



# WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

A Meeting of the **EXECUTIVE** will be held virtually on  
**THURSDAY 24 SEPTEMBER 2020 AT 7.00 PM**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Susan Parsonage', with a long, sweeping tail.

Susan Parsonage  
Chief Executive  
Published on 16 September 2020

**Note:** The Council has made arrangements under the Coronavirus Act 2020 to hold this meeting virtually via Microsoft Teams. The meeting can be watched live using the following link: <https://youtu.be/lwiYG3c6nyY>

This meeting will be filmed for inclusion on the Council's website.

Please note that other people may film, record, tweet or blog from this meeting. The use of these images or recordings is not under the Council's control.



# WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

## Our Vision

***A great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business***

### Enriching Lives

- Champion outstanding education and enable our children and young people to achieve their full potential, regardless of their background.
- Support our residents to lead happy, healthy lives and provide access to good leisure facilities to complement an active lifestyle.
- Engage and involve our communities through arts and culture and create a sense of identity which people feel part of.
- Support growth in our local economy and help to build business.

### Safe, Strong, Communities

- Protect and safeguard our children, young and vulnerable people.
- Offer quality care and support, at the right time, to prevent the need for long term care.
- Nurture communities and help them to thrive.
- Ensure our borough and communities remain safe for all.

### A Clean and Green Borough

- Do all we can to become carbon neutral and sustainable for the future.
- Protect our borough, keep it clean and enhance our green areas.
- Reduce our waste, improve biodiversity and increase recycling.
- Connect our parks and open spaces with green cycleways.

### Right Homes, Right Places

- Offer quality, affordable, sustainable homes fit for the future.
- Build our fair share of housing with the right infrastructure to support and enable our borough to grow.
- Protect our unique places and preserve our natural environment.
- Help with your housing needs and support people to live independently in their own homes.

### Keeping the Borough Moving

- Maintain and improve our roads, footpaths and cycleways.
- Tackle traffic congestion, minimise delays and disruptions.
- Enable safe and sustainable travel around the borough with good transport infrastructure.
- Promote healthy alternative travel options and support our partners to offer affordable, accessible public transport with good network links.

### Changing the Way We Work for You

- Be relentlessly customer focussed.
- Work with our partners to provide efficient, effective, joined up services which are focussed around you.
- Communicate better with you, owning issues, updating on progress and responding appropriately as well as promoting what is happening in our Borough.
- Drive innovative digital ways of working that will connect our communities, businesses and customers to our services in a way that suits their needs.

## MEMBERSHIP OF THE EXECUTIVE

John Halsall	Leader of the Council
John Kaiser	Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Finance and Housing
Parry Bath	Environment and Leisure
UllaKarin Clark	Children's Services
Charlotte Haitham Taylor	Regeneration
Pauline Jorgensen	Highways and Transport
Charles Margetts	Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services
Stuart Munro	Business and Economic Development
Gregor Murray	Resident Services, Communications and Emissions
Wayne Smith	Planning and Enforcement

ITEM NO.	WARD	SUBJECT	PAGE NO.
19.		<b>APOLOGIES</b> To receive any apologies for absence	
20.		<b>MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS</b> To confirm the Minutes of the Executive Meeting held on 30 July 2020 and the Extraordinary Executive Meeting held on 11 September 2020.	7 - 42
21.		<b>DECLARATION OF INTEREST</b> To receive any declarations of interest	
22.		<b>PUBLIC QUESTION TIME</b> To answer any public questions  A period of 30 minutes will be allowed for members of the public to ask questions submitted under notice.  The Council welcomes questions from members of the public about the work of the Executive  Subject to meeting certain timescales, questions can relate to general issues concerned with the work of the Council or an item which is on the Agenda for this meeting. For full details of the procedure for submitting questions please contact the Democratic Services Section on the numbers given below or go to <a href="http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/publicquestions">www.wokingham.gov.uk/publicquestions</a>	
22.1		Jennifer Lissaman has asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:  <b>Question</b> I am asking this question on behalf of the Wokingham Waterside Centre (WWC) Board of which I am a member.	

Since April this year there has been tremendous use of the beautiful open space between WWC and Thames Valley Park Nature Reserve, the majority of people spending the whole day there and sometimes overnight as well. Soon, the Park and Ride, to the rear of WWC will be open.

As agreed with this Council earlier this year WWC has one toilet on the outside of the building for use only with a RADAR key. The outcome of this is, unfortunately, that people are using land adjacent to the campsite at WWC, and possibly the Nature Reserve, to relieve themselves. WWC trustees/board members find this unacceptable and ask that you find a way to provide properly working public toilets in a location appropriate to this sensitive location by the River Thames National Path.

22.2 None Specific

Arya Babollah has asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

**Question**

Knowing what you have said about Black Lives Matter, what were you thinking when you tried to commandeer a Black Lives Matter banner for your photo ops at the BLM protest against for what you said and stand for in Elms Field in August?

22.3 None Specific

Tracey Stone has asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

**Question**

You have made statements on national television and made postings on your Facebook page which could appear racist and has spread fear, alarm and distress to many people of all ethnicities, but particularly black residents, living in Wokingham and Districts. As the leader of a public body, why did you do this?

23.

**MEMBER QUESTION TIME**

To answer any member questions

A period of 20 minutes will be allowed for Members to ask questions submitted under Notice

Any questions not dealt with within the allotted time will be dealt with in a written reply

23.1 None Specific

Gary Cowan has asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question:

**Question**

The Government has introduced new Regulations some of which came into force on 22 July. One in particular gives CIL charging authorities a discretion for a limited time to defer CIL payments, to dis-apply late payment interest and surcharge payments; and to credit interest already charged to developers.

What impact will this have on existing planning applications along with the Councils ability to deliver on infrastructure and climate emergency programs?

23.2 None Specific

Andrew Mickleburgh has asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

**Question**

Individuals and families living in poverty are not identified as one of the nine protected characteristics under the Equalities Act of 2010. However, Council decisions and actions often impact on individuals and families – frequently offering vital practical support, but sometimes in ways that could potentially cause harms and unintended consequences. Is there a process, perhaps something similar to the our Borough Equalities Impact Assessments, that WBC can apply to ensure that impacts of WBC policy proposals and actions on the poorest in our community will be explicitly considered, documented and given a significant weighting in the policy making process?

23.3 None Specific

Prue Bray has asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question:

**Question**

The ban on private landlords evicting tenants facing financial hardship because of the pandemic is likely to come to an end soon. Has WBC done any modelling of what the impact would be in terms of numbers of people the Borough would need to re-home in order to fulfil our statutory requirements to the homeless?

23.4 None Specific

Lindsay Ferris has asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question:

**Question**

Can you advise what the Reserves of the Council are at this time (i.e. week commencing 21<sup>st</sup> September 2020)?

23.5 None Specific Sarah Kerr has asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question:

**Question**

There still appears to be a lack of clarity and commitment from the Government to long-term funding for Council Covid-related expenditures. Some of these vital activities that the Council has funded from its own resources are particularly important for less economically well-off members of our Borough. Does the Council share this concern and if so, what practical actions can be taken to address this issue and particularly to avoid cuts that could disproportionately harm the poorest, forced upon the Council by insufficient Government support?

**Matters for Consideration**

24.	None Specific	<b>SUBSTANCE MISUSE SERVICE</b>	<b>43 - 52</b>
25.	Winnersh	<b>WOKINGHAM SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS SCHOOL</b>	<b>53 - 72</b>
26.	None Specific	<b>PROCUREMENT OF COMMERCIAL PROPERTY OWNER'S INSURANCE COVER</b>	<b>73 - 80</b>
27.	None Specific	<b>HELP TO HEAT AND ECO SCHEME</b>	<b>81 - 92</b>

A decision sheet will be available for inspection at the Council's offices (in Democratic Services and the General Office) and on the web site no later than two working days after the meeting.

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**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF  
THE EXECUTIVE  
HELD ON 30 JULY 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, Stuart Munro, Gregor Murray and Wayne Smith

**Other Councillors Present**

Chris Bowring  
Gary Cowan  
Andy Croy  
Michael Firmager  
Paul Fishwick  
Maria Gee  
David Hare  
Clive Jones  
Sarah Kerr  
Andrew Mickleburgh  
Imogen Shepherd-DuBey  
Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey  
Bill Soane

**1. APOLOGIES**

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillor Charles Margetts.

**2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 28 May 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and will be signed by the Leader of Council at a later date.

**3. DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

Councillor UllaKarin Clark declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 6, Shareholders' Report, by virtue of the fact she was an unpaid Non-Executive Director of Loddon Homes Ltd. Councillor Clark remained in the meeting during discussions and voted on the matter.

Councillors John Halsall, Stuart Munro and Wayne Smith declared personal interests in Agenda Item 6, Shareholders' Report, by virtue of the fact that they were unpaid Non-Executive Directors of WBC (Holdings) Ltd. Councillors Halsall, Munro and Smith remained in the meeting during discussions and voted on the matter.

Councillor John Kaiser declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 6, Shareholders' Report, by virtue of the fact he was an unpaid Non-Executive Director of Wokingham Housing Ltd and Berry Brook Homes Ltd. Councillor Kaiser remained in the meeting during discussions and voted on the matter.

**4. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

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

**4.1 Philip Challis had asked the Leader of the Council the following question but as he was unable to attend the meeting a written response was provided:**

**Question**

Would you agree that Taylor Wimpey have done a good job in creating the Loddon Countryside Amenity Area adjacent to Loddon Park (Sandford Farm) development, including a path which extends right up to an old bridge over the River Loddon which for safety reasons is closed off. Would you further agree with residents' disappointment that despite £250,000 funding from Taylor Wimpey and the willingness of Sustrans to provide further funding that the Council have failed to upgrade this bridge over the Loddon and provide the envisaged good links into the wider network of footpaths and provide a pedestrian/cycle link to Twyford. Would he explore the possibility of completing the reinstatement of this bridge given the current emphasis the Government are placing on walking and cycling.

**Answer**

The benefits of active travel (by bike or foot) have been integral to our plans to manage the impact of growth in Wokingham for many years and our policies, decisions and capital investment schemes have an enabling impact on this objective. More specifically the cycleway and greenways projects are part of a joined up strategy to enable active travel connectivity between our many settlements. Climate change and Covid 19 emphasise the importance of these initiatives for the environment, health and wellbeing, show that we have been a forward thinking authority in this area.

The Country Park at Sandford Farm will provide an enjoyable open space for local residents on completion of the snagging items identified by Officers at WBC. Taylor Wimpey tell us that they will complete the outstanding remedial works this month and Officers hope to carry out a final inspection before July.

There are three bridges at Sandford Farm, one of which being the Bailey bridge referred to, currently in the ownership of Summerleaze and Taylor Wimpey. The bridge is closed to public access as on investigation it was found to need replacement. As part of their planning commitments for Sandford Farm, Taylor Wimpey provided £30,000 to repair and renovate the bridge; this amount is insufficient to cover replacement. Officers are currently investigating how to move forward with this issue. There is a possibility that the bridge could be replaced and included within our wider greenways network because of the benefits this route provides for residents. We are in very early discussions with the landowners as well as undertaking further investigative works to assess the specification for and cost of replacement.

**4.2 Elizabeth Mayers asked the Leader of the Council the following question:**

**Question**

Following your social media posts incorrectly linking Black Lives Matter with the atrocious killings in Forbury Gardens do you accept that you have destroyed the trust and confidence of black, anti-racist residents and staff at WBC, failing in your duty to foster good relations and, some would say, inflaming racial division? As a result will you be considering your position?

## **Answer**

I was as shocked and disgusted at the killing of George Floyd as any other right thinking person and it is my sincere hope that the world can change for the better as a result of the outcry it has produced.

I completely support the message, principles, and the aims of Black Lives Matter in the UK. I have always been opposed to discrimination in all its forms. I understand the need today to have a clear focus of tackling racism wherever it is found.

The senseless stabbings in Forbury Gardens underline the fragility of life. One of the victims was a very popular Holt teacher James Furlong. It is difficult to find words to console in such a dreadful circumstance. It is impossible to understand the motive for such actions.

None of my social media posts have linked Black Lives Matter with the killings in Forbury Gardens.

In case there was any possibility of a mistaken conflation, I posted a clarification immediately which stated: "I would like to make it clear that there is no suggestion that the Black Lives Matter march that afternoon had anything to do with what has now been described as a terrorist incident."

Wokingham Borough Council is antiracist, promotes equality and celebrates diversity. We are determined to do better to ensure that every resident in the Borough feels truly valued. It will continue to do so whilst I am Leader.

We are undertaking a survey with our communities to listen to anybody who has experienced racism in any form as well as anybody with views on how this issue can be tackled. In particular the importance that Black Lives Matter. It is deliberately an open, listening exercise that acknowledges there will be problems we have not seen and answers we have not thought of. The survey is open throughout July and August and I urge everybody to take part.

I will not be reconsidering my position. This is an important community issue and I will continue to lead the Council on behalf of the communities, working with the independent BME Forum, and listening to staff and residents on their views on this vitally important issue. Working with Council Officers I will address the inequalities that are identified and I determinedly take forward our ongoing quest for community cohesion.

If any comments I have made have been offensive to anyone I apologise unreservedly; that was never my intention. Rather by reaching out, I hope to bring residents together. I fully support Nelson Mandela who said, "I detest racialism, because I regard it as a barbaric thing, whether it comes from a black or a white man".

## **Supplementary Question**

Sadly your answer and the things you say on equality feel pretty insincere and scripted. Apart from your comments at the previous Council meeting, saying that you would not support Black Lives Matter, and the social media posts in which you actually apologised in 'Wokingham Today' on 25<sup>th</sup> June acknowledging what you did was an entire mistake "I have done damage to myself and the Council".

These things seem to reflect genuine sentiments a little more than the answer that you have given. The fact that you still believe that Black Lives Matter is about George Floyd's death shows your lack of understanding or knowledge about the Human Rights' Movement which was actually founded in 2013.

As the Leader of the Council which is apparently hardwired to promote equality if you are not prepared to reconsider your position what steps and commitment are you prepared to make today to better educate yourself, and your fellow Councillors, on these crucial and sensitive matters to ensure that your behaviour does not contravene the Councillor's Code of Conduct again?

### **Supplementary Answer**

I do not believe my conduct has contravened the Councillor Code of Conduct nor the Nolan Principles. I believe that there is another agenda. I reiterate where we are. As a Council we are antiracist, we promote equality and celebrate diversity and we will do our very best to make that happen.

### **4.3 Beth Rowland asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question:**

#### **Question**

The enforced lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic has meant that a considerable portion of our residents will have been furloughed from their jobs on 80% of their normal salary. Some will have lost their jobs altogether – over the next few months many more will be unemployed as companies are forced to stop trading. That means that many more of our residents and their families will be forced to live on benefits with the problems that brings to children and young people. Will this Authority work with local charities and organisations including Berkshire Credit Union to support families living in poverty and debt?

#### **Answer**

Wokingham Borough Council is working closely with the third sector to support residents in the Borough.

We are working with our residents, which include tenants, site dwellers, leaseholders and licensees and others at this difficult time.

If, as many are, they are experiencing financial difficulties we will actually work with them. If they are struggling to pay their Council Tax or money that they owe to the Council we will work with them on an individual basis to understand their personal circumstances and come up with a sustainable payment plan.

We will also look at what they will be entitled to e.g. means tested benefits to maximise their incomes or they may even be able to apply for a Discretionary Housing Payment, Local Welfare or signpost them to access many of the great charities that are working in Wokingham.

We also signpost them to the following independent money and advice organisations such as: National Debt, Money Advice Service and Step Change.

Finally I guess even though the Council is in step with the guidance of the CAB and the Council Tax Protocol and best practice, which is agreed by the LGA, it is but a short step

for us to formally adopt that Protocol and to indicate our commitment to our residents who require help and as such I will commit to signing the CAB Council Tax Protocol Agreement as agreed with the LGA. That said we will continue to review our procedures to ensure the best outcome for all residents.

**4.4 Carol Jewell had asked the Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions the following question but as she was unable to attend the meeting a written answer was provided:**

**Question**

Woodley Town Council declared a Climate Emergency in October 2019 and a working group was formed to monitor the effects of climate change on the Town and its carbon footprint. Nine months later the committee has still not met as its Chairman, the leader of the Town Council, is awaiting action from this Borough Council. The forced lockdown during the Covid 19 pandemic has seen much reduced traffic especially on our road network. How is this Council going to work with both local Town and Parish Councils to take advantage of this to maintain the reduced levels of pollution that have been seen throughout the country and to encourage walking and cycling?

**Answer**

Having looked into the points you raise my understanding is that the Chairman was waiting for the Deputy Town Clerk to write Woodley's Climate Emergency Action Plan and was not awaiting action from Wokingham Borough Council. For information I have been consulted as part of the review of your Action Plan and have provided the Leader of Woodley Town Council with detailed feedback.

The response to the Covid 19 outbreak has provided evidence that we can do things differently. The lockdown resulted in a significant reduction in transport, workplace commuting in Wokingham went down by 54% during April. The Council has been engaging with businesses in order to understand how they can be supported through the green economic recovery. In our latest survey, businesses said that a lower carbon footprint was a positive impact of the lockdown and some will consider increasing their flexibility to allow more regular home working.

However, these have been challenging times for businesses, as some have not been able to function over the last few months. Because of the wide variety of businesses across the Borough, it is relevant that we engage with them effectively, the Council needs to consider their priorities and business model. For example, in town centres, there are a very high number of businesses in the retail and hospitality sector who do not have the option to work from home.

The Department for Transport has made some funding available for Emergency Active Travel measures and this is to be used to try and encourage and enable more people to travel on foot or by bike throughout the current social distancing but also beyond. So far we have been awarded £76k for the works which were completed around Wokingham Town Centre. We are currently working to identify further temporary measures across the Borough which we can implement quickly in order to help encourage further cycling and walking. There is up to £605k available to WBC, however the DfT criteria are quite strict and so we will only know later whether any of our proposals are accepted. Throughout lockdown the My Journey Team has continued to support people by assisting with training and advice and also loaning bikes to key workers and ensuring those returning to cycling are able to check and maintain their bicycles for safety. Now the rules are relaxing, there

is going to be more training available, though we have found that these courses are very popular and are already almost fully booked. For further training and advice people can visit the My Journey Webpages for routes and tips on both walking and cycling.

The Council is currently working on producing individual carbon footprint reports for each Town and Parish Council that will guide their actions towards becoming carbon neutral. While dialogue has already started with representatives from Towns and Parish Councils, we are working on creating a closer relationship over the coming months. The Council will engage individually with representatives to align our plans and create a joint approach to take advantage of the reduction in car use caused by the lock down. I have also promised the Leader of Woodley Town Council direct and community specific interaction with the Wokingham Borough Council's Climate Officers and myself over and above the Town Clerk's Forum. I want to ensure that Woodley receives all the help and support it requires in achieving your own climate objectives and reducing your carbon footprint.

#### **4.5 James Vyvyan-Robinson asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:**

##### **Question**

What action is the Council Executive going to take to rectify the A33 road surface noise bearing in mind the severe and life changing impact the increased noise is having on the mental health and wellbeing of local residents?

##### **Answer**

The Council has commissioned WSP, who are a specialist consultancy, to investigate the noise levels along the A33 corridor and to look at what measures are required to effectively mitigate the impact on local residents. The final report is expected to be issued to the Council by WSP in September which will allow the Council to take a decision on the way forward during October.

##### **Supplementary Question**

October sounds rather late to me but I will come back to that, I am sure, in due course.

My question is bearing in mind the Executive's decision to use this new surface are the Executive therefore going to take full responsibility and liability for the impact the increased noise will have on residents?

##### **Supplementary Answer**

I can tell you that whatever WSP conclude in their review we will take the appropriate action.

We are taking responsibility for the result of the WSP review whatever that is.

#### **4.6 Colin Brooks asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:**

##### **Question**

In respect of the resurfacing of the A33 bypass near the village of Riseley, please can you explain the criteria used in the decision making process. I am interested to understand if the decision was purely financial and if the increased environmental noise pollution, impact on health, wellbeing and enjoyment of local residents or the potential devaluation of

property (and subsequent negative equity position for newer residents) were included in the process or completely overlooked?

