help in this very difficult situation. Whilst the situation continues are there plans going forward on how we can deal with this?

### **Supplementary Answer**

We have been working on a plan for probably the last month now in conjunction with our voluntary sector partners to extend this support towards the end of the year because the reality is that some people are going to need it. Trying to encourage people where possible to seek other routes but providing support for those who cannot find it anywhere else. We have done the hard part and we are not going to let these people down now.

Aside from that just before Covid, in the pre-Covid days, we had spent a lot of time trying to work with the voluntary sector to work towards a plan where we could work together more effectively going forward. Now this scheme has shown how well we can work together when we have a common purpose at heart. So discussions are going on longer term about how to button the voluntary sector in wherever possible to our Voluntary Care Strategy and to try and continue this level of co-operation going forwards.

### **123.7 Abdul Loyes had asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question but due to his inability to attend the meeting a written response was provided:**

#### **Question**

It would appear on the face of it, the incidents of deaths in care homes from Covid-19 is higher in Wokingham than our neighbouring authorities. Can you please confirm if this is the case and if so, why?

#### **Answer**

Any local death is an extremely important issue for Wokingham Borough Council.

Our Council staff have been working hard to support local care homes during the pandemic since March and I have outlined all this support in the previous/prior answer I have given.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) publishes data on Covid-19 related deaths within all care homes across the country.

This ONS data shows that between the 1st January and 1st May 2020, 52 (Covid-19 related) deaths occurred within Wokingham care homes. This appears the second highest number of Covid-19 deaths reported among boroughs in Berkshire

However, the public are advised to take extra caution when comparing Covid-19 deaths between neighbouring authorities. This is because different Boroughs have different population sizes, with different age structures and some with more elderly residents than others.

Therefore, in order to make fairer comparisons, it is crucial that we standardise the ONS data for the number of residents, their ages, their vulnerabilities, and the number of care homes across each borough. We are publishing this data now on our website.

Here are three separate publications; each of which use a standardised approach to comparing deaths between Wokingham and neighbouring boroughs:

- Excess Mortality for all causes of deaths in Wokingham residents (ONS data) 1<sup>st</sup> January to 1<sup>st</sup> May:
  - The ONS publish weekly updates on all deaths caused by Covid-19/and or other causes ('all cause' mortality);
  - The UK's Chief Medical Officer has recommended this particular publication as the best approach for comparing the impact of Covid-19 between boroughs;
  - The data shows that excess Wokingham deaths are occurring at a similar rate to neighbouring boroughs in Berkshire.
- Age standardised mortality rates: 1<sup>st</sup> March to 17<sup>th</sup> April:
  - In addition, the ONS have published comparable Covid-19 death rates which take into account different age structures between boroughs;
  - All things being equal, Wokingham reported a lower Covid-19 death rate (32 deaths per 100,000 residents) compared to most neighbouring boroughs. Wokingham also reported a lower Covid-19 death rate than the national average (37 deaths per 100,000).
- Comparing deaths by total number of care homes:
  - Another way to make fairer comparisons is to consider the differing sizes of each care home population; because some boroughs have more care home residents than others;
  - Wokingham has a high number of care homes in Berkshire:
    - There are 53 care homes in Wokingham registered with the CQC;
    - By comparison, there are 14 care homes in Bracknell.
  - If we compare rates of care home deaths as a proportion of the total care homes within each borough, Wokingham reports the third-lowest Covid-19 death rate between boroughs in Berkshire. This ranges between 29 and 142 deaths per 100 care homes with Wokingham at 98.

As with care homes across the country, those in Wokingham Borough have been coping with a very difficult situation during this crisis. People have died of Covid-19 in our homes and our thoughts are with them, their loved ones and the staff who are care for them. We have and continue to lobby for solutions and offer all the support we can to our care homes.

**123.8 Rachel Shepherd-DuBey asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:**

**Question**

How will you maintain social distancing with probable increased patronage if we reopen car parks at country parks?

**Answer**

As you know the car parks have been open now for a good number of days and you have asked specifically about the social distancing measures.

The Council actually took a full risk assessment in advance of reopening the car parks at the country parks and these have focussed mainly on the social distancing to protect the safety of our residents and our staff. Measures to secure this include: only a partial opening of all car parks at our main sites to keep visitor numbers to a manageable level; a combination of social distancing marshals patrolling these parks; give way signage at pinch points; keep left posters on bridges; and one way routes on narrow paths and boardwalks. Where social distancing cannot be maintained facilities such as the park toilets will remain closed.

