

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE EXECUTIVE
HELD ON 26 NOVEMBER 2020 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.15 PM**

Committee Members Present

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

Other Councillors Present

Chris Bowring
Gary Cowan
Andy Croy
Lindsay Ferris
David Hare
Tahir Maher
Imogen Shepherd-DuBey
Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey

44. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillor Charlotte Haitham-Taylor.

45. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 29 October 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and would be signed by the Leader of Council at a later date.

46. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest submitted.

47. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions submitted.

48. STATEMENT BY THE LEADER OF COUNCIL

The Leader of Council made the following statement:

I have been immensely proud to lead the Council during this period of emergency. The residents have reacted to this pandemic in a responsible and cooperative manner. The staff have shown strong commitment, innovation and flexibility. Thank you all.

We have sought to steer the Borough through very stormy waters with a firm and steady hand and I am pleased to say that generally we have been successful.

We had the first outbreak of Coronavirus nine months ago. Since lockdown a month ago cases in Wokingham have been falling and are currently 109.3 having risen to 155 at peak.

It is clearly disappointing to find ourselves in Tier Two, but that is because that the tiering is harsher than it was and that we have been grouped with the rest of Berkshire excluding Slough. Our policy is to ensure that as far we are able to return to Tier One. We believe that Tier One gives our businesses the best chance to recover and allows for our residents to lead as full a life as possible. The first review will be on December 16th and is based upon a number of factors; but regrettably it is not negotiable.

Since my last statement, two great British institutions Astra Zeneca and Oxford University have announced an effective vaccine awaiting approval by the regulator. Today I read that Sanofi, Translate Bio and GSK are coming into the frame, together with the Pfizer, and Moderna. We can now be reasonably confident that the light at the end of the tunnel is real.

I appreciate that everyone is tired, and it has been going on for some time, but sadly it will go on for much longer. Whilst the vaccines are excellent news, it will take some six months before they are universal, though benefits will be felt quite quickly as the elderly, the vulnerable, care homes and health staff are vaccinated. So, we as a Borough and Borough Council are planning for the winter and spring, in the hope that next summer we will return to normal; if we remember what that is.

We understand that health staff, over eighties and vulnerable groups may be inoculated as soon as this year.

Coronavirus is transmitted by contact or near contact. If we can inculcate a permanent behavioural change we can have a low rate of infection. Your Council is doing what is within its power to do so together with its partners; care homes, schools, businesses, marshals and community champions.

Our trace system is now working well and we will be rolling out in the New Year more universal testing.

Our primary task is now to ensure that every resident is safe, secure and not isolated throughout the winter. Everyone should have a warm home, food and the medicines. This administration is proud the homeless in the Borough are now very low and all homeless are looked after. We have housed all the rough sleepers except for one who insists that he prefers not to be housed. We will do the same with food and fuel poverty.

It is extremely important throughout this emergency that our residents have confidence in the Council. Statements that there are "6,300 children in poverty and rising" and that there are "one in six children living in poverty" in the Borough we do not believe to be accurate or responsible. Having said that, one vulnerable person, child or family is too much.

Next week in the Extraordinary Executive, we will be agreeing the additional financial help that we are giving families and businesses.

Similarly residents can have confidence that our Council's finances are in extremely good health, despite the huge recent financial challenges we have faced as a result of Covid. These challenges have precipitated claims of insolvency, draconian service and staff cuts in other local authorities; there have been none here.

The only time in the Borough's history that there has been a financial crisis was the period of control of the Lib Dems. We had perilous balances at only £2.3m, an uncontrolled overspend of £1.0m and had to act quickly to arrest a genuine fatal decline into insolvency,

Eighteen years of responsible leadership has, amongst other things, been devoted to restoring, maintaining and enhancing the Council's wellbeing. This has entailed replenishing balances to a safe level of approximately £10m, delivering efficiencies of many millions of pounds year on year, generating new income sources through our

commercially minded activities, whilst investing at an unprecedented level in key priorities such as highways, affordable housing and climate change.