**Answer**

The Council manages the Wokingham highways network in accordance with UK Pavement Management System recommendations. This is recognised by central Government and the wider industry through its code of practice as a national standard for well maintained and well managed highway infrastructure. It is this system that establishes through technical survey data what parts of the network are prioritised for maintenance and what kind of resurfacing treatment are appropriate for each location.

Like most other highways authorities Wokingham Borough Council makes use of materials such as micro-asphalt and surface dressing to extend the lifespan of the road network before it requires a more expensive full resurfacing treatment. The full life expectancy of the new plane and inlay HRA road of up to 20 years is usually only achieved through the application of a surface dressing or micro asphalt treatment after 8 to 10 years. So it is quite normal practice to do that. All these materials are of course approved by the Highways Authority Product Approval Scheme (HAPAS) which was developed by market experts to offer consistent and clear testing methods for products and systems designed for use in the highways industry.

In addition both micro-asphalt and surface dressing treatments benefit from having a low carbon footprint and are quick to apply, which means less disruption to road users, residents, local businesses and the emergency services.

Lockchip, which was used on the recent resurfacing works on the A33, is a type of surface dressing and differs from conventional surface dressing in that a further layer of bituminous emulsion, which is very difficult to say, is sprayed over the top of the loose stone. As a consequence lockchip generally has a smoother surface with less loose material and looks more like new tarmac. Whilst these kinds of treatment do not last as long as full resurfacing treatment, such as a plane and inlay HRA scheme, they are a very cost effective and important component in the maintenance of the Wokingham highways network. It is worth noting that a full plane and inlay HRA scheme on the recently resurfaced section of the A33 would have cost £1.3million as opposed to the £200k for lockchip.

That said the Council has commissioned WSP, as I have said before, to investigate the noise levels along the A33 and look into what measures might be required to effectively mitigate the impact on local residents. The final report is expected, as I said in September, which will allow the Council to take a decision on the way forward in October.

So the answer is what we are doing is quite standard but we will look at the impact on local residents and take the appropriate action.

**Supplementary Question**

Could you please explain what change in policy has occurred since the resurfacing of phases 1 and 2 of the A33 in a much smoother and almost quiet material that was used by your department a few years' ago? Could you answer using a like for like comparable please?

### **Supplementary Answer**

I am afraid I am going to have to give you a written answer to that because the previous resurfacing was before my time as Highways Executive and I do not know why they used what they did then versus what they do now but I will certainly get you a written answer.

#### **4.7 Alan Winter asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:**

##### **Question**

In agenda item 8, you've described the proposed new recycling sacks as being made of 'hessian'. Can you reassure residents who are concerned about the environmental impact and guarantee that the hessian bags will be made of natural, recyclable material and not actually made of plastic?

##### **Answer**

I can confirm that these types of sacks have been generically called 'hessian' but in fact are made from woven polypropylene fibre with a light plastic coating to ensure resistance to moisture. They are though reusable and can last up to 5 years and so they are not a single plastic use. We will though be investigating the possibility of having them recycled when they are no longer usable.

##### **Supplementary Question**

So basically they are not hessian, which is of a natural material, they are made of polypropylene. Firstly can you stop using the term hessian bags as that is entirely misleading and wrong and secondly the continued use of plastic sacks is very disappointing given last week's Council motion on trying to reduce the use of plastics by the Council.

Can I ask has the level of carbon emissions from the sacks been considered in the decision to change the sacks rather than boxes or has that decision been purely about saving money?

##### **Supplementary Answer**

Question number 1 – yes you are absolutely right I have asked for the word 'hessian' to be removed from all the publicity material in the future. These bags use a small amount of plastic and that is on the outside to keep the moisture out and that is the sole intention of these things to actually keep our paper and card dry because wet waste gets rejected and costs us a lot of money to actually process. These bags are not really plastic they are polypropylene.

With regard to the question you asked about the carbon emissions there is hardly any plastic in there and I am advised that we will investigate the possibility of having them recycled when they are no longer used.

#### **5. MEMBER QUESTION TIME**

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

##### **5.1 Michael Firmager asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:**

### **Question**

What can we do through the Arts and Culture Strategy to help lift Wokingham Borough out of the coronavirus emergency?

### **Answer**

As you know I am a great supporter of arts and culture and am really pleased that we now have a draft strategy that not only seeks to develop and promote our local cultural offer but also highlights the many ways in which arts and culture can impact on social and economic well-being. Whilst the pandemic has sadly curtailed pretty well all 'live' events, performances and attendance at cultural venues, the amount of on-line content that has been made available and widely accessed pays testimony to the importance of arts and culture to all our lives and identities. Particularly in 'lockdown' we have seen how valuable arts and culture is in supporting people's mental health and well-being, providing connection and stimulation and reducing social isolation. Many have also taken the opportunity to develop their own creative talents from baking, hence we ran out of flour, painting, writing and making things.

I would hope that this renewed appetite for arts and culture will continue and that when conditions allow more engagement people will respond to our consultation on the Strategy and help us to grow an even more dynamic, accessible and exciting cultural offer across the Borough. As the severity of the 'lockdown' eases and performances, community events, carnivals, events in libraries and other venues are all once again possible, this will be a great way to draw people out of their homes and encourage them to embrace as well as contribute to the arts and cultural activities on their doorstep.

### **5.2 Paul Fishwick asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:**

#### **Question**

There have been a number of street trees that have been removed, but not replaced, in the last few years and in many cases the verge is wide enough and conditions suitable to enable replacements to be planted.

Wokingham Borough Council does not have a tree replacement policy but has planted new trees elsewhere. The loss of these trees has changed the street scene making it look more 'urban'. Will the Council ensure street trees are replaced wherever feasibly possible including locations where trees have been lost in the last 5 years?

#### **Answer**

The Council acknowledges the importance of street trees in softening the urban street scene and has ensured that the provision of street trees is an integral part of the designs for the major new roads we are building as part of the Strategic Development Locations (SDLs). Whilst we do not currently have a policy on replacing the loss of existing street trees, it is worth noting that it is very rare for the Council to agree to the removal of street trees for anything other than health and safety grounds. In the event that a street tree must be removed for health and safety reasons the decision on whether to plant a replacement tree is taken on a case by case basis.

The Council is in the process of developing a Tree Strategy and it is likely that this document will establish policies that will identify areas with existing valuable treescapes, identify areas that could be improved by tree planting and guide our decisions on the replacement of lost street trees. The development of the Tree Strategy will of course

include a public consultation with residents and we would welcome your personal input into that process.

### **Supplementary Question**

We are really looking at the existing areas at the moment rather than the SDLs. Would you please confirm that a planting schedule will commence as soon as possible and hopefully by this forthcoming planting season, i.e. Autumn/Winter, and try and aim for about a 75% loss of trees where feasible that would be planted this season?

### **Supplementary Answer**

I totally wholeheartedly agree there with you and I very much hope that what you are suggesting will happen.

## **5.3 Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question:**

### **Question**

When are you planning to restart the Local Plan Update Committee, since Grazeley is non-viable without the DCLG funding according to a statement by the Housing Executive at an Executive Committee Meeting and most other sources are not available due to the spending on the pandemic?

### **Answer**

As part of the Local Plan process update we commissioned growth scenarios and I will send you the link. I am sure you know where they are but I will send you the link.

In particular we considered viability on page 103. More detailed analysis of Grazeley and the scenarios also indicated that for both the 10,000 and 15,000 unit tests the initial phases indicated a loss, largely due to the timing of investment needed in the upfront utilities infrastructure.

The next point was in 7.10 of page 103. Both these outcomes indicated a strong case for early investment to secure housing delivery. This highlights the importance of the contribution to the HIF, which is the Housing Infrastructure Fund, in securing the planning and the delivery of new homes.

Grazeley is therefore not an unviable proposition; rather that it is a heavily forwarded funding burden which would have been lifted if we were successful in the Housing Infrastructure Fund and the bid that we put in.

In reply to our bid on 10 March 2019 MHCLG commented that: -

“Wokingham’s bid was an ambitious proposal in an area of high housing demand. However, following due diligence, the bid was found to not meet the gateway criteria, specifically on demonstrating sufficient market failure to require capital investment from the Government. Most of the infrastructure could be funded by other means if for example, it was progressively delivered with the build out of the development, or using loan finance.”

In essence, the Government’s review has confirmed the viability of Grazeley but suggests a different delivery model to that which was selected and supporting our preferred option.

In their reply MHCLG drew attention to the proposed Single Housing Infrastructure Fund as a potential supporting mechanism for us. Full details of that have yet to be announced.

We therefore are considering these options and the factors as well as the responses we received to the consultation. As soon as we have a clear picture the Planning and Transport Policy Member Working Group will resume and I am sure you will be part of that as you were before.

### **Supplementary Question**

MHCLG is also proposing that the OAN, better known as the housing numbers we are required to build, will be changed in late Autumn. We do not seem to know whether it will be raised or lowered. Considering that the Government has said that they want to raise the number of houses built throughout the country how will we take this into account when we are doing the Local Plan Update?

### **Supplementary Answer**

That is a very good question and I can assure you that the team of all Members that you will know have had constant conversations with MHCLG. Also we will be testing because if they do come back to us with a higher number, as you know before in our due diligence in using a well-known barrister and a demographer, we will be testing anything they put forward to us to make sure that it works for us and not just for Government.

## **5.4 Gary Cowan asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question:**

### **Question**

From time to time I see planning applications with Officer recommendations approving the removal of trees while other planning applications approve increased traffic on already busy roads.

My question is with regard to the Council flagship policy on climate emergency what specific directions has the Council given to its Planning, Environment and Highway Departments to take climate emergency into consideration when dealing with all planning applications?

### **Answer**

Planning policy is designed to help decision makers balance competing objectives such as protecting our environment and making new places for our people to live and work from. Our existing Core Strategy and Managing Development Delivery Local Plans to 2026, as obviously you know, embed sound planning policies to help us make decisions, mitigate change through infrastructure investment and other measures. Managing change in the public interest will inevitably lead to some very difficult decisions made around traffic and landscaping as part of that balance.

Climate change affects us all and our communities and as they grow the tensions you refer to will remain and we will need to carefully manage those. Policy within the new Local Plan will require developments to provide adequate landscapes and biodiversity gain as well as improved environmental performance with major residential developments being designed to achieve carbon neutral homes. A subsequent Supplementary Planning Document, the SPD, will also be developed to provide additional detail on how development of all types is expected to demonstrate the achievement of the policy requirements, including carbon neutrality.

As with the previous plan the new plan will establish a spatial strategy that allows for more people to choose to live and work where journeys can be undertaken in ways that do not add to climate change and ensure connectivity to allow working from home. Enabling our residents to make a choice for a healthier and more environmentally sensitive options such as walking and cycling for shorter journeys, including links to facilities, such as using local buses and train stations will help meet our collective commitments to address the climate change agenda.

### **Supplementary Question**

My question is really dealing with more now than tomorrow. The Council has committed £50m to fight climate change and it is also opposed to Heathrow airport expansion if it is detrimental to the environment and the Council's carbon footprint. Wokingham Borough Council's planning guidelines are silent, as we stand now, on climate emergency. I have seen many examples where the environment plays second fiddle to random development.

The new Local Plan will need to be updated now to include climate emergency rules for the Planning Department to refer to as material considerations.

The Climate Emergency Action Plan on page 3 states: "This is a Plan for right now and for the future".

My question is what action is being taken right now to refuse planning applications that are detrimental to the environment and the Council's carbon footprint?

### **Supplementary Answer**

It is a very good point and it is a point that we are obviously cognisant that we need to get right. Equally planning policies exist and it is important, and hence the reason why we did go with a draft plan earlier on this year, that we get those updated.

We will obviously look at all applications that come but obviously the larger ones are the bigger ones when it comes to carbon neutrality in terms of what can be done and what the Council can actually do in terms of fuel sources, localities, as you say, in order to make those. We are working on it; I mean obviously it is not an easy fix.

Having been in the energy industry all of my life carbon neutrality is not an easy one to achieve and it is something that we are in constant dialogue, especially with Gregor and his team, to ensure that we try to achieve what is important to us. It is not an easy fix Gary I am not at all saying that we can just change all our policies overnight so that every house is zero-carbon. It is not going to happen that easily but we are working on it and we have an agenda to get there and all those policies will be updated once we get the final Local Plan through.

## **5.5 Sarah Kerr asked the Leader of the Council the following question:**

### **Question**

Does the Leader of this Council acknowledge that poverty exists within the Borough?

### **Answer**

Wokingham Borough is one of the least deprived unitary authority areas in England. In fact it ranked as the least deprived (in 2019). However, in all cases, Wokingham Borough does

have some pockets of deprivation and poverty; where households are living on low incomes and have been there for many years.

The Department for Work and Pensions estimate that around 7% of Wokingham Borough children, approximately 2,400 aged 16 years and under, live in low income households compared to 15% in Great Britain, 8% in Bracknell Forest, and 7% in Windsor and Maidenhead.

We have a clear understanding of our demographic profile for the Borough and of where our more vulnerable communities reside; including those who may be most affected by poverty. Nevertheless, we realise there is always more that we can do, and moreover we want to do more to get a greater level of granular detail around the key poverty metrics to aid our understanding. The impact of Covid 19, for example, has seen that almost 18% of our workforce in Wokingham has been furloughed up to 31 May 2020, compared to 24% over the UK as a whole. Naturally, some of these workers on the furlough scheme may experience subsequent issues which we need to understand, track and monitor.

We aim to target our services to support these communities most in need; for areas such as Norreys, Finchampstead South, and some areas within Winnersh ward. Since Wokingham Borough is one of the most affluent areas in the country, there is a significant gap between residents on low income compared to those on higher incomes. Much of the work done by Wokingham Borough Council, and its partners, aims to bridge this gap, enable self-sustaining lifestyles for our vulnerable communities and offer targeted support.

Wokingham Borough Council is a member of the Berkshire Recovery Group which is focussing on four priority themes; one of which relates to individual hardship. Hence from a County perspective, there is a spotlight on this area, and moreover an agreed partnership approach to providing and supporting those communities facing hardship at this challenging time.

It is also important to recognise that the Council itself is, too, suffering unprecedented financial challenges with declining balances. Therefore, we must be judicious in our approach to poverty ensuring that we are truly focusing on and supporting those most in need. Despite this, we are taking a compassionate approach with our Council Tax collections by contacting those residents who may be having difficulty with their payments, engaging with them to understand their individual circumstances and to proactively support them going forward.

### **Supplementary Question**

Thank you very much for your detailed answer and I appreciate that you have acknowledged that there is a problem. The difficulty with statistics obviously is that it depends on what you are actually using as the unit of measurement. As an example the End to Child Poverty Charity measure poverty in possibly a different way because they have actually got, and the last time they took statistics May 2019, 18.4% of our children in this Borough actually live in relative poverty when you take housing costs into consideration. Which is a huge number actually.

I think we have the issue that a lot of people assume that we do not have that much of an issue because we are an affluent area but that obviously makes the gap bigger as you say.

We have had a problem for a long time; it is not just a Covid thing although obviously Covid is going to make it worse and the figures of poverty have been going up and up and up and the

fact that we have food banks and the food banks are increasing the number of people that they are dealing with.

The point is that it has been increasing for a long time and it is set to increase further because of Covid but it has been a problem for a long time. So what I am struggling to understand, and would like to know, is whatever we have been doing as a Council in the past has not been working because we have been increasing our levels of poverty not decreasing.

So what I would like to know is what are we going to be doing now that is different to actually tackle this issue? Not just in relation to Covid but in relation to the fact that we have had increasing poverty levels for years and years and years.

### **Supplementary Answer**

What are we going to be doing now that is different? I do not know that what we have been doing in the past has not worked. I will get back to you on that because you are saying something which I do not know.

My understanding is that we have looked after the people that we need to look after in our Borough and it is our intention to do so. We are a very compassionate Council and trying to find the people who need the help. But as I said in my answer we can only do so if we have the resources to do so. So we, as in Councillors, are going to face some very challenging conversations in ensuring those resources continue to exist.

## **5.6 Andrew Mickleburgh asked the Leader of the Council the following question:**

### **Question**

The fact that poverty is multi-dimensional, and that some of its elements and manifestations are intangible, are just two of the challenges that make poverty complex to measure and track. Notwithstanding, it is vital that this is done in order to serve our residents – to help to reduce numbers falling into poverty, and to help to lift others out of poverty; and to ensure a timely, efficient and effective use of scarce resources. What processes and procedures are in place in our Borough to ensure timely, meaningful and comprehensive data on poverty, in all its manifestations wherever it might exist in our community, is being collected and used to good effect?

### **Answer**

There are a variety of data sources published nationally which we monitor to help identify the levels of poverty that exist within the Borough. The published data also enables us to track how numbers are changing over time and allows us comparisons with neighbouring areas, regional and national trends. The Council regularly monitors all available data sources, along with local intelligence and knowledge to effectively understand our communities and deliver the right services. Nevertheless, we realise that there is always more that we can do, and moreover we want to do more to get a greater level of granular detail around the key poverty metrics to aid our understanding.

Our Community Engagement Team, who work directly with our residents, have a good knowledge of the demographics within the Borough and through their local connections, understand and know residents and communities who may be more vulnerable; and are able to plan and target their support work and initiatives to directly benefit those communities most in need.

The Council is also aware that many residents may be experiencing impacts to their finances during Covid 19. Nearly 18% of our workforce in Wokingham have been furloughed, as I said before, compared to 24% across the UK. Naturally, some of these workers may experience subsequent issues which we need to understand, track and monitor. For those affected households with lower incomes, who traditionally operate on little or no savings, the impact of the Coronavirus and the risk of poverty could be greater. Therefore maintaining our engagement with the communities is vital to continue providing support.

The Council has created a new directorate, Communities, Insight and Change, with the remit of getting an improved bank of insight and data to drive more informed decisions. This will aid our strategic approach around areas we want to focus on as a priority; of which poverty is one. My previous answer outlines the Council's work on a Berkshire level.

### **5.7 David Hare asked the Leader of the Council the following question:**

#### **Question**

Charities are amongst the many organisations raising alarm that large numbers of people in all parts of the UK are falling into poverty as a consequence of the Covid 19 pandemic. Many of these charities have also seen their own financial resources slashed, and thus their ability to help people in need, suffer as a result of the pandemic. What is WBC's strategy for ensuring that key local charities engaged with tackling poverty in our Borough will be able to meet the increasing demand for vital services provided by charities, despite the current funding crises that some of these charities face.

#### **Answer**

I have mentioned in previous responses that we will be facing some severe financial challenges as parlance goes and those on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be faced, as we will be faced, with some very unpalatable choices. We are certainly not going to be able to do everything.

However we have worked very closely with the charities during the emergency and we have an organisation which is now working very well. In response to this guidance we have set up a Service Sustainability Fund to support providers to maintain service continuity during this period of dealing with the Coronavirus. The fund is administered through an application process for additional retrospective funding. This Fund has been promoted to all providers of Adult Services including all those we contract within the Voluntary and Community Sector.

To qualify for reimbursement items of expenditure must be all of the following:

- related to clients in receipt of adult social care services that are funded by Wokingham Borough Council, or related to self-funders within the Wokingham geographical area;
- over and above usual business costs;
- directly related to the Coronavirus emergency;
- in respect of actual payments made.

Several VCS providers have requested and have received funding through this scheme including WADE, CLASP, ASD Family Help, Age UK Berkshire, Young People with Dementia and Ridgeline Trust.

At the start of the outbreak we set up a Wokingham Borough Community Response to meet the needs of vulnerable residents due to Covid 19. This has been a joint working group with the VCS. The focus has also included supporting the VCS through this difficult period. We have supported the VCS to apply for grant applications. We have provided PPE for many local VCS organisations who found it difficult to source reasonably priced PPE on their own and we have provided advice and guidance, via Public Health, on understanding all the guidance issued.

It is also important to recognise that the Council itself is, too, suffering unprecedented financial hardship with declining balances. Therefore, we must be judicious in our approach to poverty ensuring we are truly focusing on and supporting those most in need. Wokingham Borough Council is a member of the Berkshire Recovery Group. Hence from a County perspective, there is a spotlight on this area.