We feel confident that these measures will be sufficient to maintain social distancing but we have to rely on our residents to ensure that they adhere to the guidelines when they visit the country parks to enable the car parks to remain open. I must say and admit that our residents behave very responsibly to all this response and this will be kept under constant review to ensure that safety of staff and residents is maintained at all times and contingencies are in place to work with the Police, Highways and our parking partner NSL as and when required.

Can I take this opportunity to thank all our Officers and our staff for ensuring the safety of our residents.

**Supplementary Question**

If you have not been to Dinton lately you will realise that people are not doing social distancing properly. They do not seem to be doing that and I have not seen anybody actually telling people to split up. There are lots of people having picnics together and unless they have some very interesting family groups they seem to be teenagers walking together, hand in hand, things like this. I do not they are actually married to each other or living with each other. If they are it is a little bit of a strange situation.

So what are we actually doing about this?

**Supplementary Answer**

I visited the park myself and I also keep in constant touch with the staff and the management there. They have reported no misbehaving of our residents and I am confident and really pleased that everybody is behaving themselves. Like you say if you see couples holding hands we do not know if they are married or not or whether they are living together.

**Additional Question**

At 16 I doubt they are married besides which I walk in Dinton Pastures every day with my dog and I have seen a lot of people not doing that so it would be nice to have more people actually telling people. Saying can you separate a little bit please like that.

### **Additional Answer**

Our staff have been very, very, good at that and if they see anything that is untoward they will take action and we have additional marshals on site on busy days and social distancing is being practised and respected as far as I am concerned. I do take note of what you say Rachelle and will raise it with the management at Dinton Pastures to make sure that we do respect all this.

### **123.9 Andrew Mickleburgh asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:**

#### **Question**

I have heard some very positive feedback from parents about the help provided by schools in our Borough to support continued studies during the lockdown. However during lockdown, inevitably for multiple reasons, potentially quite large numbers of pupils will have fallen behind their peers in terms of learning. In some cases this gap is likely to be significant, with the potential for a long-term negative impact in term of learning and self-confidence. Is WBC planning to offer any targeted support to schools that could help pupils who have fallen behind their peers during lockdown to quickly catch up again?

#### **Answer**

It is important to remember that the schools have been open for key workers' children and for vulnerable children. For those children studying at home our Officers have worked very closely with the schools sharing on-line resources for home learning.

Our Officers are currently working with schools through a range of meetings and round table discussions on how we best can help to school them and initial advice, as you know, is that the schools should open slowly and in a controlled way starting with reception, Year 1 and Year 6. This depends on the five tests being met to reduce the national alert level to 3, to provide a greater focus on pastoral support that enables pupils to re-engage with the process of class based learning. This means that the teachers will have time to assess the level of the impact that home learning will have had on each individual pupil, which by its very nature will be different depending on the child's circumstances and they will then have to adapt the learning curriculum so that the children can get back to the way they were before the lock-down happened.

Where there is a need for specific targeted responses to particular schools or individual students, Children's Services will be working again with the schools, and other services, to help the Heads and teachers to identify the best way to meet the individual child's needs.

#### **Supplementary Comment**

I do not have a question but I would like to say that I, and many parents and pupils, are very grateful for this much needed support so thank you very much.

### **123.10 Sarah Kerr asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:**

#### **Question**

Like many parents right now, I am feeling quite nervous about the prospect of sending my young children back to school. Socially distancing children is not easy, and many of us know from experience how easy it is for various illnesses to get transmitted. Many parents will not feel confident yet that the school environment is safe for them, their family and school staff. How is WBC planning to approach this issue?

## **Answer**

Firstly I would like to say that every school will do a risk assessment and they will decide whether they are ready to open or not. As you are aware no school is being forced to open; it is up to the individual school to decide if they are going to open and for them to arrange the schooling for the individual students. Children's Services are in daily contact with the headteachers and are working with them on developing a response to ensure that the emerging guidance is implemented in advance of opening the school.