We were financially strong and resilient coming into this emergency, despite years of austerity, in which we faced continuously escalating statutory care costs and severe restrictions in Government funding. It is this financial resilience that has enabled us to step up in the ways that we have needed for our community throughout the pandemic.

Our real terms cost of delivering services has reduced by 31% since 2011, primarily as a result of continuous improvement, giving savings of over £22m during the last five years on a net service budget of approximately £130m with very little that amounts to service cuts. Indeed, we have expanded services including waste collection and libraries, whilst other authorities have been pairing these back.

For the last five years our balances have held at approximately £9-10m. We are the lowest funded unitary authority at £84 per person whilst other authorities receive as much as £450 per person and yet we still manage to invest in services, including a capital investment programme for our community of £150-180m each year.

The Council's Treasury Management mid-year statement reports our income from investment activities at £7.2m per annum, a material sum. All the borrowing the Council has ever had to deliver all our capital road schemes, schools, affordable housing, regeneration, is at virtually no cost to our residents. Actually it is £7.52 per annum for a Band D tax payer. This borrowing has allowed us to accumulate realisable assets of almost £500m, not including value from optimising our significant land holdings.

We are one of the best council tax and business rate collectors in the country and were indeed the very highest achievers for council tax for four years running. Indeed our collection rates are holding up even in these difficult times.

Our Housing Companies are now running at a profit of over £650k per annum and net assets of £1.3m.

Our Wokingham town centre regeneration has secured committed rental in excess of 87% of its retail assets, some of which are not yet built, and has secured rental income in excess of the cost of borrowing with retailers still flocking in to take up units; even in current times. Again, we buck the trend.

The Comprehensive Performance Assessment, widely feared due to its intensive and thorough inspection, awarded the highest score for Wokingham under many of its financial themes each year and the highest score on all themes in one year. We were the only council to have achieved this accolade. More recently we have been reported in national journals and in external specialist reports as having excellent financial standing and financial management.

Our financial strength and standing are not something that has materialised overnight.

We cannot rest on our laurels as we will have severe financial challenges in the future. The work we have done and continue to do should be recognised for its incredible achievement and should not be blemished by untrue statements that bring the Council into disrepute and discredits all those that have given so much.

The comprehensive spending review has not been unhelpful to Wokingham but until the overall financial settlement is made, which is expected in December, we cannot fully assess the significance for Wokingham.

Please help me to help you. Those on this call are Councillors, the press and interested members of the public. What you do and say will have an enormous impact on public behaviour towards the virus and economic recovery. Please do not make things up with Trumpian statements from Twyford or bizarre references to buying a kitchen and cars from the faculty at Royal Holloway, or because it is politically expedient, or provides a good story. To get through this successfully residents must have confidence in the Council and the press. Residents must feel that we are doing our best to keep everyone safe, secure and happy.

Lastly stay safe and observe the rules. Thank you.

49. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

49.1 Andy Croy asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question:

Question

Why does the Council consult the public on cuts to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme but not on Councillor pay rises?

Answer

I am somewhat surprised that you have asked this question Andy as you seem to have got the wrong end of the stick. It is my intention not to reduce those who qualify but to expand the scheme to disallow the Carers' Allowance as part of the money taken into consideration when making judgements on whether or not anybody will receive it. So there will be more carers that will actually qualify for this payment.

But let me answer your question. It is that the Council is obliged to comply with the legislation associated with these different subjects. Let me explain them in more detail.

There is a legal requirement to carry out a public consultation when considering changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme. A consultation is required regardless of whether a negative or positive change, and as you heard earlier I am planning a positive change, but in Wokingham's case the key purpose of the consultation is to understand better how we can improve or how we extend the scheme. Indeed we think there is an opportunity, as I have said earlier, to disregard Carers' Allowances when taking into consideration. This will mean more carers will get the allowance.

The Local Authorities Members' Allowances, which is the second part of your question, is a regulation agreed in 2003 and it sets out the framework for Members' allowances to be awarded, in addition to detailing how the Independent Remuneration Panels, or IRP, could operate.