**5.8 Bill Soane asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question:**

**Question**

In view of the Government announcement regarding recompense to assist local authorities in their shortfall in income at their leisure centres during the Covid 19 pandemic, will this grant assist the Council in any way, and if so how?

**Answer**

On the assumption that you are referring to the “75p in the £” scheme in which the Government will recompense principal local authorities for 75% of lost income, subject to a 5% threshold, it has been confirmed that the Council cannot claim for its lost third-party income; i.e. the support of places for leisure. But it is able to claim for any lost, or foregoing, management fee that was budgeted but not received. Details on how to claim are awaited but the Council will be aiming to recover as much of its lost income as permitted.

The cost to the Council as a result of the forced closure of our Leisure Centres is a big financial issue and we will continue to work with our leisure providers, work with other Local Authorities in a similar position and work with Government Departments to alleviate our costs and restore both the financial position for our Council taxpayers and the service provision for our community going forward.

**5.9 Chris Bowring had asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question. Due to time constraints the question was not asked and the following written answer provided:**

**Question**

Would the Executive Member tell me how the ‘Tackling Racism Matters’ survey is progressing?

**Answer**

The survey is open until August 28 and is being promoted via local media, social media and through the BME Forum. We have had about 260 responses to date and are keen to hear from more people in order to make the survey as meaningful as possible. I would urge all residents to take part by visiting the Council’s website and searching for ‘consultations’.

**5.10 Andy Croy had asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question. Due to time constraints the question was not asked and the following written answer provided:**

**Question**

Regarding Agenda item 8. Manufacturers of kerbside recycling bags to protect paper and cardboard from water also provide elasticated covers to black bins which also protect the contents from water. For example:

<https://sackmaker.com/kerbside-recycling-sacks.html>

Why have we opted for an expensive full replacement of the black bins when the same result could more quickly and more cheaply be achieved by providing elasticated covers?

**Answer**

The Council must find a solution to prevent recycling getting wet as this is impacting on the Borough's recycling rates and causing significant environmental and financial cost to the Council.

The Council has commissioned a leading waste consultancy to consider options for a solution to this issue which include the option of elasticated covers for black bins. This will be reported at the Executive on 24<sup>th</sup> September. The MTFP report to this Executive secures funding for a solution that will be recommended to the September meeting. Elasticated covers have been considered as an option but do not represent a holistic solution in terms of resilience to weather and becoming detached from the vessel/ box.

**5.11 Maria Gee had asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question. Due to time constraints the question was not asked and the following written answer provided:**

**Question**

Regarding Item 7, Appendix B Estimated General Fund Balance. The balance on the general fund is now predicted to be £5.1 million at 31 March next year, which is very worrying and unsafe. It should be at a safe level of between £9.3m and £14.3m. This Council has to set the balance in this range as this is policy, because the Council should be taking risk into account and practising good financial management.

Risks were identified in the Medium Term Financial Plan as increasing significantly in 2020/21, and include the risks of further grant reductions, additional service pressures, dependency on future commercial income, and risks around business rate receipts. These risks are certainly higher as a result of the pandemic.

Given that the Government is running out of money, and there is a risk of a second wave of Covid 19 over winter, what plans does the Council have to get the general fund balance back up to the safe level, should lobbying not be successful?

**Answer**

Despite the fact that this Council has been one of the best financially managed Councils in the country over many years, as demonstrated by the independent assessments set out in the Executive Report, we are indeed facing considerable financial challenges as a result of Covid 19. We have incurred considerable additional costs to support our most vulnerable who have been dependant on our support during such difficult times and we have lost considerable income from activities that help fund what we do, such as car parking and

leisure. As I am sure you are aware the financial impact of this pandemic is being faced by local authorities throughout the country with numerous claiming publicly that they are no longer sustainable.

The judgement of whether this Council has safe balances and its medium to long term financial viability rests with our Statutory Finance Officer, our CFO, who was the author of the MTFP you refer to. It is not a judgement that sits with our politicians. As the Lead Member for Finance you will understand that we discuss the finances of the Council almost daily.

We continue to recognise the importance of strong and robust financial management of our Council taxpayers' money. This will involve ensuring our expenditure remains targeted to those most in need and delivering the key objectives of the Council. We will continue our endeavours to maximise our income streams where appropriate to fund the growing gap between Government grant and the costs of delivering our statutory services. We will further embrace new and innovative ways of working to ensure the provision of our services are most cost effective and efficient in delivering services to our residents whilst maintaining or improving the customer experience. And, as you referenced in your question, we will continue to make representations to the Government to seek the best funding deal for our community.

This work is already underway and in many ways it has never stopped, it just needs to be taken with greater intensity. It also needs to be taken in a calm, considered and planned way focused on achieving the medium term to long term health of the organisation rather than making knee jerk quick fix solutions to restore balances immediately which could generate catastrophic service and financial outcomes further down the road. I am confident we have the calibre of politicians and Officers to do this the right way and in the way we have collectively successfully addressed our financial challenges in the past.

**5.12 Imogen Shepherd-DuBey had asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question. Due to time constraints the question was not asked and the following written answer provided:**

**Question**

Looking at the Capital Monitoring Report there is a quantity of £105M rephased to later years.

Please can you explain what exactly will be impacted by this deferral?

**Answer**

The detailed schedule of re-phasing is shown on page 64 of this Agenda. The impact of this is that schemes are progressed in a way that minimises our financial risk with regards to ensuring we have the resources secured to fund them, and it ensures the timing of the investment is better aligned to the service need. This approach is part of our strong overall financial management and entirely necessary in the context of the financial challenges we currently face as a result of Covid 19.

**5.13 Clive Jones had asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question. Due to time constraints the question was not asked and the following written answer provided:**

## Question

The proposal to use hessian sacks has come to the Executive as part of an update on the MTFP. Can you explain why this has not come to the Executive as an item in its own right with a full business case attached?"

## Answer

Changes in the world market for recycled material have meant that wet paper and card is no longer being accepted by recycling plants and this is impacting on the Borough's recycling rates and causing significant environmental and financial cost to the Council. The Council must therefore find a solution to prevent this recycling getting wet. The financial report being considered by this Executive meeting secures funding for a solution to this issue. A further update report will be presented by the Executive on 24<sup>th</sup> September.

## 6. SHAREHOLDER'S REPORT

*(Councillors UllaKarin Clark, John Halsall, John Kaiser, Stuart Munro and Wayne Smith declared personal interests in this item)*

The Executive considered a report setting out the budget monitoring position of the Council owned companies up to 30 June 2020.

Whilst introducing the report the Executive Member for Finance and Housing highlighted the facts relating to the national effects of Covid 19 and the costs of coping with the crisis.

Councillor Kaiser advised that with regard to Wokingham the number of residents supported had risen from 1,800 to nearly 5,000 people at its peak. In addition £39.4m had been paid out in Government grants and rate relief to businesses large and small and the Council was now faced with an expected overspend of £19m; which would be supported by around £15m worth of grants received from the Government, NHS and other income.

Councillor Kaiser reiterated that although the Council was currently planning for recovery nobody had any idea what normal would look like or cost. With spikes turning up around the UK and Europe and the third world just beginning to count the cost in lives and resources he believed that the Country was still in the early stages of this world wide pandemic.

With regard to the Shareholders' Report Councillor Kaiser confirmed that the companies were on target for the current financial year.

With regard to WHL there were currently 57 houses under construction. Councillor Kaiser reminded Members that the Council had an ambitious target to build 1,000 houses over four years; a mixture of homes which would produce an overall return of 5%. To achieve this it had been agreed to move to a more efficient one team approach between the Council and the housing companies. This was being achieved by the development function of the housing companies being brought back in-house and this was proving to be successful.

Councillor Kaiser highlighted the anticipated budget shortfall for WHL but confirmed that even taking this shortfall into account it was expected that a full year profit of about £400,000 would be achieved from the housing companies overall. This profit would be included in the General Fund Account.

**RESOLVED:** That the budget monitoring position for the financial year up to 30 June 2020 (Quarter 1) be noted.

## **7. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING REPORT FY2020/21 - QUARTER 1**

The Executive considered a report setting out the Revenue budget monitoring position at the end of quarter 1 of the current financial year.

The Executive Member for Finance and Housing went through the report and drew Members' attention to the Council's strong financial standing at the start of the pandemic, as set out in the executive summary section. This included healthy non-general reserves that were earmarked for specific expenditure and risks that the Council may face.

Councillor Jorgensen advised the meeting that she had sent the Executive Member for Environment a large number of questions from residents related to the details of the hessian sack scheme and asked Councillor Batth if he would be happy to answer those questions as part of the "Q and A" on the scheme? Councillor Batth confirmed that he would be happy to respond to those questions.

**RESOLVED** that:

- 1) the Council's strong financial standing leading up to the COVID-19 crisis as illustrated in the Executive Summary, as set out in the report, be noted;
- 2) the significant financial impact of the COVID-19 crisis as illustrated in the Executive Summary be noted;
- 3) the overall forecast of the current position of the General Fund revenue budget, Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), illustrated in the Executive Summary and appendices attached to the report, be noted;
- 4) the ongoing work to manage the budget and ensure the financial viability of the Council, as set out in the Executive Summary, be noted;
- 5) the revenue implications of capital borrowing for £288k for the purchase of hessian sacks, which will have the effect of increasing recycling levels and generating a beneficial financial impact far in excess of the cost of borrowing, be approved.

## **8. CAPITAL MONITORING 2020/21 - END OF JUNE 2020**

The Executive considered a report setting out the progress of the Council's Capital Programme as at 30 June 2020.

During his introduction the Executive Member for Finance and Housing advised that the "hessian" sacks, as mentioned in the Revenue Monitoring report, were being purchased via the Capital Budget.

Due to the uncertainty going forward Councillor Kaiser highlighted the changes to a number of projects which had been re-phased, as shown in Appendix B to the report, amounting to £105m. It was noted that these projects were not being cancelled at this stage but were basically being deferred.

With regard to the recyclability of the "hessian" sacks Councillor Jorgensen stated that she believed that polypropylene was recyclable. In addition Councillor Kaiser believed that the

rubber weights utilised in the sacks were also 100% recyclable and that parts of the bags were actually made from material that had been previously recycled.

Councillor Kaiser also highlighted the additional £600k funding for the development of Dinton Pastures Activity Centre.

**RESOLVED** that:

- 1) it be noted that the Council's Capital Programme will continue to be reviewed throughout the year in the context of the impact of Covid-19 on funding sources and service requirements, and that any changes will be presented to Executive for approval;
- 2) the proposed rephrasing to parts of the Capital Programme following the 'in-year' review including the impact of Covid-19, as set out in Appendix B, be approved;
- 3) £600k additional budget funded by borrowing for the Dinton Pastures Activity Centre (DAC), for changes necessitated as an outcome of public consultations and planning requirements be approved. The cost of borrowing estimated at £27k p.a. will be covered from expected additional incomes generated by the new activity centre, as set out in paragraph 6 of the Executive Summary of the report;
- 4) a reduction of the Schools Devolved Formula grant budget in the capital programme to £302k, due to the Council receiving £87k less than originally budgeted, as set out in paragraph 7 of the Executive Summary, be noted;
- 5) borrowing of £288k for the purchase of hessian sacks which will have the effect of increasing recycling levels and generating a beneficial financial impact far in excess of the cost of borrowing, as set out in paragraph 8 of the Executive Summary, be approved;
- 6) it be noted that consultants will be engaged within existing budgets to review the noise levels and options with regards to recent major resurfacing works, as set out in paragraph 9 of the Executive Summary;
- 7) the quarter one position for the capital budgets, as set out in Appendix A to the report as summarised in the Executive Summary, be noted.

**9. TREASURY MANAGEMENT OUTTURN 2019-20**

The Executive considered a report relating to the Treasury Management Outturn for 2019-20.

The Executive Member for Finance and Housing advised the meeting that the report demonstrated how the treasury management function had effectively managed the Council's debt and cash balances to support the funding of the delivery of the Council's key priorities. It was noted that the report had been considered by the Audit Committee and would be reported to Council.

**RESOLVED** that:

- 1) the report be recommended to Council;

- 2) it be noted that the report was presented to Audit Committee on 29th July 2020;
- 3) the managed repayment of debt over time which illustrates the increased borrowing required to fund key Council priorities, which in turn generate income streams (to repay debt) and provides revenue funding for vital statutory services (as set out in the graph in table 2 of the report), be noted;
- 4) the asset value created through the Council's capital investments compared to the debt required to generate the asset value (as set out in the graph in table 2 of the report) be noted;
- 5) the capital investments made in the Council's priorities for its community, by category (as set out in table 1 of the report) be noted;
- 6) the Treasury Management report in Appendix A, that shows that all approved indicators have been adhered to and that prudent and safe management has been adhered to, be noted.

#### **10. WOKINGHAM OUTBREAK CONTROL PLAN SUMMARY**

The Executive considered a report relating to the Wokingham Outbreak Control Plan which was produced jointly with Public Health England and other partners.

The Leader of Council informed the meeting that the implementation of the Plan would take place within a recently formed Local Outbreak Engagement Board; which was a sub-committee of the Health and Wellbeing Board.

**RESOLVED** that:

- 1) the scale of preparation in a short timescale to develop an outbreak control plan jointly with Public Health England and other partners be noted;
- 2) the impact of the Plan for the public be noted.

#### **11. CENTRAL AND EASTERN BERKSHIRE JOINT MINERALS AND WASTE PLAN: DUTY TO COOPERATE**

The Executive considered a report relating to the Central and Eastern Berkshire Joint Minerals and Waste Plan and specifically the Statements of Common Ground (SoCG) which provide a record of engagement, clarify areas of agreement and where necessary areas of disagreement.

During his introduction the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement highlighted that the Minerals and Waste Plan had been considered over a number of years and had been consulted on widely. The Plan was a great example of listening to residents' views as a number of the sites that had originally been put forward when reviewed were not found to be suitable and therefore were not included in the Plan.

Councillor Smith highlighted that the reason the Statements of Common Ground were required was because of the Council's reliance on neighbouring authorities for the purchase of raw materials for building roads, networks, etc.

**RESOLVED** that:

- 1) the following Statements of Common Ground, as part of on-going Duty to Cooperate requirements, be approved:
  - i. South East Waste Planning Advisory Group (SEWPAG) Statement of Common Ground concerning Strategic Policies for Waste Management (see Appendix A).
  - ii. Statement of Common Ground between the Central and Eastern Berkshire Authorities and Buckinghamshire Council, Central Bedfordshire Council, Hampshire County Council, Oxfordshire County Council, Surrey County Council, South Downs National Park Authority, West Berkshire Council and Wiltshire Council concerning Soft Sand Supply (see Appendix B).
  - iii. Statement of Common Ground between the Central and Eastern Berkshire Authorities, and Buckinghamshire Council, Hampshire County Council, Oxfordshire County Council, Surrey County Council, West Berkshire Council and Wiltshire Council, concerning Sharp Sand and Gravel Supply (see Appendix C).
  - iv. Statement of Common Ground between Central and East Berkshire Authorities and the South London Waste Plan Boroughs concerning Strategic Policies for Waste (see Appendix D).
  - v. Statement of Common Ground between Westminster City Council, the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead and Wokingham concerning strategic waste matters (see Appendix E).
- 2) delegated authority be given to the Director of Place and Growth, in consultation with the Executive Member responsible for Strategic Planning, to enter into future Statements of Common Ground;
- 3) any minor changes to the Statements of Common Ground be delegated to the Director of Place and Growth, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement.

**12. CENTRAL AND EASTERN BERKSHIRE JOINT MINERALS AND WASTE PLAN: PROPOSED SUBMISSION PLAN**

The Executive considered a report relating to the proposal to publish and consult on the Central and Eastern Berkshire Joint Minerals and Waste Plan.

The Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement reiterated that the Plan had been widely consulted over a number of years. It was not expected that the Plan would be contentious as all the mineral and waste sites had been removed and the Council would be relying on neighbouring authorities.

**RESOLVED** that the following be recommended to the Special Council Executive Committee:

- 1) approve the Central and Eastern Berkshire Joint Minerals and Waste Plan: Proposed Submission Plan and supporting documentation for publication and public consultation under Regulation 19;

- 2) authorise community engagement on the Central and Eastern Berkshire Joint Minerals and Waste Plan: Proposed Submission Plan and associated supporting documents to take place for 6 weeks from Thursday 3rd September 2020;
- 3) authorise the submission of the Central and Eastern Berkshire Joint Minerals and Waste Plan: Proposed Submission Plan, and supporting documents to the Secretary of State for independent examination in public, under Regulation 22;
- 4) authorise the Director of Place and Growth, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement, to agree minor amendments necessary to the Central and Eastern Berkshire Joint Minerals and Waste Plan: Proposed Submission Plan and other supporting documents prior to consultation. Any minor modifications would consist of non-material amendments such as rewording and correction of typing errors;
- 5) request the appointed Inspector to recommend modifications to the submitted Joint Plan, in the event that the Inspector considers that such modifications would make the plan sound.

### **13. CLIMATE EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN – DINTON ACTIVITY CENTRE (DAC) PROJECT**

The Executive considered a report providing an update on capital projects relating to a replacement provision at Dinton Activity Centre and the expansion of Addington School both of which would assist with the delivery of the Climate Emergency Action Plan.

The Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions informed the meeting that an additional capital budget of £483,900 was being requested to finance the two climate emergency projects. The first related to the use of environmentally friendly technology eg air source heat pumps, alterations to the domestic hot water systems, solar panels both on the roof and in the car park, etc. to reduce the energy usage of Dinton Activity Centre. This project would reduce and offset carbon at the facility which would lead to it becoming energy positive i.e. it would generate 126% more energy than it uses and would take 30% more carbon from the environment than it produces. Councillor Murray stated that the intention was to roll this out to other Council assets in the coming months.

Councillor Murray informed the meeting that the second project related to the addition of solar panels to the Addington School new build. Unfortunately the design process had been too advanced, and build deadlines too close, to add additional climate infrastructure at that phase. The project would, however, still cut carbon emissions by 49.7% and improve energy efficiency versus the original plan by 46%.

Councillor Murray reiterated that the motion, supported by Council last year, did agree that the Council would play as active a role as possible in fighting climate change with the objective of reaching carbon neutrality by 2030 if possible. The Council was, of course, reliant on other bodies eg Highways England, Southwest Trains and Reading Buses, as well as Central Government and the energy companies, to play their part in achieving carbon neutrality.

**RESOLVED** that:

- 1) the proposals and the anticipated outcomes, as set out in the report, be noted;
- 2) the decision to invest in the carbon neutrality proposals in Dinton Activity Centre and Addington School to significantly reduce the carbon emission of the new buildings in line with the Council's net zero carbon by 2030 target, be confirmed;
- 3) an additional capital budget of £483,900 financed by borrowing and fully repaid from savings generated through reduced energy costs be approved;
- 4) it be noted that the annual financial cost reductions in excess of the capital financing costs will be set aside to provide for component replacement in future years.

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**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF  
THE EXECUTIVE  
HELD ON 11 SEPTEMBER 2020 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.05 PM**

**Committee Members Present**

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

**Other Councillors Present**

Prue Bray  
Richard Dolinski  
Paul Fishwick  
Clive Jones  
Sarah Kerr  
Caroline Smith

**14. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were submitted by Councillors Pauline Jorgensen and Charles Margetts.

Councillor Richard Dolinski, Deputy Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services, attended the meeting on behalf of Councillor Margetts. In accordance with legislation Councillor Margetts could take part in any discussions but was not entitled to vote.

**15. DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received.

**16. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

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

**16.1 Chris Johnson asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:**

**Question**

The agenda states on page 10 that the life expectancy of the sacks is now three to five years, and not the 5.5 years as previously stated, or in fact the 13.3 years as indicated by the financial weighting in the options appraisal. As this solution is supposed to last until 2026, there is clearly going to be an increased need to replace these sacks during this time. Why has this not been fully realised in the modelling?

**Answer**

I am a little unsure about where the 13.3 year figure has arisen from as I do not think that this appears to feature in the options appraisal. I can confirm that the life expectancy of the bags is five years as per the manufacturers' experience. However, they can last beyond five years and this certainly reflects the Council's experience with the garden waste bags pre 2012, you might remember, in that it was found they lasted well over five years. It is therefore expected that this 'solution' will last well beyond 2026 if required.