The latest scientific advice from Government is that children of all ages have less severe symptoms than adults if they should contract the virus and there is a great deal of confidence that younger children are less likely to become unwell if infected with the virus. However it is up to the parents if they want to send their children back to school or not and I think that is the correct way of doing it. If a parent is worried and does not feel confident then they can keep their children at home.

We will be working with schools to manage limited attendance and will be creating small teaching groups of no more than 15 students so that they can maintain strict social distancing. That means that we will have, for example, staggered drop off and pick ups, lunch and break times will be different so that children in different teaching groups will not mix.

We will also be supporting schools to implement additional protective measures. We will be helping them with cleaning materials and equipment necessary.  
*(At this point in the meeting the connection with Councillor Clark was lost)*

## **Supplementary question**

I did not hear all of the answer. I heard a lot about whether it is safe or not for children to go back. My concern is not just about the virus but about the mental health of our children. What I specifically did not catch anything of was how families who choose not to send their children back to school - what support is going to be there? I appreciate that a lot of that comes from the schools but I am assuming that the Council is going to be supporting schools to not only look after and teach the children that are going back into school but providing support to those families that have chosen to stay at home as well. I couldn't hear any of that I am afraid.

## **Supplementary Answer provided by the Leader of Council**

Wokingham Borough Council's policy on schools is that we have very competent teachers. We have very competent governors and our role is to support them in doing their job. We are not going to encourage or penalise parents for putting their children in school and we will support them as well. So in the context of what we can do we will support the schools in the children being at school, or the children not being at school, and we have a massive job which is identifying the children who may or may not be falling behind to bring them up to scratch.

## **Supplementary Answer provided at the end of the meeting by Councillor Clark**

We will continue to work with the headteachers to ensure that those children are being given a good education although they are staying at home. So they are not going to be forgotten about and as I said before it is a parental choice whether they are going to send the children to school or not and there will be no penalty if they decide to keep them at home. So I think we have to be sure that there is a good risk assessment at the school but if parents still do not want to send their children it is their decision. It is also the school's

decision whether they are going to open or not so whether parents decide not to go, or if schools decide not to open, the Council will still be working with the school to ensure that the children are receiving a good education.

**123.11 Tahir Maher asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question:**

**Question**

Unfortunately, the proposed Revenue outturn for 2019/20 will be affected due to the current pandemic. The Council has had time to assess the impact from Covid-19 on the revenue outturn for 2019/20, consequently, what is the forecast and possible variance from the original outturn for 2019/20?

**Answer**

The 2019/20 outturn report has presented already in the accounts the impact on the Council's accounts of the Covid-19 pandemic for that financial year. The direct costs in 19/20 were £104k, but these were offset by the first tranche of Government funding from the Government which was received before the year end. Indirect costs were also absorbed by the services as these were minimal because we were very early into it. Mainly in the last week of March and these figures are also in the outturn figures already; which I will be reporting on tonight.

The main impact on the Council will be in the current financial year, which is 2020/21. The grant funding, less that used in 19/20, has been carried forward into the current year; even with this and the second allocation from central Government, the Council will still face pressure on its 20/21 budgets as a result of the response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Although our financial management arrangements remain sound we have unprecedented challenges as a result of this crisis and therefore we must continue to ensure our resources are targeted at those most in need in the community.

**Supplementary Question**

I think it has been partly answered but I will just highlight it again. It is just really looking at the forecast for 20/21 and the likely variance again budget. Is there anything to be really cautious about there that you may have foreseen now although I know it is a bit early?

**Supplementary Answer**

We feel we are on top of the numbers Tahir and they are not very appetising when you see how much money we are spending to support residents, to support care homes, but what we are doing we work on a regular basis with the Leaders of the other parties, your Leader as well, and we report on the financials on a weekly basis. Once we get to the first outturn of this year we will hopefully be in the position that we will be able to give a clearer picture as to what it is going to look like going forward.

**123.12 Pauline Helliar-Symons asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:**

**Question**

Can you tell me how Wokingham Borough Council has managed to maintain 100% waste collection when so many others did not?

## **Answer**

This has been a real testament to the strength of our partnership working. The Wokingham Borough Council waste collection service is delivered by, as you know, Veolia who have worked with the Council throughout the crisis in an adaptable, flexible and pragmatic way to ensure that the best possible service is delivered to our residents, whilst following Government guidelines to ensure the safety of the workforce and the public.