Wokingham Borough Council's IRP is made up of members of the public who voluntarily give up their time to conduct a biennial review of the Members' Allowances Scheme. Independent Remuneration Panel members are recruited via advertisements in the local

newspaper, on the WBC website, and via WBC social media streams. Potential candidates are then interviewed by the Lead Specialist for Democratic and Electoral Services and the Assistant Director for Governance. Successful candidates are then appointed for a three to four year term. The IRP make recommendations to the Council from an independent viewpoint and the decision as to whether to accept those recommendations is left to the elected Members.

There is no requirement within the legislation for a full consultation on recommendations from the IRP to be undertaken. The regulations underpinning Members' allowances and IRPs do however stipulate that upon receipt of a copy of a report made to it by the Independent Remuneration Panel, the local authority must as soon as reasonably practicable ensure that copies of that report are available for inspection by members of the public at the principal office of the authority and publish the recommendations and main features of the report in one or more newspapers circulating in the area. WBC adheres to these regulations, and welcomes any comments received upon publication of the report and the newspaper article. Any comments received would be passed on to the IRP ahead of the item going to the full Council meeting for debate and decision to be made by the Members.

Supplementary Question

You are right when you say that these processes are outlined by legislation but that is the minimum standard. There is nothing in legislation which prevents the Borough Council from putting out a consultation on Councillor pay rises which would inform the work of the IRP. I suspect that the reason we do not is that we will not necessarily get the answers which we want which brings me on to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

The wording of the survey was very, very, poor and many people I have spoken to thought that the wording was designed in such a way as to encourage people to give answers that would result in less money going to the people who needed it the most.

Why can't we design a decent survey to get proper answers from people?

Supplementary Answer

I am looking for proper answers from people Andy and that is what I want to do. The other issue, of course, with regards to every time we go to consultation there is an element of cost involved with that. I mean we are following the legislation with all the other councils I know doing it that way. There is nobody else who doesn't do it that way and I cannot see any reason why we should change the way we do things just for it to cost the residents even more.

49.2 Lindsay Ferris asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question:

Question

We are aware that there have been a number of issues within Optalis over the past months. Have the relations between RBWM and WBC now improved?

Answer provided by the Leader of Council

Optalis remains key to this Council's delivery of Adult Social Care and improvement journey. Optalis continues to perform well in all key measures, with many positive comments from local residents who use the services and their families. Plans are being jointly developed to create additional front line capacity in the organisation. This will

facilitate continued measured growth, by providing a genuine alternative market option. This will also stimulate further efficiencies in the wider local adult care sector. In addition to this, further opportunities for driving efficiencies and improvements are being developed in partnership with the Director of Adult Services. I would also like to thank the staff at Optalis for all the hard work they have been putting in on the front line throughout the Covid period; many of them have gone above and beyond to make sure our residents are supported and safe.

As you are aware, in terms of the relationship between the two Council co-owners of Optalis, there has been an ongoing dispute in terms of agreeing an equitable split of central costs as laid out in the shareholder agreement. I am pleased to announce that RBWM have agreed to settle two parts of that dispute with positive ongoing negotiations to resolve the third and final element. So, the short answer to your question is yes there is an improvement I am positive about the future, but we do need to let these negotiations conclude over the coming weeks.

Supplementary Question

I have concerns about the current arrangements and feel that they may be unstable in the future. Do you also share that view?

Supplementary Answer provided by the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services

I think I have shared publicly before that the last 18 months we have been looking at Optalis and we have had a change of strategy. There has also been a review of governance; basically in everything the Company does. It obviously follows that just because a company was doing something when it was set up it does not mean that it is the right thing in perpetuity and that is what has driven this discussion.

I would say that relationships with Optalis have improved dramatically since the appointment of the new CEO, David Birch, and as John answered we are in a much better place than we were.

There are negotiations going on basically to resolve the third of the issues regarding future costs at the moment. I am hopeful of a positive outcome. Things have been much better with Optalis over the last six months and hopefully they will go that way. We within WBC are fully focussed on getting a relationship which works with Optalis but work most of all basically for our residents because that is who we are all here for to serve.