**16.2 Beth Rowland asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:**

**Question**

Please will you tell me how you consulted with representatives from protected characteristic groups for completion of the Equality Impact Assessment on the proposed 'hessian' recycling bags and what was the input from those groups?

**Answer**

The Assessment you refer to, an Equality Impact Assessment, was undertaken if you look at Appendix 3 of the report. This demonstrated that all groups were carefully considered in assessing the impact of this minor change to the waste collection service; because we are only changing the receptacle we are not changing the policy and we are not changing anything else. Consultation with protected characteristic groups was not undertaken as the method of collection has not significantly changed and therefore it is not a substantial alteration to the existing service. However, testing has shown that the empty bags weigh less than the current boxes so will be easier to handle. The assisted collection service will continue as well as providing advice for residents who may have specific issues. I am therefore confident that these new containers are very convenient, practicable and in some ways easier to use for those who are elderly or have a disability.

**Supplementary Question**

I would like to ask a question about specific disabilities. I am affected by severe arthritis and my hands are quite disfigured and becoming more disfigured. I cannot open velcro things and so am not quite sure how people in my situation, I do have an assisted collection, would actually get stuff in the bag and be able to hold the lid open in the plastic bags while you put something in it? Could you answer that for my Parry please?

**Supplementary Answer**

Velcro is easy to open of that I am pretty certain. Are you experiencing difficulties with velcro? We can take it off line if you would like and discuss this personal problem off line if you like?

**The Leader of Council stated:**

Consistent with what we always do Beth we will try to discover if we have any residents who need help and if that help needs to change as a consequence of that change. We have always done so in the past and we shall continue to do so in the future.

**16.3 Ian Shenton asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:**

**Question**

How do you know that you'll be getting value for money when procuring the sacks as the procurement process is being handled by Veolia?

**Answer**

It is a very good question and the answer is very simply that the contract works on a number of key criteria including transparency and partnership working. Wokingham Borough Council would see all the prices which are paid and ensure we are getting best value on all the containers that we purchase through the contract. Our contractor Veolia, who we have been dealing with for some time, has significant procurement influence in the container markets to help the Council achieve best value and timescales for delivery.

However in this case, as this is a new container, Officers have been particularly diligent to ensure best value including testing other options through its own Procurement Team.

An additional advantage of utilising Veolia is that the management of risk lies with them so in the unlikely event of an issue it will be Veolia to be liable for and resolve rather than the Council doing it

**The Leader of Council stated:**

Given the urgency of, and the delay that we have in putting the order, therefore our procurement and expediting people are also shadowing Veolia and are trying to see what other sources exist for the same product. So we have got a very good idea of what the market price is.

**Supplementary Question**

Veolia will need to have been given a specification for the sacks to facilitate the procurement process which would have needed to include disposal plans. The disposal of this kind of sack concerns me as although they are technically recyclable it is not an easy process and only 1% of them are recycled in the UK. What has the Council requested in the specification with regards to disposal of these sacks and where could I view the whole specification document?

**Supplementary Answer**

We have been advised by our consultants that there are a number of authorities using these bags. They are perfectly recyclable and our specification was that we wanted to ensure that we recycle them once they have come to the end of their life and we have been assured that they are recyclable and they will be.

**16.4 Mike Smith asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:**

**Question**

I note from the agenda for this meeting that the purpose is to discuss and approve the expenditure of £288,000 on the purchase of close-able, waterproof recycling bags as a replacement of the currently used, open, hard plastic boxes. This is to mitigate against wet paper waste. I also note this purchase would result in a commitment to an additional £235,000 annual costs.

I have 4 years' experience of these types of weighted, waste segregated bags as currently used by Cornwall County Council where the County average for recycling is just 25.2% according to their website in January 2020. Currently many of these plastic sacks are tatty, they do blow around in relatively modest winds despite being weighted and the lid fastenings are not particularly functional in keeping water out.

I note from the Enclosure One document that the appraisal has been entirely desk based and includes a highly subjective and complex model. For example, the first (and most influential) criteria in the model is "Impact on recycling rates" with a weighting of 40% – You have scored the plastic sacks at 10 but only 6 for shower caps and lids – in my mind, there is no difference as all three do exactly the same in keeping the rain out. The rest of the model is equally open to criticism.

There is a comment in the main document that Monmouthshire Council has trialled them for a year on page 10. Actually it is less than 9 months and your report does not say it is

only on just 2,000 households - therefore the comments on page 11 of your report about replacement cycles compared with black boxes is entirely invalid and misleading. And they have not been implemented across that whole County.

Please can you explain how you justify to the residents of Wokingham, not doing any practical trials with the residents before spending over a quarter of a million pounds in capital with additional annual costs of £235,000 as the business case is not, to my mind, as a retired technical auditor, comprehensive, robust and compelling?

### **Answer**

I note the comparison between Wokingham and Cornwall in regard to recycling rates. The collection arrangements in Cornwall are very different to our own and they have three different receptacles; while we only have one. They have three separate recycling materials as compared to our single receptacle. We aim to make recycling as easy as possible for our residents and this is likely the reason why our current recycling rate is double that of Cornwall. If I may add they are not made out of hessian they are polypropylene material and very recyclable. Hessian I think was bandied around some time ago as a generic name but they are not hessian they are polypropylene.

The Officers have used the Monmouthshire Council trial and there are 3,000 properties, not what you said, which if you give each house two bags that is 6,000 bags and it is a new product over 12 months to inform the recommendation to proceed with the recycling bags. Feedback from Monmouthshire residents was positive including that the waterproof bag was robust, reduces the impact on the environment and is convenient. In addition to these the Council has found that the paper and card material remains dry, and that is the whole point of employing these bags, and the collection crews find the system very, very, straightforward.

The bags have been assessed against other options of a shower cap and lids for the current boxes which has been informed by other Councils' findings and the consultant's considerable expert knowledge and experience. Officers have also fully tested the proposed bags to ensure that they are waterproof.

Therefore I am confident that the proposed bags have been fully considered against other options and are the best short-term solution to wet waste to both save the Council a large amount of money and to increase our recycling.

The consultant's report and the Council's own experience are clear that wet paper would cost Wokingham Borough Council £600k per annum in lost recycling income. This would affect our recycling rate by 6% per annum therefore undermining the climate change commitment to reach 70% recycling by 2030. Further, as I said, the Cornwall comparison is not really valid.

### **Supplementary Question**

What will you do if this £288k worth of capital expenditure fails to realise the £13k per week your report says it is going to produce in initial income? It does not work.

### **Supplementary Answer**

We have done a great deal of work on this Mr Smith and we have found that if we do not do anything we are going to keep losing £600k per year in lost recycling income and we are confident that having spent that money we will be saving something like just over £400k per year.

**The Leader of Council stated:**

It does not actually say that we are going to make £13k per week. We have a problem and the problem is that it is not of our own making. We launched food waste 18 months ago and that has been enormously successful and in the wake of that we bought a new fleet of vehicles so it was an expensive change but it has been a very, very, successful change. Thereafter we thought that our black bins, which everyone seems to be happy with, and blue bags, which everyone seems to be happy with in the short term, was going to be a medium term solution.

However, the Chinese in their infinite wisdom decided that they would stop being the recycling centre of the world and therefore the market changed and the recyclers, or the secondary recyclers, got more picky and all of a sudden last winter started rejecting our, and our partners', batches. That caused us, Wokingham Borough Council, a cost of approximately £600k per year. The available solutions to that problem are not obvious and none of the solutions are perfect. Clearly the most immediate solution was to buy lids for our boxes but the people who collect the rubbish said this would be a nightmare because we will be chasing lids all over the streets and particularly on windy and wet days. It would not work for us and would actually take longer. So we then went through a consulting exercise through a third party, who presumably is an expert, to supplement our expertise of our Officers which is considerable. On balance they have recommended this solution.

You and everybody else can criticise line 3 of page 40 of the report until the cows come home but we recognise that it is a compromise and we recognise that we have taken the best advice from our Officers, who strongly recommend it, and a third party. We have to in our current constrained circumstances do something about £600k going down the drain. We do not have unlimited financial resources. Covid has hit our profit and loss and balance sheet very hard and it had to and we are in a recovery situation.

So we just have to do something and anybody who is impeding us doing it is actually working against the public interest and I ask all the Lib Dems, like yourself Mike because you and Caroline get two bites of the cherry because you are married, to support us on this and recognise that there is no perfect solution for the predicament that we are in currently and that is why we have taken so much advice.

**17. MEMBER QUESTION TIME**

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

**17.1 Gary Cowan had asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question but as he was unable to attend the meeting the following written response was provided:****Question**

Can you confirm that the Council's preferred option is a container, dimensions 40 x 40 x 60 cm with 350g rubber weights for stability?

**Answer**

Yes that is correct, the bags can hold approximately 65 litres of recycling which is bigger than the existing recycling 55 litre boxes. Testing showed that three kilogrammes per bag can be accommodated which is more weight than what we are currently collecting in the

boxes and the Monmouthshire case study has demonstrated that the weighted bag is stable so not to blow away.

## **17.2 Sarah Kerr asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:**

### **Question**

It has been highlighted that there are serious flaws in the options appraisal that could materially change the outcome of the report. Why is this same options appraisal still being used when it's clearly flawed?

### **Answer**

Your question is not specific, nor does it cite an example either. However, based on your question at Overview and Scrutiny on 26 August I think I can maybe wrongly deduce that this is around the 'write-off' and the lifespan of the respective containers. Given that the Scrutiny Committee supported the recommendations of the report, I am a little bit unclear how you can make this assertion.

I can confirm that the life expectancy of the bags is five years as per the manufacturers testing and delivery experience. They anticipate a lifespan more than this, but this depends on how you look after them as well, but have identified a prudent timeframe. They can last for many years and this certainly reflects Wokingham's experience with the garden waste bags pre 2012 that lasted well beyond the five years and it is expected that this solution will also last beyond 2026 if required. But if you can be a bit more specific with your question I can ask the Officers to produce a written response to you if that helps?

### **Supplementary Question**

I have a further question but will just provide a couple of examples which I provided at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. So one of the things actually relates to the question Mr Johnson asked earlier. It actually states in the report that the replacement rates for sacks, when working out the financial side of things, is 7.5% which equates to 13.3 years. So the finances of this and the weighting on that was based on these sacks having that kind of replacement rate. Clearly it is not right and that could have a material effect on the outcome.

Another example is the capacity of sacks is modelled on 90 litres when we are actually taking 60 litres and given that there is no limit to the number of boxes or sacks that people are allowed actually why is capacity even part of the weighting anyway when people can have as much capacity as they want. So that is just two examples but I can provide you with more and I can provide those in writing.

The other question I wanted to ask, that comes out of this, is that the problem of wet waste has been known about for about a year now by this Council, since last autumn. So it is a year to find a solution and lids, as we said earlier, were identified early on as a possible solution and they were going to be trialled in two wards at the beginning of 2020. At the call-in we were told that the trial did not happen in case the solution did not work. But that is the whole point of a trial to find out if a solution does or does not work and there are a lot of assumptions in this business case that need to be tested as many of them are quite off the wall, particularly with residents and how they are going to react to it. Doing a trial would have been an obvious step to take for any fiscally responsible organisation so the question that comes out of it is why given that you have had a year has the proposed solution not been trialled in Wokingham Borough?

### **Supplementary Answer**

We wanted to get the best possible advice and our Officers, very experienced Officers, were set about finding a solution and we interviewed about four consultants and one was appointed who was very experienced. They have extensive experience in recommending this particular bag to other authorities so the trial was in many ways their vast experience. When we compared the bags with the boxes with the lids and the shower caps this option was very, very, cost effective and very effective in keeping our waste dry and that was the whole objective. So trialling using other authorities that were actually using the bags so it was prudent to actually look for that very expert advice and we did and here we are. We had to go through a number of hoops to actually appoint the consultant, then they were appointed, then we issued them with a very thorough business case and they have come up with this best solution. Here we are now to actually approve tonight, hopefully, the purchase of these bags and the funding which was already earmarked on 30 July.

If you do want to give me a detailed question by all means do so and I will make sure that you get a written answer.

### **17.3 Clive Jones asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:**

#### **Question**

In the options report it states that only one additional vehicle and crew is needed when the plastic hessian sack option is followed and that if the other two options were followed then two vehicles and crews would be needed. Where is the evidence for this? There is no supporting evidence in the options report.

#### **Answer**

In parallel with the work undertaken by the consultants Officers conducted further research with the collection contractor Veolia. This centred on the time taken to empty and return the three options included in the report. These discussions highlighted that it would take approximately three seconds extra for the bags to be emptied. As is, the boxes take on average about six seconds per property to empty and return. It was modelled that the bags would take nine seconds which would mean an additional 40 hours of work per week to cover which equates to an additional vehicle and a crew. The same modelling was applied to the lids and shower caps and this showed that the additional time would exceed the 40 hours and therefore would require two extra vehicles.

Now I refer to the financial section of the report. The cost of one additional vehicle, crew, maintenance etc. is costed at about £235k. Overall, the implementation of this proposed system will avoid a budget impact of £403k per annum and this accounts for the additional vehicle. If we did nothing, and this has been discussed before, then the impact on the budget would equate to £600k per annum due to the wet waste issue.

#### **Supplementary Question**

My question was where is the evidence for this shouldn't it be before you? I know that you have said that the modelling has been done by Veolia and our Officers but shouldn't this be in the pack that you are looking at tonight and would you agree that if the extra three seconds is wrong and it is an extra five or six seconds then the extra cost to the Council would be another £235k?

### **Supplementary Answer**

I think that the amount of work that the Officers have put in with Veolia trying to work out the actual time it would take to empty a box and to empty a bag has been thoroughly tested and I am pretty confident that it will not take more than nine seconds.

### **17.4 Paul Fishwick asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:**

#### **Question**

Looking at Table 1 (pages 23 and 24) in the Wet Waste Options Appraisal (Appendix 1), could you tell me how these authorities collect paper and card, when they introduced this system and what impact it has had on recycling rates?

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

I am afraid that we are going to have to give you a written answer as the question came in very late. It is such a detailed question that Officers have not been able to research those questions.

### **17.5 Prue Bray asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:**

#### **Question**

Monmouth County Council in their trial of plastic hessian sacks are separating the collection of paper card etc. and cans, plastic bottles, yoghurt pots etc. into different coloured sacks. Stopping co-mingling like this considerably reduces the chances of contamination. Given that one of the problems which the Council has had is the inability to separate plastic from wet paper in co-mingled recycling, it is surprising that there does not appear to be any consideration of stopping co-mingling in the options considered in Wokingham. Why was this not looked at?

#### **Answer**

The Council has collected recycling co-mingled since 2008 and as such when the collection service was retendered it was asked to be continued to be collected in this way to ensure that recycling is as easy as possible for our residents to encourage them to take part. The Council's bespoke split bodied vehicles collecting blue bags and mixed dry recycling in the same vehicle at the same time can still be used as with the bags and adopting a non-comingled method of collection would require a new fleet of vehicles at considerable cost to the Council.

In addition, by utilising the bags the paper material will remain dry and therefore there will not be a contamination issue due to wet paper. Therefore, there is no need to collect the respective materials separately.

Given the possible implications of the Government's Waste and Resources Strategy, comingling of recycling is something that will have to be looked at ahead of the next collection contract retendering in 2026.

### **Supplementary Question**

So you are using Monmouth as a case study in this report but among the questions that remain unanswered about Monmouth are whether the sacks made any difference to their recycling rates and how long it takes for the bin men to collect the sacks? One question that has been answered is that Monmouth have been conducting a trial, and are going to

go on conducting a trial, for another year whilst you have decided not to conduct a trial. How can you justify using Monmouth to support your decision when either you do not know the answers to the questions which are relevant or have decided to ignore them?

### **Supplementary Answer**

I think that the experts know better. Monmouth is a model example and we have that evidence to make that decision and I think it will work in Wokingham.

### **The Leader of Council stated:**

I think I would add Prue that as you know we have a consultant engaged in trying to map our future in terms of recycling and waste collection. We are in the middle of a contract. We have just bought a series of vehicles which were designed for what we thought to be the existing case.

### **17.6 Caroline Smith asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:**

#### **Question**

When reading the supporting documents into the rationale of buying the plastic sacks it states that they will result in a 6% improvement in recycling rates and an extra 1.5% as the bags are bigger. This is based on an assumption that people, having no room in their black boxes, are putting extra recycling into blue bags. Where is the evidence for this currently happening, which can be accurately determined as 1.5% not being recycled?

#### **Answer**

To clarify first of all, if nothing was done to mitigate the wet paper issue, then the loss of recycling I think is about 6% off the current recycling rate which would come down from 54% to 48%.

It is evident from the blue bag (that you mentioned) compositional analysis of what is thrown away that good recyclate is being disposed of and every item needs to be captured in order to meet our climate change and recycling objectives. The proposed bag will help divert material from disposal to recycling as it is bigger than the current box. Furthermore, there will be a comprehensive educational campaign to detail what can be recycled and to prevent good material from going to waste in the blue bags, which will assist with this diversion.

Additionally, tests of the proposed bags with the recyclables inside has shown the extra space allows for more material than presented in the current boxes. Due to this it has been calculated that an extra 1.5% of material will be collected which will help drive up our recycling rates even further which is great news, I am sure you will agree. We encourage all residents to recycle and each household will receive two bags and if required bigger households can opt for more bags.

#### **Supplementary Question**

You did not quite actually tell me where the evidence for this 1.5% of the stuff that was put into the blue bag was coming from?

#### **Supplementary Answer**

Looking at the blue bag the compositional analysis of the blue bags has shown that there is a lot of additional stuff that is going in the blue bags which should really be in the recycling boxes.

## **18. PROPOSAL TO MITIGATE AGAINST WET PAPER**

The Executive considered a report setting out a proposal to roll out waterproof recycling bags, to replace the current open black recycling boxes, to mitigate against the problem of wet paper and card.

When introducing the report the Executive Member for the Environment reminded Members of the reasons why the report was being considered, which included the changes that had occurred in the global recycling markets which meant that wet paper products were no longer accepted for recycling. Because paper products were currently collected in an open box, and were therefore subject to becoming wet, much of the material collected since last winter had required to be disposed of at a greater cost. Not only was this costing approximately £600k per annum but had a negative impact on the Council's overall recycling rate of about 6%.

Councillor Batth reiterated that it was proposed to supply every household in the Borough with a reusable waterproof bag in which to store and present all recyclable materials, including paper and card.

Members were also reminded of the process that had been followed to get to this stage of the process which included approval of the funds to implement the solution on 30 July. This decision was subsequently called-in and considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on 26 August. Following consideration of the matter the Committee supported the Executive's decision. Tonight consideration was being given to the procurement and use of the waterproof bags for subsequent implementation.

Councillor Dolinski mentioned that in the business case it stated that the unwanted black boxes would be collected however no costs were shown for the disposal of these boxes. He queried therefore what the financial implication was and how much had been factored into the projected savings or gain of £403k? Councillor Batth confirmed that it was estimated that the cost of collection and disposal of the black boxes would be approximately £28k and this had already been taken into account in this year's budget; which was why no mention had been made in the financial implications of the report. Councillor Batth advised that the intention was to recycle the boxes and turn them into benches which would include the names of some of those residents who had unfortunately passed away due to Covid-19.

The Leader of the Council advised that what was being proposed was an interim solution as the Council would be considering its long term waste and recycling strategy. To this end Councillor Halsall advised that he would be inviting Liberal Democrat members to get involved with this ambitious project which he expected to lead to radical changes to the current process.

**RESOLVED** that:

- 1) the sum of £288k for the purchase of the waterproof recycling bags be approved;
- 2) the support of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee to the resolution made by the Executive at its meeting on 30 July 2020 be noted and;
- 3) the proposed change for the recycling container from open black box to a closable waterproof recycling bag by the end of January 2021 be approved.