A range of alternative operational practices have been implemented by Veolia to reduce staff contact and secure social distancing at the same time. Personal Protective Equipment and testing have been made available to Veolia's staff. Where staff have self-isolated, additional agency staff have been employed to maintain that 100% collections within the Borough that you mentioned.

I would like to thank Veolia for their magnificent efforts which epitomises our partnership working with them since 2012. I would also like to thank our Customer Delivery Team and the Community Transport Unit who worked together to continue the deliveries of blue bags and garden waste sacks to residents following the closure of the Council's libraries and community hubs.

We will continue to do our utmost to support our service and we are aware of how much residents appreciate the service being provided during these very difficult times. We have had quite a lot of positive feedback from many residents appreciating our continued service to maintain the 100% waste collection and long may that continue.

## **Supplementary Question**

Please will you ensure the front line workers know how much we Councillors and residents appreciate what they are doing?

## **Supplementary Answer**

I will do Pauline and I share your support there and we will all do our best to pass our thanks and our support to our contractors and their staff.

## **124. OFFICER RESPONSE TO ADOPTION OF ESTATE INFRASTRUCTURE REVIEW**

The Executive considered a report setting out the Officer response to the Adoption of Estate Infrastructure Review which was undertaken by an Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group.

Councillor Andy Croy, the Chairman of the Task and Finish Group, introduced the report and advised that the review was carried out because residents had informed the Council that the adoption of new estate infrastructure i.e. highways, open spaces etc had often not proceeded as they had hoped and this had often lead to a lot of distress. The purpose of the Task and Finish Group was therefore to look at the issues surrounding adoption and to see if recommendations could be made to the Executive which would allow for a smoother and more transparent adoption process. The aim was for the Borough, and particularly affected residents, to be provided with better quality infrastructure more quickly.

The Leader of Council went through the recommendations from the Task and Finish Group and the Officers' responses related to each was noted.

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, Councillor Helliars-Symons, stated that she had found the report to be extremely balanced and welcomed the

Officer input. She also voiced her support for all the recommendations within the report and hoped that the Executive would accept them.

**RESOLVED:** That the Officers' responses to the Task and Finish Group's review contained within the report be approved.

## **125. REVENUE MONITORING 2019/20 - OUTTURN**

The Executive considered a report setting out the Revenue budget outturn for the 2019/20 financial year.

During his introduction the Executive Member for Finance and Housing advised the meeting that although the budget showed a variance of just under £500k this represented a significant improvement on the position forecast at the mid-year point which was closer to £1m. Councillor Kaiser highlighted that this movement had been as a result of the continued work that had been undertaken by the Improvement Boards in both Adult's and Children's Services and had been achieved even though an overspend was showing in Children's Services of £2m. Councillor Kaiser praised the Officers for all their hard work.

Councillor Kaiser also drew the Executive's attention to the recommendations within the report and the fact that from a budget of £124.3m, £124.7m had been spent, which was less than a third of a percent increase, which he felt was very impressive.

Councillor Kaiser also highlighted that the general fund balance at year end was £9.1m which had improved by £0.3m from last year. This represented a prudent level which was above the CIPFA recommendation for the minimum reserves.

Members were advised that with regard to the 2020/2021 Revenue budget it was currently difficult to plan due to the considerable impact of Covid-19 and further information would be provided at a future meeting.

**RESOLVED** that:

- 1) the outturn position of the revenue budget and the level of balances in respect of the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account, Schools Block and the Authority's investment portfolio be noted;
- 2) the General Fund carry forward requests of £2,734,399, as set out in Appendix B to the report, be agreed;
- 3) the significant reduction in the overspend on the general fund revenue account achieved since the last report be noted; substantially this is a result of the continuous improvement work in the Adults Social Care and Customer and Localities directorates.

## **126. CAPITAL OUTTURN 2019/2020**

The Executive considered a report setting out the outturn for the 2019/20 Capital budget.

The Executive Member for Finance and Housing informed Members that 74% of the Capital budget had been spent during the 2019/20 financial year which was a slight increase on last year's position. It was acknowledged that for a number of reasons, eg delays and reliance on third parties etc, it was difficult to spend 100% of the budget and deliver the Capital programme on time.