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Substance Misuse Service</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	The Executive on 24 <sup>th</sup> September 2020
<b>WARD</b>	None specific
<b>DIRECTOR</b>	Matt Pope, Director of Adult Social Care, and Carol Cammiss, Director of Children's Services
<b>LEAD MEMBER</b>	Cllr Charles Margetts, Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services, and Cllr UllaKarin Clark, Executive Member for Children's Services

## **PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)**

The current provider of Wokingham Borough Council's drug and alcohol substance misuse service has decided that it can no longer provide the commissioned service for Wokingham Borough Council. This is a mandated service and approval is sought to have a new contract in place by June 2021. The contract value will increase by £150k per annum to meet the expected needs and cost of the service.

The re-commissioning of the Wokingham substance misuse service will enable residents to recover in the community, reduce the harms associated with substance misuse, protect children and families from potentially problematic/dangerous situations associated with substance misuse and help residents recover to a healthy lifestyle.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

That the Executive agrees to:

- 1) increase the current substance misuse annual contract value of £492k for the incumbent to allow for a sustained delivery of a mandatory\* (\*required by law or mandate; compulsory) service until 30<sup>th</sup> June 2021 whilst a new procurement exercise is completed (as allowable within PCR2015);
- 2) the re-commissioning of the Wokingham substance misuse service. This will start with publishing a Prior Information Notice for early market engagement and awareness of the upcoming re-procurement of the substance misuse service relevant to a contract of estimated £4.5 million. ( £642k per annum);
- 3) increase the contract value in the tender to meet the anticipated demand and cost of the service.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Local authorities have a mandated responsibility for providing, planning and funding alcohol and drug treatment and prevention services. The current service (Provider is SMART) is a fully integrated drugs and alcohol recovery service delivered in line with an evidence based practice model that attracts and engages substance misusers into

treatment and promotes full sustained recovery from drugs and/or alcohol. The service supports children, adults, young people, families and carers with substance misuse issues within/across a community setting(s).

In March 2020, SMART served Wokingham Borough Council with notice. SMART stated they had been subsidising the service from its charitable reserves since at least 2017 and they could no longer sustain this position. Benchmarking took place and WBC finance met with SMART to identify the shortfall each month which was agreed at £7,000. It was subsequently agreed that WBC would pay SMART an additional £7,000 per month until the end of the contract in June 2021 thus allowing WBC strategy and commissioning to procure a new service. In order to procure a service that meets the requirements of residents and be seen as an attractive opportunity to prospective bidders it is suggested the current budget of £492k be increased by £150k (circa £642k) per annum. This additional funding would be provided from the Public Health grant and not from council funds directly. If the service is not adequately funded we run the risk of the tender being advertised and no providers bidding therefore resulting in a mandated service not being offered to residents. The increase in the contract value would allow for a redesign of the service (previously designed in 2014) this will incorporate an outreach service not previously commissioned, prevention work with a focus predominantly on young people and education (previous funding from children's was withdrawn in 2018) and therefore will make the service available to more people. By attracting more people to the service and raising awareness of substance misuse both to clients, residents and WBC employees this will provide better value for money as the service will be used to its full capabilities.

## **BACKGROUND**

Local authorities have a mandated (required by law or mandate; compulsory) responsibility for providing, planning and funding alcohol and drug treatment and prevention services. The current service is a fully integrated drugs and alcohol recovery service delivered in line with an evidence based practice model that attracts and engages substance misusers into treatment and promotes full sustained recovery from drugs and/or alcohol. The service supports children, adults, young people, families and carers with substance misuse issues within/across a community setting(s). The current service supported 376 residents into accessing services and providing treatment and interventions. Of the 376 residents 73 were young people (under 18) and 303 were adults.

The current service provider, SMART, have been providing substance misuse treatment services in Wokingham since October 2014. They were brought in on a caretaker basis when the previous provider, KCA, was deemed to be offering an unsafe service particularly for young people. At that time Smart operated a number of services in the South East, including Bracknell. The service went out to tender in April 2017 and Smart won the contract on a 3 years +1+1 basis with the service due to end on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022 and the process for re-procuring the new service had begun.

Typically substance misuse treatment services are run by not-for-profit charitable organisations. Over recent years the market has changed with smaller organisations merging together or with bigger corporate providers in order to allow them to continue to operate in an ever-increasing competitive market. Smart continued within the sector as a sole provider and has lost market share. Wokingham is the only area where they are offering a fully integrated substance misuse service. This has meant their overhead costs and their ability to negotiate cost-effective terms with other key partners, such as GPs for shared care, for which they rely on to operate services has been compromised. Additionally, that has been an extraordinary increase of 700% in the cost of Buprenorphine (illicit drug substitute) which has been borne by the provider.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> March SMART served Wokingham Borough Council with notice. SMART stated they had been subsidising the service from its charitable reserves since at least 2017 and they could no longer sustain this position. Benchmarking took place and WBC met with the provider to identify the shortfall each month which was agreed at £7,000. It was subsequently agreed that WBC would pay SMART an additional £7,000 per month until the end of the contract in March 2021 thus allowing WBC to procure a new service. In order to procure a service that meets the requirements of residents and be seen as an attractive opportunity to prospective bidders it is suggested the current budget of £492k be increased by £150k (circa £642k) per annum. This additional funding would be provided from the Public Health Grant and not from the Council Revenue. If the service is not adequately funded we run the risk of the tender being advertised and no providers bidding therefore resulting in a mandated service not being offered to residents.

## **OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY OF SUBSTANCE MISUSE SERVICES**

Drugs and alcohol present a wide range of social and health issues. Their misuse can have serious consequences for individuals, family members and whole communities such as crime, domestic abuse, child abuse and neglect, family breakdown, physical and mental health problems and homelessness. Estimates show that the social and

economic costs of alcohol related harm amount to £21.5bn, while harm from illicit drug use costs £10.7bn. These include costs associated with deaths, the NHS, crime and, in the case of alcohol, lost productivity. The evidence shows that drug treatment reflects a return on investment of £4 for every £1 invested, increasing to £21 over 10 years.

Wokingham has comparatively low prevalence rates of substance misuse, see table below. The rate of drug use in Wokingham, per thousand of the population, is below the region (South East) and National Rate. The prevalence for the South East has been provided in line with the benchmarking data provided further in to the report.

**Prevalence** measures the proportion of individuals in a defined population that have a disease or other health outcomes of interest at a specified point in time (point **prevalence**) or during a specified period of time (period **prevalence**).

**National and local prevalence estimates and rates per 1,000 population aged 15 to 64 with 95% confidence intervals (CI) - 2016-17**

Local authority	15-64 population	Number of users			Rate of use per thousand of the population		
		OCU	Opiates	Crack cocaine	OCU	Opiates	Crack cocaine
<b>Wokingham</b>	102,615	373	307	249	3.63	2.99	2.43
<b>West Berkshire</b>	100,340	645	512	350	6.43	5.10	3.49
<b>Windsor and Maidenhead</b>	94,173	525	446	362	5.57	4.74	3.84
<b>South East</b>	<b>5,697,624</b>	<b>35,135</b>	<b>29,176</b>	<b>21,891</b>	<b>6.17</b>	<b>5.12</b>	<b>3.84</b>
<b>ENGLAND</b>	<b>35,457,660</b>	<b>313,971</b>	<b>261,294</b>	<b>180,748</b>	<b>8.85</b>	<b>7.37</b>	<b>5.10</b>

Whilst prevalence remains lower in Wokingham than neighbouring local authorities it is understood the hidden harm within Wokingham is higher than neighbouring LA's. **Hidden harm** is **harm** or abuse that is usually **hidden** from public view occurring behind closed doors, often not recognised or reported. For example this is believed to be professionals within Wokingham who are employed outside of the Borough and consuming alcohol / drugs in their leisure time / evenings and weekends. Additional funding will also allow the provider to tackle this area of unmet need. The outreach work which will be included within the newly designed service specification is one area which the provider will be expected to work with this cohort of residents.

It is anticipated by increasing the current annual contract value by £150,000 it will allow WBC to provide additional outreach services to residents affected by the impact of COVID-19 detailed further in the report. COVID-19 will increase the demand on the current service capacity and is expected to impact on services post March 2021.

The harmful effects of substance misuse are not isolated to the individual; it extends its reach wider to those in the family, the children, carers and friends.

The potential harms to children in particular are pronounced, studies have shown that children who grow up in a household where substance misuse is a factor (or any other adverse childhood experience) are more likely to experience substance misuse issues and bring up their children in a household where adverse childhood experiences are a factor. The new service specification includes working with parents and carers and increasing their awareness of the impacts of substance misuse on young people both directly and indirectly. This will be provided in a number of ways but one expectation is to deliver at parents evening and through partnership working with our schools.

The effect on family members and partners can be just as troubling; nationally it is acknowledged that there are also strong links and interdependencies between substance misuse, domestic abuse and mental health. Families that are living with substance misuse are at increased risks and so should be supported, and professionals should remain vigilant to any additional needs.

Young people's drug and alcohol misuse can have a major impact on their education, health, family life and their long-term life chances. At this point in time there are 13 young people in treatment with 38% of these being young 13-14 year old teenagers. Substance misusing young people have a number of additional vulnerabilities and for Wokingham over 50% of these young people present with issues - including being looked after, mental health, self-harm, NEET, ASB/criminal activity and affected by others' substance misuse. Five of the young people have parents who also misuse substances and there are concerns that these children may be hidden and their needs not met.

Some Key Statistics:

- In 2019/20, 189 adults engaged in drug treatment, with the main age band being 30-34 years at 22.2% of all clients.
- In 2019/20, 114 adults engaged in alcohol treatment, with the main age bands being 35-39 years at 15.8% of all clients.
- Over 50% of adults in drug and alcohol treatment are parents and it is well recognised that children of substance misusing parents features in a large number of cases open to Children's Social Care.
- There were 7 drug related deaths between 2016 and 2018 for Wokingham.

We know most drug related deaths happen to those not in treatment so investing in treatment helps to reduce drug related deaths via prescribing, harm reduction (needles / blood borne viruses), social contact, etc. Drug related deaths are usually the homeless and unknown who do not access mainstream services but access social security for benefits and numerous visits to a & e. Impact on family is the loss (emotional) and dysfunctional family networks / connections. Investing in treatment addresses all these areas for an individual.

The re-commissioning of the Wokingham substance misuse service will enable residents to recover in the community, reduce the harms associated with substance misuse, protect children and families from potentially problematic/dangerous situations associated with substance misuse and help residents recover to a healthy lifestyle. The clients who engage in services largely have chaotic lifestyles and attending services is not a preferred option for them. Therefore, the redesign of the service allows for workers to visit the service user whether that be at a home address, coffee shop or other this will ensure improved engagement and ultimately better outcomes for the client.

## COVID-19

The current public health crisis around COVID-19 raises serious additional concerns for the wellbeing of people who use drugs, ensuring service continuity for those with drug problems, and the protection of those offering care and support for this population. Because of the prevalence of chronic medical conditions, many will be at particular risk for serious respiratory illness if they get infected with COVID-19. Because COVID-19 (like any severe infection of the lung) can cause breathing difficulties, there may be an increase in the risk of overdose among opioid users.

People in the UK are **drinking differently as a result of coronavirus**<sup>1</sup>. But our research shows that we aren't all responding in the same way. Changes in drinking habits are happening in two directions. Some people are drinking more often. Around one in five drinkers (21%) are drinking **more frequently** since the lockdown. This suggests that around **8.6 million UK adults** are drinking more frequently under lockdown. Since the service design in 2014 there has been a huge change in the amount of alcohol consumed nationally and one area of the redesign allows for targeted work with local establishments to publicise the harm caused by excessive drinking and the information on how to access services available to our residents.

There are also risks beyond the individual. It is estimated one in 14 adults feels that alcohol makes the tension in households worse since lockdown. If this is applied to the Wokingham adult population we can infer that more than 9,000 adults are living in households where alcohol has exacerbated tension in the household.

The figures are even higher for households with children. One in seven people with children under 18 living in their household feel that alcohol had increased tensions. For Wokingham this could be directly affecting over 4,000 children, while only 4% feel alcohol had lessened tensions (approx. 1,200).

## KEY RISKS AND MITIGATIONS

The most significant risk will be the failure of Wokingham Borough Council to provide a mandated service to residents with substance misuse issues along with the subsequent impact on:

- Disruption in service provision to vulnerable members of our community and their families
- Failure of Wokingham Borough Council to deliver a mandated service
- Reputational risk within Berkshire and the wider South East region to manage this extra-ordinary situation
- Extra burden on social care services, particularly for children, housing, mental health, police and benefits
- The current contract allows for a 3 month notice period, which will be lengthened in the new contract following reprocurement

## PROCUREMENT TIMETABLE

Due to the value of the contract exceeding £663k for the full contract period it is subject to OJEU procurement rules and regulations and therefore set timescales which cannot be amended. A comprehensive project plan has been completed and agreed with

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<sup>1</sup> <https://alcoholchange.org.uk/blog/2020/covid19-drinking-during-lockdown-headline-findings>

procurement and if authorisation is given by executive to procure the new service will be in post to commence on the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021.

**Term of the Contract:**

The term of the contract will be on a 5+1+1 basis which is standard within the industry and recommended good practice to enable a service to become well established within the community. The initial 5 year term will encourage more competitive bids.

**Funding:**

Funding for the service is financed through the Public Health Grant.

**Link to Service or Corporate Objectives**

The service fits within the principles from the Wokingham Borough Council's vision of looking after vulnerable people and improving health, wellbeing and quality of life for the residents of Wokingham Borough. Drugs and Alcohol Strategy Group is a subgroup of our multi-agency Community Safety Partnership and thus is sat within a wider community placement.

This service aligns with the draft Borough Plan in a number of ways, supporting strategic values, principles and plans:

Values	
<b>Being Ambitious</b>	The service will be linguistically, ethnically and culturally relevant, and able to meet the needs of residents of Wokingham Borough who misuse drug and/or alcohol.
<b>Customer Focussed</b>	Commissioning a service that works for the community, ensuring there is equity of access to the service.
<b>Taking ownership</b>	Understanding needs and addressing these e.g. support adults, young people, families and carers with substance misuse issues within/across a community setting(s).
<b>One team</b>	Listening and being open and honest with residents and our community in terms of what is feasible with the resources.
Principles	
<b>Customer enabling</b>	Demands for substance misuse services are increasing and we need to find new ways to manage this. We need to promote self-care by helping customers meet their own needs through community support and technology.
<b>Customer self-service</b>	Ensure the maximum amount of information is available on the providers website and customers can access online training and support. Access and engagement with the service will require the provider to have lean processes, digitised and e-enabled.
<b>Focused customer case work</b>	Both straightforward and more complex clients will be managed in the smartest way we can. Where clients have chaotic and complex lives ways of holding and managing these clients need to be innovative to provide a quicker and smarter outcome. The new service has also been adapted to consider outreach work in the community to provide a flexible approach to accessing the service.

<b>Specialists</b>	Commissioned to promote and enhance partnership working and manage the Substance Misuse contract to ensure clients maximise opportunities for positive outcomes and recovery
<b>Commissioning</b>	Commissioning quality services in line with the latest evidence-based practice, ensuring the service is up-to-date, innovative and provides good value for money
<b>Future Model</b>	Improving substance misuse services for Wokingham Borough residents and visitors, with robust governance and oversight demonstrating value for money and quality services
Plan	
<b>Support at vulnerable times and Health and Wellbeing</b>	Enable people to have a good quality of life and equal access to services and the information they need
	Provide safe, high quality and value for money service
	Ensure effective support for vulnerable learners, for example children and adults with special educational needs or disability
	Improve emotional and mental health, reduce self-harm

The service also supports the following priorities within the developing Children & Young People's Plan:

- Priority 1 – Early Intervention and Prevention
- Priority 2 – Emotional Wellbeing
- Priority 3 – Contextual Safeguarding
- Priority 4 – Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

The service also aligns with the 'reducing inequalities' priority from the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

### **Project Specific Objectives, Appraisal of Options and Project Timetable**

Substance misuse services represent a significant proportion of the spend of the public health ring-fenced grant, and affects a range of [Public Health Outcome Framework](#) (PHOF) outcomes, including:

- Admission episodes for alcohol related conditions
- Successful completion of drug/alcohol treatment

Commissioning of this service will meet the mandated and local needs by developing a specification:

- using the Care Act 2014 and statutory Care Act guidance to ensure commissioned services meet the mandate
- using the Wokingham substance misuse needs assessment to tailor the specification
- using the National Strategy and policy guidance for example Modern Crime Prevention Strategy 2016 – Alcohol Chapter

The integrated substance misuse service aims to improve substance misuse outcomes by:

- Ensuring that support planning and delivery is co-produced with the customers
- Delivers high quality care and support to achieve the aims of the service
- Is sensitive to the needs of an individual customer and non-discriminatory in the delivery of the service
- Accessible so that it can provide services when needed to all customers within its normal operating hours
- Promotes the safety of customers and that of their carers, staff and the wider public

- Offers choices which promote independence
- Well-co-ordinated between all staff, stakeholders and partners
- Delivers continuity of care and support for as long as this is needed
- Empowers and supports staff
- Properly accountable to its customers and their carers

Service objectives:

- Maintain and improve the health and wellbeing of the residents that use the service
- Effectively manage offenders in partnership with other agencies to reduce their offending rates
- Reducing crime and anti-social behaviour related to drug and alcohol misuse
- Support the Youth Offending service to reduce levels of re-offending in the under 18 cohort and reduce the number of entrants into the criminal justice system.
- Support children who are impacted by parental substance misuse
- Support people who misuse drugs and/or alcohol to access education, employment or training in conjunction with existing services in Wokingham, gain suitable accommodation and maintain it and improve their health and wellbeing
- Increase the knowledge of generic workers to increase the early identification of substance misuse
- Provide alternative solutions to the delivery of substance misuse services which are not service based

Spending on drug treatment is reported to lead to a wide range of benefits including:

- Making communities safer by reducing crime, drug litter and street prostitution and troubled families stabilised.
- Protecting public health by preventing drug-related deaths, restricting blood-borne viruses (HIV, hepatitis C) and reducing the burden on the NHS.

In actual cost terms, it is calculated<sup>2</sup> that:

- Every £1 spent on drug treatment saves £4.00 in costs to society.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION**

***The Council continues to face severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of reductions to public sector funding and growing pressures in our statutory services. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions of approximately £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.***

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	Please see “Other Financial Information” below	Yes	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)		Yes	
Following Financial Year (Year 3)		Yes	

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/alcohol-and-drug-prevention-treatment-and-recovery-why-invest/alcohol-and-drug-prevention-treatment-and-recovery-why-invest>

### Other Financial Information

We have undertaken a benchmarking exercise to see how substance misuse spending in Wokingham compares to other comparative neighbours. We have been challenged by Public Health England for the past two years as we spend the lowest proportion of our grant on substance misuse services. The table below shows that Wokingham is currently spending less on this mandated services and therefore an additional £7,000 per month has been agreed with the service provider. Therefore the spend for 2020/21 will in fact be £576,000.

#### Summary - Using 2018/19 Data

	RBWM	West Berks	Wokingham
Population (2018)	150,906	158,527	167,979
New presentation	258	204	205
All in treatment	494	449	298
Spend per person	£ 5.02	£ 5.31	£ 2.93
Budget	£ 758,000	£ 842,290	£ 492,000

The service redesign will be conducted in the context of needing to achieve improved outcomes along with increased value for money e.g. offering online advice services, requirement for value-for-money service level agreements with pharmacies. As detailed in the report and within the Corporate objectives the additional funding will allow Wokingham Borough Council to meet the ever changing needs of a complex and challenging cohort of residents.

### Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

A Prior Information Notice was published on the 30<sup>th</sup> June 2020 to ensure providers are aware of the upcoming opportunity. A provider event is planned for the 19<sup>th</sup> August 2020 to stimulate the market to promote a competitive tender.

### Public Sector Equality Duty

Wokingham Borough Council must not discriminate directly or indirectly against any group or individual and is required to foster good relations. This has been considered as part of the overall approach to this re-procurement. A further Equality Impact Assessment will be completed on the new service specification once it has been finalised and after full consultation with key partners and communities affected. The new service will seek to address inequalities and ensure equitable provision of services in the future. No detrimental impacts are anticipated.

**Climate Emergency – This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030**

This will have a neutral impact.

### List of Background Papers

None

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**Service** Adult Social Care

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<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Wokingham Special Educational Needs School</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	The Executive on Thursday, 24 September 2020
<b>WARD</b>	Winnersh;
<b>LEAD OFFICER</b>	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers, Director, Children's Services - Carol Cammiss
<b>LEAD MEMBER</b>	Executive Member for Business and Economic Development - Stuart Munro, Executive Member for Children's Services - UllaKarin Clark

## **PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)**

The purpose of this report is to update the Executive on plans for the provision of a new Special Education Needs school within the Borough and agree the proposed terms of the lease of the site to the Department for Education.

The proposal will help the Council meet its statutory duties to Children and Young People with Special Education Needs, It will provide high quality, local special school places at a lower cost than alternative out of borough schools and with reduced transport costs.

As part of the provision of the new school a lease for the school site at Winnersh Farm (owned by Wokingham Borough Council) to the Department of Education is required. It is proposed this lease is for 125 years. The Executive must approve any leases for Council owned land for a duration longer than 14 years.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

That the Executive:

- 1) confirm their support for the development and provision of a new Special Education Needs School at Winnersh Farm;
- 2) approve the lease of the site at Winnersh Farm to the Department for Education for use as a Special Education Needs school on their model Heads of Terms, and delegate powers to the Director of Asset and Resources, in conjunction with Lead Member for Business and Economic Development, to complete the lease.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report seeks approval for the continued development of a new Special School (for children with Special Education Needs and Disabilities or (SEND) at Winnersh Farm and the terms of the lease with the Department for Education for use of the site.

The new school will help the Council meet its statutory duties to Children and Young People with Special Education Needs, It will provide high quality, local special school

places at a lower cost than alternative out of borough independent and non-maintained schools and with reduced transport costs.

The school will be a special free school, for 150 pupils (all ages), for children with autism (ASD) and Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) Difficulties. It is anticipated that half the places will be used by Wokingham children and young people. The other half being used by children and young people from Reading borough.

Having the special free school in Wokingham provides for a number of benefits to the borough, not least the positive impact on children, young people and their families in relation to having access to additional in-borough provision.

The school will be built and funded by the Department for Education. The Maiden Erlegh Trust have been appointed by the DfE to run the school. Revenue funding will come from the councils' High Needs Block Budgets (through a combination of top slice and direct payment).

A site at Winnersh Farm has been identified as the most suitable site for the school, taking into account location, availability and site conditions. Feasibility work has been undertaken to confirm the location of the school within the site and prepare initial designs. The site will be subject to a long lease to the department for Education, proposed at 125 years at nil rent. The terms of the lease need to be approved by the Executive as the proposed length of lease is longer than 14 years.

If the project does not proceed then the Council will need to continue to provide SEN provision through its existing provision which includes expensive out of Borough provision, which also has an impact on the children who need to be transported out of Borough for their education.

Subject to approval for the Executive, a planning application for the school will be submitted in January 2021. The school is expected to open in September 2022.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **January 2019 report**

The January 2019 report “Provision for Special Education Needs and Disabilities, including potential options for Addington School expansion” to Wokingham’s Executive established both a range of issues leading to growing pressure on the High Needs Block budget and actions to reduce spend, while maintaining or improving the quality of provision. The actions included:

- The expansion of Addington School in Woodley (complete)
- Improved accommodation for the Foundry College (nearly complete)
- A new Special Free School for Wokingham (now being delivered through the Winnersh Farm project)

### **Current and future need**

Bringing the 2019 report up to date, the number of children and young people with EHCPs has continued to increase (up by 200 / 8% p.a. from 2017 to 2020). Within this total there has been continued strong growth in the number with EHCPs for SEMH and ASD (from 438 to 592 / 11% p.a.) and a lower rate of increase (from 190 to 207 / 3% p.a.) for the subset of EHCPs naming Special Schools and other specialist settings. Both Wokingham and Reading Borough Councils expect this growth to continue. Since long term growth rates cannot be predicted with certainty, the viability of the proposals has been considered against both low and continued high growth scenarios. See Appendix A for additional data.

### **Impact for Children, Young People and Families**

The impact of children on attending out of borough provision is considerable. Children with SEND often have to travel large distances to access provision that is appropriate to their needs. This can add a number of hours onto a normal school day, which can affect children’s ability to engage fully upon arrival (thus not gaining the full educational benefit of settings), or needing time to ‘wind-down’ or rest upon returning home at the end of the day (thus impacting on family life).

Having school within the borough will have a positive impact on children’s wellbeing and ability to learn, as well as enjoying family life.

### **Financial position**

The continued growth in the number of children with EHCPs has led to significant pressure on the HNB budget. At the end of the 2019/20 year the HNB budget deficit was £3.36m, having increased by £1.79m during the course of the year.<sup>1</sup> The council has little discretion over the size of the HNB budget and cannot divert other schools funding to increase the allocation (see Appendix B).

High cost specialist provision for a small proportion of all children with EHCPs is an important contributor to the financial challenge. Looking at spend data for 2018 (the

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<sup>1</sup> Report to the March 2020 Schools Forum

most recent comprehensive figures) the average place cost for all state sector special schools was £25K, while for Independent and Non-Maintained Special Schools (ISS / NMSS) it was £66K. These ISS / NMSS schools received nearly 45% of all payments, despite having just less than 10% of the children and young people with EHCPs. This growth in the use of out of borough ISS / NMSS has been a significant contributor to the home to school transport budget deficit.

Future growth in the number of children with EHCPs will, without remedial action, increase the pressure on the HNB budget (£1.64m projected overspend 2020/21) and associated further pressure on the home to school transport budget.

## **Analysis**

Despite additional funding and expansion in capacity, need continues to grow, and financial pressures remain. This confirms there continues to be a case for new local provision, provided it can be offered at a lower cost than out of borough alternatives. Significant savings would be made by replacing day placements at independent and non-maintained special schools (currently costing between £60K and £90K p.a.) with places at schools in the state sector at £35K p.a. (£10K greater than the average, but consistent with the provision (and projected costs) at the Winnersh Farm School)

## **New Free Special School**

The 2019 report envisaged the new Free Special School being delivered following a bid by Wokingham BC to the DfE. Although this bid was not successful, Reading Council also submitted a proposal for a 150 place Free Special School for children with Autism to serve Reading, Wokingham and West Berkshire, which was approved by the DfE. A brief summary of the DfE scheme is provided at Appendix C. This school would meet a major Wokingham need, reduce place and transport costs and be much closer to Wokingham than most ISS / NMSS sites.

However, since the DfE's approval of the Reading scheme, a number of changes have occurred:

- Reading BC found that their proposed site was not available. The land is leased to a third party who wished to retain it for their own use. Reading BC were unable to offer a satisfactory alternative.
- Wokingham BC supported Reading BC by identifying land at Winnersh Farm which could be used to accommodate this school. Other land was considered, including on the Hatch Farm Dairies site, but due to development challenges was not adopted for use.
- Wokingham and Reading being able to commission 75 places each (rather than the original 70 places for Reading and 40 each for Wokingham and West Berkshire) following West Berkshire's withdrawal from the project. This is to Wokingham's benefit, as the 40 places that would otherwise have been available would have met a smaller proportion of the Council's current and expected future provision.
- It is expected that the Northern House School will change its designation from Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) to Autism Spectrum Disorder with challenging behaviour when it transfers to a new Trust. This means that children with SEMH (without ASD) will need an alternative local school, a need that is intended to be met by the Winnersh Farm school

## BUSINESS CASE

### Winnersh Farm school proposal details

The current proposal is:

- **Special Free School Opening September 2022**, for 150 pupils (all ages), designated for children with ASD and Social Emotional and Mental Health problems.
- **Places to be shared equally** between Reading and Wokingham Borough Councils (75 each).
- **DfE to build the school** on land Winnersh Farm Capital costs to be (largely) met by DfE, revenue costs come from commissioning school's DSG (child funding directly from LAs and place funding via top slice from WBC's DSG – see below for balancing mechanism)
- **Expected funding mechanism:** Place funding (@£10K per place) to be met by DfE (top sliced from Wokingham's HNB budget allocation), but Wokingham BC's costs balanced out through the DfE's import/export adjustment. Pupil funding from LAs commissioning places (so mainly WBC and RBC, but potentially also other LAs if Reading and Wokingham do not take up all the places). While established schools are funded based on historic rolls, the DfE has an adjustment exercise for new and growing schools.
- **A Trust running the school** to hold a contract with DfE
- **Designation:** SEMH and ASD (Social and Communication Difficulties). The primary focus will be on higher achieving / more complex need) children (so not duplicating Addington with its Learning Disability focus or Northern House with its expected ASD plus challenging behaviour focus).
- **Trust designate** Maiden Erlegh Trust
- **School to grow** year by year to 150
- **The aspiration** is that this will become the school of choice for those local children who would otherwise go to high cost independent or non-maintained special schools.

### Viability and impact

Under both low and high growth scenarios the school is sustainable. There are sufficient children with ASD and SEMH projected to require out of borough places in both scenarios to make use of the places. Appendix D sets out a full analysis.

Under the low growth scenario the projected saving (when the school is full) would be circa £1.5M p.a.

Under the higher growth scenario the projected saving (when the school is full) would be circa £2.2M.

The reduced saving under the low growth scenario reflects the reduced number of high cost places replaced by the new school (50 out of the 75 offered) compared to the high growth scenario (all 75 places offered) with the remainder coming from out of borough state sector (community and free / academy special schools). Home to school transport savings would be similar in either scenario. Appendix E sets out the financial analysis.

## **The Winnersh Farm site**

The Council has worked with the Department for Education, Reading Borough Council and Wokingham Borough Council to identify an appropriate site for the school within Wokingham Borough, after the original site identified within Reading Borough was no longer available. The Winnersh Farm site was identified as being available (the previous Farm Tenancy expired in March 2020), suitable in terms of size and location, and deliverable in terms of construction logistics and site constraints.

Feasibility and design work has been undertaken jointly with the Department of Education to identify a suitable location within the site for the SEN school, taking into account the school requirements for buildings, outdoor space, sport and play facilities and car parking and access. The school site is required to be 1.8ha in size to meet the Department for Education standards. Feasibility and design work has also taken into account the constraints of the site, predominantly seeking to mitigate the noise and air quality impact from the M4 and A329(M). Survey work of the noise and air quality conditions in this location has been undertaken and has informed the overall masterplan of the site. The school site is proposed to be located at the western end of the site adjacent to Woodward Close and Wheatfield Primary School and furthest from the motorway to mitigate any impacts of noise and air quality. The impacts of noise and air quality in this location has been deemed acceptable for a school use by the Department of Education. A full noise and air quality assessment will be required to be submitted with planning applications on this site, which may include the identification of further mitigation measures. Access to the school site will be from a new constructed road coming off Woodward Close. The proposed school site is outlined in red on the plan at Appendix F.

The site is currently unallocated for development within the Council's Core Strategy local plan and Managing Development Delivery local plan and sits outside of the settlement boundary of Winnersh, in the countryside. Early pre-application discussions with the Local Planning Authority has indicated that the use of the site for a SEND school could be justified by the specific educational need in spite of the site not being allocated. The matter would be formally considered through the planning application process.

Subject to the approval of Executive, it is proposed that public consultation on the proposals at Winnersh Farm is undertaken later this year in advance of a planning application being submitted by the Department for Education in January 2021.

The Council's draft Local Plan Update (published early 2020) proposes an allocation for this site for residential development in conjunction with an adjacent site (optioned by Taylor Wimpey) and to include the site within the settlement boundary of Winnersh. The planning and design work for the SEND school has been progressed to take into account the potential wider residential development. This has confirmed that the delivery of the SEND school is compatible with the achievement of the potential wider development, which will be the subject of future engagement.

## **Property agreements**

It is proposed that the site for the school be leased to the Department for Education on the basis of their EFA model 125 year Free School lease at a peppercorn rent. Further information on the EFA model is set out on the Government website at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/free-schools-utcs-and-studio-schools-model-lease>.

### *Costs*

The Department for Education will build and fund the SEND school. However the DfE will not fund “abnormal” costs associated with site and ground conditions. This is following scenarios in the past where the DfE have been gifted sites by other local authorities for the construction of schools which have not been suitable for any other uses due to their ground conditions and the DfE has been left with significant costs relating to site mitigation and remediation. This risk has been taken into account when identifying the part of the site suitable for the construction of the school. Site surveys have been undertaken and areas of known contamination, flood risk and noise impact (predominately the eastern end of the site) have been avoided. The results of further ground investigation surveys are awaited which will help identify any further risk. Wokingham Borough Council is currently in discussion with Reading Borough Council as to how the risk of “abnormal costs” could be shared between the two authorities.

As part of the development of the wider site a new road will be constructed through the site. This will give access to the SEND school site and any residential development on the remainder of the site. It is likely that the SEND school will be built in advance of any residential development and vehicular access to the school will be required first. It is therefore proposed that the first section of the new road will be constructed by the Council concurrently with the construction of the school and in advance of the construction of the residential units. A bid has been submitted to the Council’s Capital Programme of £650,000 for this construction in 2021/22. Any further financial contribution from Reading Borough Council will reduce the financial outlay from Wokingham Borough Council.

### *Land Value*

The site identified for the school has a current land value of £52,000 as farmland. If the site were to be developed for residential use, as per the proposed Local Plan Update allocation and the rest of the site, then the value of the school site would be circa £2million. This increase in land value represents the financial contribution from Wokingham Borough Council to the delivery of the school.

### **Value and impact analysis**

The new school would be of benefit to the Council because:

- It can reasonably be expected to meet educational needs, with a well-resourced and capable Trust to run it and a modern building built to contemporary standards.
- It is expected to reduce cost per place by close to 50% compared to high costs alternatives that are regularly used by this Council.
- Home to school transport costs will be reduced because of the greater efficiency of transport and the reduced travel distance.
- The capital costs to the council (for abnormal construction costs) are estimated at circa £100,000. School related abnormal costs are expected to be a small proportion of total costs and wider development costs would need to be met with or without this scheme to unlock the development potential of this site. In any event these one-off costs will need to be balanced against the ongoing, long term

revenue savings reasonably anticipated from the scheme. It is therefore a low risk that these will be material matters for the final decision.

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

***The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.***

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	Nil		
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£650,000 for construction of highway access  £100,000 risk pot for abnormal costs	Bids been made to the capital programme – allocation to be confirmed.	Capital
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£220K to £320K saving for the HNB	Yes	Revenue – High Needs Block

### Other Financial Information

#### Capital Funding

A bid has been submitted to the capital programme for 2021/22 to fund the design and construction of the access road to the school site (£650,000) and to establish a risk pot for abnormal costs associated with construction of £100,000.

#### Revenue Funding

Based on unit costs of alternative provision of £60K for projected future numbers, savings are projected of £2.2M p.a. by 2026 to the High Needs Block Budget. If the growth in the number of EHCPs is contained, the projected benefit will be £1.5M p.a. The higher savings figure is based on continued growth in the number of children and young people requiring special school places and therefore the total HNB spend will have increased but the saving would be insufficient to fully offset the overall cost increase because the new school would not be able to cater for all of the additional required placements. The lower figure would reflect low (or no) growth in the number of children requiring special school places, and the savings would, therefore, lead to a reduction in overall HNB spend.

Based on current transport costs, transport savings would be £375K per annum by 2026

It is proposed that entries to the school are phased over a period of 5 years. The detailed projected annual impact on the HNB and the Home to School Transport budget in the period leading to full use of 75 places by Wokingham Borough Council in 2026 is shown in Appendix E and summarised below:

	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
<b>No of Children</b>	18	37	57	67	75
<b>Cost in Alternative placement per placement</b>	£1,140,000	£2,220,000	£3,420,000	£4,140,000	£4,500,000
<b>Projected Cost in New School</b>	£589,000	£1,147,000	£1,760,000	£2,139,000	£2,325,000
<b>Projected Saving</b>	<b>£551,000</b>	<b>£1,073,000</b>	<b>£1,660,000</b>	<b>£2,001,000</b>	<b>£2,175,000</b>
<b>Cost of School Transport to alternative placement</b>	£180,000	£370,000	£570,000	£670,000	£750,000
<b>Cost of School Transport to new school</b>	£90,000	£185,000	£285,000	£335,000	£375,000
<b>Home to School Transport Projected budget saving</b>	<b>£90,000</b>	<b>£185,000</b>	<b>£285,000</b>	<b>£335,000</b>	<b>£375,000</b>
<b>Overall Projected Annual Saving</b>	<b>£641,000</b>	<b>£1,258,000</b>	<b>£1,945,000</b>	<b>£2,336,000</b>	<b>£2,550,000</b>

### **Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation**

Subject to the approval of the Executive, public consultation on the proposals for the SEN school at Winnersh Farm will be undertaken jointly with the Department of Education and the Maiden Erlegh Trust later this year before the submission of a planning application in January 2021.

### **Public Sector Equality Duty**

An Initial Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken of the Winnersh Farm development proposed. This identified no low or high negative impacts on any groups.

### **Climate Emergency – This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030**

The design of the school building will be built to the latest Building Regulations standards on sustainability. By providing SEN provision within the Borough this will reduce the distance pupils are required to travel.

<b>List of Background Papers</b>
None

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Current and Future needs

The number of children and young people with EHCPs has grown by just under 200 (25% / 8% per year) over the period 2017 to 2020. Within this overall growth, WBC's number of EHCPs for SEMH and ASD have increased from 438 to 592 (by 35% (11% per year)). The numbers of these children with EHCPs naming special schools and other non-mainstream provision has increased from 190 to 207 (by 9%, on average (3% per year)). Growth is seen in all age groups, with particularly strong growth in the 18+ (49% p.a.) and primary school (12% p.a.) age groups.

	2017	2018	2019	2020	%ge change since 2017	annual %ge growth
<b>EHCPs</b>	798	848	894	995	25%	8%
<b>EHCPs (not mainstream schools)</b>	348	352	370	354	2%	1%
<b>EHCPs ASD / SEMH</b>	438	488	518	592	35%	11%
<b>EHCPs ASD / SEMH (not mainstream schools)</b>	190	200	211	207	9%	3%

Source data: 2017 to 2019 – SEND2 returns, 2020 –download of SEND2 data set, prior to submission date.<sup>2</sup>

Both Wokingham and Reading expect to see continued growth in numbers of children and young people with EHCPs for ASD and SEMH, and both have continuing pressures on their HNB budgets. While there is no reason to suppose this increase will cease in the immediate future, it is important to consider the value of the scheme if growth did decline, by establishing the viability of the proposal within the reasonable range of future growth models. These are:

- That growth will continue at its current rate (a high growth model).
- That growth will slow, because the pool of children with high SEND levels is limited and because of the success of initiatives to support schools to support children and young people with SEND in mainstream provision (a low growth model).

Two tables are set out below, showing the total number of EHCPs for Wokingham children under the two scenario of current growth maintained and growth slowing in the near future. These are not forecasts (although the higher rate is a projection) but are intended to establish the range of likely outcomes, within which the new school proposal has to be viable and help the HNB budget to balance. The balance between mainstream and specialist provision is based on the 2020 split (close to a 2/3<sup>rds</sup> / 1/3<sup>rd</sup> split)

<sup>2</sup> SEN2 2014 to 2020 with top-up charges clean 20200122 (Autosaved)

**Scenario 1: 6% growth per annum (current increase rate) to 2030. This scenario is consistent with current growth rates being sustained for the next decade.**

	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2025</b>	<b>2030</b>
Special Schools	354	379	417	436	456	474	544
Mainstream	641	681	710	758	805	857	1,106
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>995</b>	<b>1,060</b>	<b>1,127</b>	<b>1,194</b>	<b>1,261</b>	<b>1,331</b>	<b>1,650</b>
Growth per annum		7%	6%	6%	6%	6%	6%

*2020 figures are based on data from January 2020, later years are derived from 2020 figures, inflated by the growth per annum figure given on the bottom row. They are a projection of current growth rates.*

**Scenario 2: 2% growth in 2021, 1% growth in 2022 and 2023, static thereafter. This scenario is consistent with initiatives to support children with SEND in mainstream schools being sufficiently successful as to arrest growth from 2023 onwards.**

	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2025</b>	<b>2030</b>
Special Schools	354	361	365	368	368	368	368
Mainstream	641	654	660	667	667	667	667
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>995</b>	<b>1,015</b>	<b>1,025</b>	<b>1,035</b>	<b>1,035</b>	<b>1,035</b>	<b>1,035</b>
Growth per annum		2%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%

*2020 figures are based on data from January 2020, later years are derived from 2020 figures, inflated by the growth per annum figure given.*

Both scenarios show a need for additional capacity, with between 14 and 190 additional special school places required by the end of the decade.