Councillor Kaiser reported that during 2019/20 the Council had delivered more capital investment than in any other year and had spent £171.3m; which was an increase of £39m on that spent during the previous financial year. This represented an increase of 30% year on year. Forecasts for the 2020/21 financial year had predicted a significant increase on that figure but that would, of course, be dependent on the emerging impact of Covid-19.

**RESOLVED** that:

- 1) the Quarter 4 adjustments to the capital programme be noted being the release of budgets in 2020/21, into the 2019/20 capital programme, to cover projects expenditure acceleration ahead of the original profile for:-  
  
£198k Winnersh Triangle Parkway  
£180k Dinton Activity Centre
- 2) it be noted that the funding of the Foundry (Pupil Referral Unit) will be utilising S106 and CIL contributions up to the value of £892k originally allocated to general Special Education Needs (SEN) projects;
- 3) the 2019/2020 Capital Outturn, as set out in Appendix A to the report, be noted;
- 4) the re-profiling of budgets into future financial years, as set out in Appendix B to the report, be approved.

**127. TRANSFER OF LAND TO THE COUNCIL FOR COPPID BEECH PARK AND RIDE**

The Executive considered a report in relation to the transfer of land to the Council to facilitate the Coppid Beech Park and Ride.

The Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement advised the meeting that the report only related to the transfer of land for the Coppid Beech Park and Ride as the decision as to whether or not to have a park and ride had previously been agreed by the Executive. It was noted that part of the S106 agreement with the landowner related to the transfer of land to the Council to create the Park and Ride.

**RESOLVED:** That it be agreed to procure provision of the Coppid Beech Park and Ride site. This will enable the transfer of land from the land owner in accordance with the Outline Application s106 agreement in relation to development at land at Keephatch Beech, Wokingham.

**128. SMALL BUSINESS DISCRETIONARY PAYMENT**

*(Councillors Munro and Murray declared prejudicial interests in this item)*

The Executive considered a report setting out a proposed Policy for the provision of Small Business Discretionary Payments.

The Executive Member for Finance and Housing advised the meeting that in response to the Covid-19 pandemic the Government had announced the provision of additional business rate support to some small businesses. This related mainly to those businesses with fixed property related costs which had not been eligible for other grant schemes that

were in place. The Government had recognised that economic need varied across the country so although they had set some national criteria for the fund they were allowing local authorities to determine which cases to provide support to within those criteria. The Government had also made it clear that local authorities needed to distribute the funding at the earliest opportunity which was why this item was deemed as urgent and was therefore being considered at this meeting.

The original guidance issued by the Government had since been superseded by a more detailed second version which was received after the agenda was published. It was also likely that further changes to the guidance would be received. Because of this Councillor Kaiser informed the meeting that he was proposing two amendments to the Policy and an additional recommendation as set out below:

- As stated in the policy discretionary grants were not subject to any formal statutory appeals process and there were no rights of appeal. However at the bottom of page 6 of the Policy an appeal process was actually mentioned. It was therefore proposed to amend this paragraph to state that there was no appeals process;
- As the Government guidance had been updated on a number of occasions, and it was likely to be further amended in the future, it was also put forward that an additional recommendation delegating authority to the Deputy Chief Executive, in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance and Housing, to make minor amendments to the Policy as a result of any further Government guidance;
- The latest version of the guidance was received over the weekend and this stated that people who had claimed as part of the self-employed income support scheme could now also apply for a discretionary grant and therefore there was also a need to reflect this change in the Policy.

Councillor Kaiser highlighted that the Council's discretion mainly related to the amount it wished to award to businesses. As the Council had only been awarded £1.1m to cover these payments, and as a way of making the money go further, it had been decided to award a number of smaller grants i.e. £3k and £5k which would benefit smaller businesses eg dog groomers, people who work from home as well as grants of £10k and £25k.

Councillor Haitham Taylor commended the Council for getting the money out so promptly to businesses already as it was a real lifeline for many. She wanted to ensure that as much as possible would be done to publicise the fact that small businesses could apply for these grants.

**RESOLVED** that:

- 1) Wokingham Borough Council's Discretionary Grants Policy, relating to the Covid 19 pandemic as set out in Appendix 1 of the report, and as amended at the meeting be approved;
- 2) the Deputy Chief Executive be delegated authority, in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance and Housing, to make minor amendments to the Policy as the result of any further Government guidance.