## **Appendix B: HNB Budget**

The HNB budget allocation is set by the DfE and has not kept pace with increasing costs. As a consequence there is a significant, and still increasing, deficit on the HNB. While the HNB deficit cannot be funded from the General Fund, deficits are effectively funded from the Council's reserves. Efforts to increase funding for the HNB from the DSG Schools Block were rebuffed by Schools Forum and the Secretary of State for Education. Although funding has been increased in recognition of national budget pressures, the growth has not been sufficient to generate a budget surplus to ensure that the budget deficit stabilises or to pay back the accumulated deficit. This scheme and its intended benefits will be reported to Schools Forum.

## Appendix C: DfE Free Special School offer

As noted above the Reading BC Free School project was approved by the DfE as a school of 150 places serving children from Reading, West Berkshire and Wokingham. The DfE's offer (when they invited expressions of interest from local authorities) can be summarised as:

- School to be a Free Special School, built by the DfE on land provided (for free / at a peppercorn rent) by the local authority.
- Sponsor to be appointed by the DfE, but after recommendations by the successful bidder, to operate to a specification written by the successful LA.s
- Scheme depends on the successful councils underwriting revenue costs, by providing guarantees concerning future use, and place and pupil funding.
- While the DfE will build the school, they expect local authorities to pay for abnormal site related development costs. This might be for such matters as ground conditions, flood mitigation or access issues (a non-exclusive list).
- Under the standard DfE funding model for state funded Special Schools, Place funding (£10K per place) comes directly from the DfE, but is top-sliced from the host local authority's HNB budget (the host being the LA within which the school is sited), and pupil funding comes from local authorities commissioning places for individual children. The DfE's "import / export" adjustments (based on £6K per child or young person taking up a funded place) to the HNB ensure that LAs do not suffer because they import children or benefit from being an exporter by adjusting each council's core HNB budget to reflect the balance of in and out of borough local authority place funded provision and usage. Additionally host local authorities receive £4K per place for each child or young person taking up a funded place in their area, irrespective of the child's home local authority.

## Appendix D: Managing growth

The tables below show how needs can be met, with the new school under the two scenarios of continued and slowing growth.

### Scenario a – 6% growth p.a.

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025		2030
New Special School	0	0	18	37	57	75		75
Addington	178	200	220	220	220	220		220
Northern House	33	36	36	36	36	36		36
ISS / NMS / SpP16	78	78	78	78	78	78		148
AP / PRU	8	8	8	8	8	8		8
Special	45	45	45	45	45	45		45
Mainstream	641	681	710	758	805	857		1,106
Other	12	12	12	12	12	12		12
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>995</b>	<b>1,060</b>	<b>1,127</b>	<b>1,194</b>	<b>1,261</b>	<b>1,331</b>		<b>1,650</b>

*Projected EHCPs to 2026 by education provider.*

Under this scenario, the new school prevents growth in the number of EHCPs for high cost placements (until 2025), but does not provide sufficient capacity to reduce their use. Additional new capacity will be required to reduce the reliance on high cost placements.

### Scenario (b) – 2% growth, to 1% and then static growth figures

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025		2030
New Special School		-	18	37	57	75		75
Addington	178	200	220	220	220	220		220
Northern House	33	36	36	36	36	36		36
ISS / NMS / SpP16	78	70	47	39	25	20		20
AP / PRU	8	8	6	4	4	4		4
Special	45	39	30	24	21	8		8
Mainstream	641	654	660	667	667	667		667
Other	12	8	8	8	5	5		5
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>995</b>	<b>1,015</b>	<b>1,025</b>	<b>1,035</b>	<b>1,035</b>	<b>1,035</b>		<b>1,035</b>

Under this scenario the new school could significantly reduce the reliance on high cost placements. This model shows that if the current high growth rate in the number of EHCPs slows significantly, the new school can make a significant inroad into the use of high cost placements, helping reduce the overall HNB spend, despite some increase in demand.

## **Appendix E: Financial benefit**

The principal financial benefit will be to the HNB budget (part of the DSG). Reduced reliance on very high cost ISS / NMSS sector will help reduce pressure on the HNB. Local provision will also reduce the burden on the Home to School Transport Budget. Using current spend figures the likely impact of the new school is set out in the table below. This is based on all the new school places taking the place of alternative high cost placements. In the low growth scenario, up to 50 places could be taken from the high cost schools, and 25 places taken from out of borough provision. This would reduce the annual benefit of the proposals to £1.5M. This would be sufficient to address the annual HNB budget deficit.

The basic principles behind special school (and other commissioned places for children and young people) are that commissioned places at state sector schools are funded (£10K per child in a Special School) by host local authorities and top-up funding is paid for each child or young person on a school's roll (rates are variable). An import / export adjustment ensures that local authority payments are balanced. Places in the Independent and Non-Maintained sectors do not receive place funding – all costs are met from what would be top-up in the state sector.

		2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
A	Place cost (per place)	£ 10,000	£ 10,000	£ 10,000	£ 10,000	£ 10,000
B	Number of funded places	38	74	114	138	150
C	Place Funding (A X B)	£ 380,000	£ 740,000	£1,140,000	£ 1,380,000	£ 1,500,000
D	Top up costs (per child)	£ 25,000	£ 25,000	£ 25,000	£ 25,000	£ 25,000
E	Number of WBC pupils on roll (50% of B)	19	37	57	69	75
F	Top up costs (D X E)	£ 475,000	£ 925,000	£1,425,000	£ 1,725,000	£ 1,875,000
<b>G</b>	<b>Total costs to WBC (before import / export) (C+F)</b>	<b>£ 855,000</b>	<b>£ 1,665,000</b>	<b>£2,565,000</b>	<b>£ 3,105,000</b>	<b>£ 3,375,000</b>
H	Basic entitlement rate	-£ 4,000	-£ 4,000	-£ 4,000	-£ 4,000	-£ 4,000
I	Basic entitlement (total) (B X H)	-£ 152,000	-£ 296,000	-£ 456,000	-£ 552,000	-£ 600,000
J	Import / Export adjustment per place	-£ 6,000	-£ 6,000	-£ 6,000	-£ 6,000	-£ 6,000
K	Number of non-WBC children on roll	19	37	57	69	75
L	Import Export Adjustment (J X K)	-£ 114,000	-£ 222,000	-£ 342,000	-£ 414,000	-£ 450,000
M	Effective value of import / export adjustment plus basic entitlement ( I + L )	-£ 266,000	-£ 518,000	-£ 798,000	-£ 966,000	-£ 1,050,000
N	Total cost to WBC (G+L)	£ 589,000	£ 1,147,000	£1,767,000	£ 2,139,000	£ 2,325,000
O	Comparator place costs (unit)	£ 60,000	£ 60,000	£ 60,000	£ 60,000	£ 60,000
<b>P</b>	<b>Total Place of comparator provision</b>	<b>£ 1,140,000</b>	<b>£ 2,220,000</b>	<b>£3,420,000</b>	<b>£ 4,140,000</b>	<b>£ 4,500,000</b>
<b>Q</b>	<b>Saving</b>	<b>-£ 551,000</b>	<b>-£ 1,073,000</b>	<b>-£1,653,000</b>	<b>-£ 2,001,000</b>	<b>-£ 2,175,000</b>

#### Notes

(D) Top up rate: Reading BC set this (in their initial proposals to DFE) at two levels. £20K and £30K, with an equal number of students in each band anticipated, hence the £25K figure given.

(H) Basic entitlement: £4k funding given to each LA for each pupil on the roll of a special school / specialist post 16 setting with funded places in the local authority's area through the HNB funding allocation.

(I) Basic entitlement total payment is based on the expectation that otherwise all children on the roll of the new school would be placed in schools outside the Wokingham area.

(L) Note that this is a notional figure as the actual adjustment will reflect the position for all schools with place funding and all children and young people.

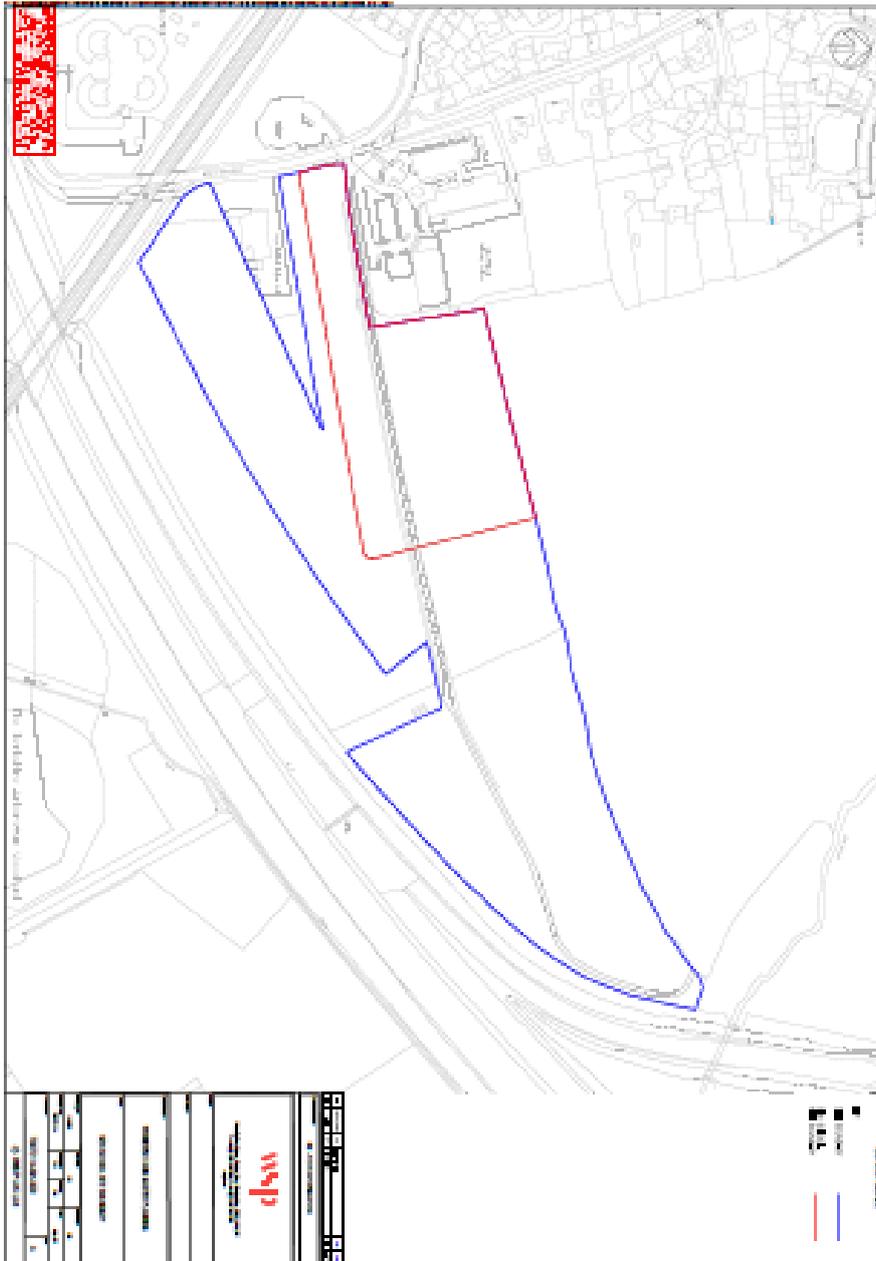
As noted, there are a number of assumptions here, and elements of the scheme are still in development. What is critical though is that cost per place (place funding plus top up) is kept below the level of other schools (particularly independent special schools) that might otherwise be used. For this exercise a figure of £60k per child per year is used as a comparator. There are a number of schools meeting the needs of children with autism and SEMH through day provision where the costs are appreciably higher (£65 to £70K per child per year), though. To have a significant impact on the overall HNB spend, it is important that this becomes the school most children who would currently be placed in an independent special school are placed at. An important risk, is that the school does not become the school of choice, and children and young people who should be placed there, in fact continue to be placed at Independent Special Schools (with the agreement of the Local Authority or through Tribunal decisions).

Mitigation depends on (a) the Trust creating a school that does offer flexible and high quality places that are popular and do meet needs and (b) robust (and well resourced) processes to resist unnecessary high cost placements.

Home to school transport spend will also be reduced. On the basis of the average cost of transporting a child out of the borough is in the order of £10k, but only £5K within the borough, the potential savings per year would be:

	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2025</b>	<b>2026</b>
Number of children	19	37	57	69	75
Saving per child	£ 5,000	£ 5,000	£ 5,000	£ 5,000	£ 5,000
Total Saving	£ 95,000	£ 185,000	£ 285,000	£ 345,000	£ 375,000

# Appendix F: Proposed School Site



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<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Procurement of Commercial Property Owner's Insurance Cover</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	The Executive on Thursday, 24 September 2020
<b>WARD</b>	None Specific;
<b>LEAD OFFICER</b>	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers
<b>LEAD MEMBER</b>	Executive Member for Finance and Housing - John Kaiser

## **PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)**

Insurance provides financial protection to the Council and its tenants in respect of loss of, or damage to, the economic investment, commercial, retail, industrial, town centre and other similar properties (e.g. Peach Place, Elms Field) that are owned by the Council.

N.B. The Council is required, under covenants or conditions contained in all of the leases, to arrange this insurance.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The Executive is recommended to approve:

- 1) the procurement (by way of open competitive tender) of the insurance cover;
- 2) delegation of the design of the contract specification to the Deputy Chief Executive;
- 3) delegation to the Deputy Chief Executive, in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance and Housing, authority to award the contract(s) to the successful bidder(s) following completion of the evaluation process.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Following recent investment purchases, the regeneration of the town centre and Elms Field, and combined with industrial estates and retail premises owned for many years, the Council now has a commercial, retail and industrial properties portfolio of some £120,000,000.

Insurance cover has been placed with a number of insurers as the investment portfolio has grown. It is proposed that the Council will now seek to leverage the size and variety of the whole portfolio to secure high quality cover at a competitive price with a single insurer. This will achieve the best value for the Council and for its tenants.

A tender process must be completed. The new policy will commence on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2021 to run in-line with the Council's primary insurance programme.

It is proposed to retender the cover on either:

1. a 3 year + 2 year basis (i.e. an initial term of 3 years with 1 possible extension of up to 2 years); or
2. a 5 year basis.

The premium is estimated to be between £450,000 and £625,000 over 5 years and therefore requires Executive approval.

Ongoing advice is taken from the Council's appointed insurance brokers as to which contract term is most advantageous given the likely state of the commercial and public sector insurance markets as we move in to late 2020/early 2021.

## BACKGROUND

The Council's current insurance cover has been placed with a number of different insurers as the investment portfolio has grown and the town centre (Peach Place) and Elms Field properties have been completed. Some properties are unattractive to insurers (e.g. plastics factory, hotel, cinema) and have therefore had to be insured at short notice with insurers willing to accept the risk.

The Council will now seek to use the size and variety of the whole portfolio to secure high quality cover at a competitive price with a single insurer; the 'attractive risks' (e.g. offices, town centre retail) mitigating the 'unattractive risks'. This overall spread of risk will be more attractive to the insurance market and is expected to reduce the overall premium.

The Council is required under the terms of the leases with its tenants to arrange the cover. This process will also demonstrate that the Council has sought the best value insurance cover available.

## BUSINESS CASE

It is important for the Council to protect itself and its tenants from the financial consequences of loss of, or damage to, these properties – especially major fire or flood damage. Further, adequate and sufficient insurance cover is a key element of the Council's approach to risk management.

Regardless of the overall duration of the contract, the cover is renewed on an annual basis and changes may be incorporated at each renewal. Therefore, there is always the ongoing opportunity to ensure that the contract remains cost effective and provides the necessary insurance cover that the Council requires.

No other options are available: providing the insurance is a requirement of the leases.

There are minimal financial implications to the Council from procuring the insurance cover as the premiums are charged out to the tenants. However, it is necessary to demonstrate to tenants that the best value insurance cover available has been purchased.

Cover is to commence from 30<sup>th</sup> June 2021.

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

***The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.***

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	Nil	Yes	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	Not known at this stage	Yes	Revenue
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	Not known at this stage	Yes	Revenue

<b>Other Financial Information</b>	
It should be noted that the price is subject to influences such as changes any in the risk profile, external factors affecting the insurance market, and any further changes to the rate of Insurance Premium Tax (currently 12%).	
<b>Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation</b>	
None required	
<b>Public Sector Equality Duty</b>	
An EQA has not been undertaken: no groups will be disadvantaged by the decision.	
<b>Climate Emergency – <i>This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030</i></b>	
No impact	
<b>List of Background Papers</b>	
Procurement Business Case	
<b>Contact</b> Dan Skinner	<b>Service</b> Business Services
<b>Telephone</b> Tel: 0118 974 6571	<b>Email</b> dan.skinner@wokingham.gov.uk



In accordance with the Procurement and Contracts Rules and Procedures (PCRP) (see section 3.1.1): a formal business case is required for any procurement with a total value above £50,000. The level of approval required for the Business Case depends on the type of procurement and total ascertainable value of the contract, as indicated in the table below:

**1. Level of Approval**

**State “YES” in the applicable box at either Level 1 or Level 2:**

Type of Procurement	Level 1		Level 2	
	Assistant Director & Director	“Yes”	Assistant Director, Director & Executive Approval	“Yes”
Goods and Services	£50k – £500k		> £500k	Yes
Schedule 3 Services	£50k – £663k		> £663k	
Works	£50k – £4,733k		> £4,733k	

**NOTE:** Executive meetings (Level 2) are held each month but the submission of papers is strictly controlled, resulting in a cycle of at least 6-weeks – speak to Democratic Services for assistance.

**2. Project Information**

<b>Project / Contract Title</b>	Commercial Property Owner’s Insurance Cover
<b>Project / Contract Description</b>	Damage to Buildings and Loss of Rent insurance cover to protect the Council’s and tenants’ interest in those commercial, industrial and retail investment properties owned by the Council. <i>The Council is required under the terms of the leases to procure this insurance cover.</i>
<b>Expected Start Date &amp; Duration (months)</b>	Commencing 30.06.2021; the duration is likely to be 36 or 60 months.
<b>Any Extension/s Allowed (months)</b> (e.g.: 1 x 24m / 1 x 12m + 1 x 12m)	The intention is to seek quotations on (1) a 3-year plus 2-year extension basis and (2) a 5-year basis. <i>Advice will be taken from the Council’s appointed insurance brokers as to which contract term is most advantageous.</i>
<b>Total Ascertainable Value</b>	Estimated at between £450,000 and £625,000 over 5 years.
<b>Procurement Procedure</b> (Open, Restricted, other agreed procedure) <b>Summarise the advice from your consultation with Procurement</b>	Open procedure in order to secure the maximum possible interest from the insurance market.
<b>Budget Available</b> (please state the value and add any specific comments or notes)	N/a: see below.
<b>Source of Funding</b> (revenue or capital or specified other)	The premium is invoiced out to the individual tenants.
<b>If procurement is for software, specify outcome of your consultation with IMT and/or Digital &amp; Change</b>	N/a

### 3. Project Justification

#### **Link to Service or Corporate Objectives:**

The insurance provides financial protection – it is essentially a ‘loss financing mechanism’ – in respect of loss of, or damage to, economic investment, commercial, retail, industrial, town centre and other similar properties that are owned by the Council.

It is therefore a key financial risk control mechanism that protects the Council’s, and tenants’, limited resources; it provides peace of mind and reassurance to the authority and tenants.

Note that the Council is required, under covenants or conditions contained in all of the leases, to arrange this insurance.

#### **Project Specific Objectives, Appraisal of Options and Project Timetable:**

The Council’s current insurance cover has been placed with a number of insurers as the investment portfolio has grown and the town centre properties have been completed. Some properties are unattractive to insurers (e.g. plastics factory, hotel, cinema) and have therefore had to be insured at short notice with insurers willing to accept the risk.

The Council will now seek to leverage the size and variety of the whole portfolio to secure high quality cover at a competitive price with a single insurer; the ‘attractive risks’ (e.g. offices, town centre retail) mitigating the ‘unattractive risks’. This overall spread of risk will be more attractive to the insurance market.

It will also mean that there is an insurer ‘on standby’ that is ready and willing to insure new properties as they are purchased by the Council or built.

The Council is required under the terms of the leases with its tenants to arrange the cover. This process will also demonstrate that the Council has sought the best value insurance cover available.

It will be essential for the Council to:

- emphasise the positive aspects of the risk that is being presented to the insurance market;
- its level of engagement with the risk;
- detail any risk improvements undertaken and show how it is managing and improving the overall risk;
- describe in detail the Council’s approach to risk management for the properties to be insured.

Evidence of good risk management practice is becoming much more important to insurers when they are considering whether to quote and on what terms.

The tender will be conducted by the Council’s insurance brokers with full oversight by the Council’s property, insurance and procurement specialists, as a fully compliant OJEU-level Open Procedure.

The new policy will commence on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2021 to run in-line with the Council's primary insurance programme.

### **Cost Benefit Analysis:**

The Council owns buildings with a total 'insurance value' (i.e. Sum Insured) of c. £120,000,000 including rental income. More properties are likely to be added to the portfolio in future. It is important for the Council to protect itself and its tenants from the financial consequences of loss of, or damage to, these properties – especially major fire or flood damage. Further, adequate and sufficient insurance cover is a key element of the Council's approach to risk management.

As stated, the Council is required under the terms of the leases to arrange this cover and the premiums are invoiced to the individual tenants. As such, the Council does not bear the cost of this insurance cover other than the costs of administration, or if a property is empty and there is therefore no tenant to whom the premium can be charged.

### **Contract Management:**

The insurance is procured by Business Services on behalf of Commercial Property in order to comply with the covenants and conditions within the leases requiring the Council to arrange the cover. It is monitored, reviewed and revised as necessary on an ongoing basis to ensure that it provides comprehensive and suitable cover.

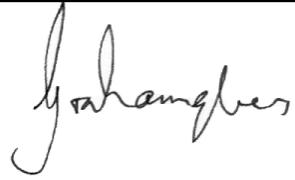
#### **4. Approval**

This Business Case is for approval:

- (1) to enter in to the procurement process; and
- (2) to design the contract specification; and
- (3) for delegated authority to the project team to award the contract(s) to the successful bidder(s).

***Note: If Level-2 approval is required, the document should be signed by Assistant Director and Director at Level-1 first, and then presented to the Executive for final approval.***

#### **Level 1**

<i>Position</i>	<i>Department</i>	<i>Signature</i>
<b>Assistant Director</b>	Commercial Property	
<b>Director</b>	Deputy Chief Executive / Director, Resources & Assets	

**Level 2**

**NOTE: Level 1 approval must be completed first.**

**Please state the date of the relevant Executive meeting or Individual Executive Member Decision at which the Business Case has been approved.**

<i>Date of Executive meeting / approval</i>
Executive Approval

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Help to Heat and ECO Scheme</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	The Executive on Thursday, 24 September 2020
<b>WARD</b>	None specific;
<b>LEAD OFFICER</b>	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers
<b>LEAD MEMBER</b>	Executive Member for Resident Services, Communication and Emissions – Gregor Murray

## **PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)**

The aim of this scheme is to facilitate a widespread uptake of Energy Company Obligation (ECO) funding to ensure that energy efficiency measures are installed in as many eligible households within the Borough as possible.

WBC will advertise the national ECO Scheme and the locally set Eco Flex 'Help to Heat' scheme through its own facilities, relevant local publications and through social media.

Use of the ECO scheme is expected to primarily support achievement of 2 key objectives within the borough:

- The alleviation of fuel poverty.
- Improved Energy efficiency in households locally. This will subsequently lead to a reduction in carbon emissions, contributing toward the Councils stated Climate Emergency aims.

The expected benefits of the scheme are reduced energy costs for some residents and a reduction in carbon emissions from the least energy efficient properties in the borough.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that Executive approve:

- 1) the Help to Heat scheme in order that the Chief Executive can sign-off Wokingham Borough Councils 'ECO FLEX Statement of Intent.' This will enable the Statement of Intent to be published on the Council's website.
- 2) the use of the wider national ECO scheme including the advertisement to residents of their ability to access ECO grant funds.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report outlines:

- The Council's proposed utilisation of the national ECO scheme, enabling access to external grant funding to cover the cost of energy efficiency measures to be undertaken on its HRA housing Stock which have an EPC rating of E,F or G.

- The Councils proposed publication of its Statement of Intent in respect of the locally defined ECO FLEX scheme. This will expand eligibility criteria for private households within the Borough and enable those that have an EPC rating of D, E, F or G, to access Grant Funding for the purpose of undertaking energy improvement works/measures to their homes.
- The report outlines the approach to encouraging and promoting as wide a take up as possible in respect of the available grant funding for the benefit of residents of the borough and in line with the Council's Climate Emergency declaration.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Energy Company Obligation (ECO) is a Government program designed to reduce emissions created by energy company power stations. The current obligation ECO 3 commenced on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2018 and will run until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022.

Under ECO major energy suppliers (such as British gas, EDF Energy, EON, Npower, Scottish power & SSE) are obliged to contribute a portion of their income to finance grants under the scheme. ECO grants can be accessed by designated ECO providers/installers with the funding being accessed on behalf of the household.

ECO funding is paid by the obligated large energy suppliers directly to the ECO provider/installer with no grants going via the household or, in the case of HRA housing stock, the local authority.

### Wokingham Borough Council's Aims for the scheme

The aim of this scheme is to encourage and facilitate a widespread uptake of the ECO offer(s) within the Borough in order to ensure that energy efficiency measures are installed in as many eligible households as possible.

Wokingham Borough Council will advertise use of the national ECO scheme as well as the locally set Wokingham Borough Council ECO FLEX 'Help to heat' scheme through our own facilities and internal departments, as well as publishing marketing material.

Use of the ECO schemes is expected to primarily support achievement of 2 key objectives within the borough:

- The alleviation of fuel poverty.
- Improved Energy efficiency in households locally. This will subsequently lead to a reduction in carbon emissions, contributing toward the Councils stated Climate Emergency aims.

### Key Elements of Wokingham Borough Council's use of ECO

The ECO funding will be utilised by WBC through this project in 3 main elements, these being:

1. The use of the national ECO scheme grant funds for WBC's own qualifying housing stock properties.
2. The creation of a local 'Help to Heat' scheme using the ECO 3 'Flexible Eligibility Criteria' which enables WBC to create additional criteria under which private households can qualify for energy efficiency installation measures.
3. The promotion of both the national ECO scheme and its qualifying measures as well as advertisement of Wokingham Borough's 'Help to Heat' scheme with its additional eligibility criteria for private residents.

## **Analysis of Issues**

In order to achieve the Councils stated aims with the declared climate emergency it is necessary to realise external funding opportunities for energy improvement works wherever these are available.

By advertising the ECO scheme and the locally set Help to Heat ECO flex portion of this, the Council can utilise external funding to reduce carbon emissions from private households within the Borough.

## **Finance**

The ECO scheme will not incur significant financial expenditure for the Council as it utilises a national grant-funding scheme that is, in most cases, expected to cover 100% of improvement works.

There may be instances where an ECO surveyor informs the Council that a HRA property doesn't qualify for a grant covering 100% of the costs of identified work. The Councils Housing department has therefore identified use of up to £30,000 from pre-existing budgets to meet any such funding gap(s) where appropriate.

The Council's 'Help to Heat' scheme will not incur capital costs. A member of the Energy Team within Commercial Property will be assigned as the 'Responsible Council Officer' (as required under the scheme) and will undertake additional tasks related to the project as an extension of their substantive role.

## **Governance**

The Council's ECO scheme including the 'Help to Heat' element of this will be run by the Energy team within Commercial Property in Corporate Services Directorate.

The ECO scheme will be administered by the Energy Team with assistance from the Housing department in relation access to HRA housing stock properties and associated data.

## **Next steps**

Following Executive approval the 'Statement of Intent' document will be sent for signing by the Chief executive ahead of publication on the Council's website as required by the legislation under-pinning the locally set flexible eligibility criteria portion of ECO. Once the Statement of Intent is published the Council's 'Help to Heat' scheme will be live and residents will be to engage ECO providers/installers to access funds using the Boroughs locally set additional criteria.

The Energy team has been working with Insta Group Ltd who have been selected to work with WBC in accessing funds for HRA housing stock properties that are eligible and undertaking works.

The Council will undertake advertisement of our 'Help to Heat' scheme as well as the national ECO scheme via social media, local publications and letters to residents to ensure that there is strong uptake of ECO grant funding within the Borough.

## **BUSINESS CASE**

Wokingham Borough Council undertook to reduce its carbon emissions to net zero by 2030. In order to achieve this, continual improvement of the energy efficiency measures of properties within the borough are required.

To tackle carbon emissions within the Borough the Council will need to undertake as many non-mutually exclusive options for improving energy efficiency as practically possible. To facilitate the uptake of energy efficiency improvement measures within Wokingham Borough it is considered that the ECO scheme as outlined above is ideal due to the benefits it provides with limited additional costs.

The grant funding nature of the ECO scheme with funds provided from large energy suppliers to ECO installers (as outlined above) enables work to be undertaken at no cost to individual householders or the HRA (in respect of the Councils Housing Stock). There is subsequently a clear cost benefit to the Borough in making use of ECO funding and advertising this opportunity to local residents.

The current timescales for ECO3 are that it will complete on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022.

With the adoption of the ECO scheme the expected outcomes will be an uptake of grant funded installation measures in both qualifying borough resident properties and HRA housing stock properties with these resulting in lower energy use as well as carbon emissions for these properties.

There are very few notable risks associated with uptake of ECO since the financial costs for this are placed on large energy suppliers as an obligation to issue a certain level of grant funding.

The main risks associated with this scheme, therefore, are through publicity associated with the works carried out. However, the Council itself will not bear any responsibility for works to third party properties as these will be carried out by independent contractors selected by individual households. The Council's involvement for these properties is to widen the qualifying criteria and facilitate access to the ECO funding.

The biggest notable risks for the ECO scheme surround negative publicity in NOT undertaking it as this would limit access to ECO funds for some residents who could have qualified under the expanded eligibility measures the Council can introduce by publishing a signed ECO flex Statement of Intent. Many neighbouring local authorities already have similar ECO schemes in place.

This scheme represents a positive undertaking by the Council that will benefit not only its own housing stock but also qualifying households within the borough, all of which advances the Council's position in respect of its Climate Emergency declaration.

### **Key Performance Indicators**

The performance of the Help to Heat ECO scheme will be measured in terms of the number of installations/measures undertaken.

The Help to Heat ECO scheme will initially aim for 400 energy efficiency measures to be installed in its first full year.

The data for installation measures will be taken from Wokingham Borough Council's spreadsheet record of approved Help to Heat scheme declarations and from information supplied by Insta Group Ltd as our primary ECO provider.

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

***The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.***

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£0	Yes	
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£0	Yes	
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£0	Yes	

### Other Financial Information

The wider ECO scheme will involve the Housing department to facilitate use of ECO grants for eligible HRA housing stock properties as well as the Communications team to assist Energy in advertising both our 'Help to Heat' scheme as well as the national ECO scheme.

### Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

None

### Public Sector Equality Duty

Equality Assessment completed and attached

***Climate Emergency – This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030***

The delivery of the ECO scheme will have a direct impact in carbon emissions across the Borough. By improving the energy performance of buildings, carbon emissions will be directly reduce.

### List of Background Papers

None

<b>Contact</b> Matthew Johnston	<b>Service</b> Commercial Property – Energy Team
<b>Telephone</b> <u>07714 226 772</u>	<b>Email</b> Matthew.johnston@wokingham.gov.uk

**Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) form: Initial impact assessment**

If an officer is undertaking a project, policy change or service change, then an initial impact assessment must be completed and attached alongside the Project initiation document.

**EqIA Titular information:**

Date:	20/08/2020
Service:	Corporate Services
Project, policy or service EQIA relates to:	<b>Help to Heat ECO scheme</b>
Completed by:	Matthew Johnston
Has the EQIA been discussed at services team meeting:	No
Signed off by:	
Sign off date:	

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**1. Policy, Project or service information:**

This section should be used to identify the main purpose of the project, policy or service change, the method of delivery, including who key stakeholders are, main beneficiaries and any associated aims.

**What is the purpose of the project, policy change or service change , its expected outcomes and how does it relate to your services corporate plan:**

The purpose of the Help to Heat ECO scheme is to access funding via ECO3 which is a national scheme for HRA housing stock properties as well as to expand the eligibility criteria for private households via the councils ECO flex Statement of Intent. When published Wokingham Borough Council's Statement of Intent will allow for households within the borough to qualify for ECO funding using a larger set of eligibility criteria based on need.

The expected outcomes of the Help to Heat ECO scheme are that it will provide funding for energy improvement measures on both HRA housing stock properties as well as private households resulting in lower energy use as well as potentially costs for those properties.

The Help to Heat ECO scheme relates to the council wide core plan for the Borough to be carbon neutral by 2030 and progresses this goal through reducing carbon emissions in eligible low energy efficiency properties locally.

**Outline how you are delivering your project, policy change or service change. What governance arrangements are in place, which internal stakeholders (Service managers, Assistant Directors, Members ect) have/will be consulted and informed about the project or changes:**

The Help to Heat ECO scheme is being undertaken by the Energy team in co-ordination with Housing; as well as this Energy is working with the communications/engagement and Marketing team to arrangement advertisement of both our Help to Heat scheme as well as the wider ECO3 national scheme.

Once approved by the executive the scheme will be delivered for our HRA housing stock residents through the housing department providing the necessary survey and contact data to Energy to query with the resident if they would like to access funding via Insta Group Ltd.

Energy will be working with the communications/engagement and marketing team to ensure advertisement of ECO in all aspects to our residents in as wide a scope as is possible.

The scheme will be run by the Energy team as part of commercial property under Bernie Pich with Graham Ebers having overview as director of corporate services. All appropriate stakeholders will be notified of and consulted regarding any possible considered changes to any aspect of the project though it is likely the project will not require notable changes.

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**Outline who are the main beneficiaries of the Project, policy change or service change?**

The main beneficiaries of the proposed scheme are all of the residents in Borough with lower EPC rated properties and those likely to suffer from fuel poverty as well as individual who are LIVC (Low Income and Vulnerable to Cold).

This scheme ensures wider eligibility criteria for residents in relation to an aspect of an already existing national energy grant scheme.

**Outline any associated aims attached to the project, policy change or service change:**

The associated aims of the project are to alleviate fuel poverty and reduce carbon emissions by helping the least energy efficient properties within the borough access funding for energy efficiency improvement measures.

This scheme broadly assists WBC in moving towards its stated aim of being carbon neutral by 2030 by way of reducing carbon emissions in some of the boroughs least energy efficient properties.

## 2. Protected characteristics:

There are 9 protected characteristics as defined by the legislation:

- Race
- Gender
- Disability
- Gender re-assignment
- Age
- Religious belief
- Sexual orientation
- Pregnancy/Maternity
- Marriage and civil partnership:

*To find out more about the protected groups, please consult the EQIA guidance.*

## 3. Initial Impact review:

In the table below, please indicate whether your project, Policy change or service change will have a positive or negative impact on one of the protected characteristics. To assess the level of impact, please assign each group a Positive, No, Low or High impact score:

*For information on how to define No, low or high impact, please consult the EQIA guidance document.*

If your project is to have a positive impact on one of the protected groups, please outline this in the table below.

*For details on what constitutes a positive impact, please consult the EQIA guidance.*

Protected characteristics	Impact score	Please detail what impact will be felt by the protected group:
Race:	No/Neutral	The eligibility for ECO3 funding is set by BEIS nationally. The parameters on Wokingham Borough Council's 'Help to Heat' ECO flex scheme has its expanded qualifying criteria limited by BEIS. All national ECO3 funding criteria is based on the energy efficiency of the property in question as well as various qualifying benefits set by government to show the household is likely to be vulnerable to fuel poverty. All additional qualifying measures undertaken by WBC as part of our 'Help to Heat' scheme are within legislation parameters.

Gender:	No/Neutral	The eligibility for ECO3 funding is set by BEIS nationally. The parameters on Wokingham Borough Council's 'Help to Heat' ECO flex scheme has its expanded qualifying criteria limited by BEIS. All national ECO3 funding criteria is based on the energy efficiency of the property in question as well as various qualifying benefits set by government to show the household is likely to be vulnerable to fuel poverty. All additional qualifying measures undertaken by WBC as part of our 'Help to Heat' scheme are within legislation parameters.
Disabilities:	Neutral/Positive	The parameters on Wokingham Borough Council's 'Help to Heat' ECO flex scheme has its expanded qualifying criteria limited by BEIS. The council's ECO flex statement of Intent expands criteria for ECO eligibility for those likely to be low income & vulnerable to cold (LIVC) which can be of positive benefit to some residents of this protected group.
Age:	Neutral/Positive	The parameters on Wokingham Borough Council's 'Help to Heat' ECO flex scheme has its expanded qualifying criteria limited by BEIS. The council's ECO flex statement of Intent expands criteria for ECO eligibility for those likely to be low income & vulnerable to cold (LIVC) which can be of positive benefit to some residents of this protected group.
Sexual orientation:	No/Neutral	The eligibility for ECO3 funding is set by BEIS nationally. The parameters on Wokingham Borough Council's 'Help to Heat' ECO flex scheme has its expanded qualifying criteria limited by BEIS. All national ECO3 funding criteria is based on the energy efficiency of the property in question as well as various qualifying benefits set by government to show the household is likely to be vulnerable to fuel poverty. All additional qualifying measures undertaken by WBC as part of our 'Help to Heat' scheme are within legislation parameters.
Religion/belief:	No/Neutral	The eligibility for ECO3 funding is set by BEIS nationally. The parameters on Wokingham Borough Council's 'Help to Heat' ECO flex scheme has its expanded qualifying criteria limited by BEIS. All national ECO3 funding criteria is based on the energy efficiency of the property in question as well as various qualifying benefits set by government to show the household is likely to be vulnerable to fuel poverty. All additional qualifying measures undertaken by WBC as part of our 'Help to Heat' scheme are within legislation parameters.
Gender re-assignment:	No/Neutral	The eligibility for ECO3 funding is set by BEIS nationally. The parameters on Wokingham Borough Council's 'Help to Heat' ECO flex scheme has its expanded qualifying criteria limited by BEIS. All national ECO3 funding criteria is based on the energy efficiency of the property in question as well as various qualifying benefits set by government to show the household is likely to be vulnerable to fuel poverty. All additional qualifying measures undertaken by WBC as part of our 'Help to Heat' scheme are within legislation parameters.
Pregnancy and Maternity:	No/Neutral	The eligibility for ECO3 funding is set by BEIS nationally. The parameters on Wokingham Borough Council's 'Help to Heat' ECO flex scheme has its expanded qualifying criteria limited by BEIS. All national ECO3 funding criteria is based on the energy efficiency of the property in question as well as various qualifying benefits set by government to show the household is likely to be vulnerable to fuel poverty. All additional qualifying measures undertaken by WBC as part of our 'Help to Heat' scheme are within legislation parameters.

Marriage and civil partnership:	No/Neutral	The eligibility for ECO3 funding is set by BEIS nationally. The parameters on Wokingham Borough Council's 'Help to Heat' ECO flex scheme has its expanded qualifying criteria limited by BEIS. All national ECO3 funding criteria is based on the energy efficiency of the property in question as well as various qualifying benefits set by government to show the household is likely to be vulnerable to fuel poverty. All additional qualifying measures undertaken by WBC as part of our 'Help to Heat' scheme are within legislation parameters.
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Based on your findings from your initial impact assessment, you must complete a full impact assessment for any groups you have identified as having a low of high negative impact. If No impact, or a positive impact has been identified, you do not need to complete a full assessment. However, you must report on this initial assessment and it must receive formal approval from the Assistant Director responsible for the project, policy or service change.

Initial impact assessment approved by....

Date: 20/08/2020

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