49.3 Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question:

Question

Have you received any notification of changes to planning for the future proposals by the Ministry for Housing Community and Local Government as has been hinted at by the news media due to MPs revolting against the Government white paper?

Answer

We have not heard anything yet, official or unofficial. The only things that I have picked up is what you have probably alluded to that was in The Telegraph and reported through the BBC. But we have not had anything official yet. But let us hope that it is a U-turn.

Supplementary Question

There has been an appeal decision recently by the Inspectors saying that a two-storey extension was perfectly allowable based on the new rules. So does this mean that the new rules are actually in effect or not?

Supplementary Answer

I presume you were talking about permitted development rules. There is a document that was circulated by Marcia some time ago as a result of the question that Andy Croy asked me at the full Council meeting. I have asked Marcia to resend that note out to explain all the rules on permitted development and the latest rules on temporary permitted development through Covid. So you can look at that.

I do not know what actual one you are referring to but there are some circumstances where permitted development can be allowed but it does go through, what they call, prior approval through the Council. So it would have to go through a prior approval and it could get permission if it meets the criteria. Marcia is in the process of sending an updated note out to all Members.

49.4 Imogen Shepherd-DuBey asked the Executive Member for Business and Economic Development the following question:

Question

Under our 'Love Wokingham' brand, Wokingham Town Council has setup a virtual access point for many of our local businesses in the town, which directs people to the online presence for our local shops and businesses. We have our own website and regularly promote these businesses on social media. During the lockdown windows we have been putting out lists of restaurants who are delivering takeaway food. A sort of virtual High Street, which we have not been charging for.

I can see that Wokingham Borough Council have decided to start up a Virtual Christmas Market for small local traders on a Facebook feed, for which they are, rather shockingly charging £20-£50 to use. Considering that there is clearly no web site development and this looks like a very minimal service, I am wondering what value it offers.

What is Wokingham Borough Council actually investing in to promote and support all virtual businesses across the Borough?

Answer

Firstly, I would just like to point out that Love Wokingham is funded by both the Borough and Town Council and its promotion of local businesses has been agreed between the two authorities. Therefore it is, itself one of the ways we are promoting and supporting businesses.

Just to give you a bit of background. You asked the question what other things we are doing and then I am going to come back to the fee:

- Approximately £19million of business rate relief have been provided;
- £20million of businesses grants have been provided, including discretionary;
- Website promotion of businesses providing virtual services;
- Provision of clear advice and guidance to help businesses operate in Covid-19 safe manner;
- Promotional signage to encourage safe local shopping;

- Social media promotion to encourage local shopping.

In terms of the virtual market fee, the Wokingham Virtual Christmas market was set up following the cancellation of an in-person ice rink and Christmas market style hut event due to Covid-19. To help support local businesses that would have been involved in the market we decided to take the market aspect virtually and online. Following some research it was decided to use a Facebook group style event in order to get the market up and running for the longest period.

In order to manage companies that were interested in becoming a stallholder we set up an application form in order to explain rules and responsibilities and also have a form of business identification; including insurance, hygiene certificates and website. This was to ensure consumer safety whilst we provided a platform for products to be sold on. A small admin fee applied to enter to the value of £20 for a small sole trader, self-employed or craft type business and a £50 fee for national or regional business with many shop premises. So far all of the 40-plus stallholders who have paid have entered at the £20 charge level.

The admin charge was introduced so that the page could be managed to allow only those stallholders entered to post, which prevents a build-up of hundreds of posts per day that you see in other market groups.

So in summary the stallholders receive:

- Support on any questions/queries they may have during the market time frame;
- Help to create an eye-catching post;
- Statistics on when to post, based on judging by the consumer habits for the previous week;
- Promotion of the market via WBC's social media channels, of which our Facebook alone has an average monthly post reach of one million;
- A virtual market open for 38 days, if joined from the start, which is one of the longest running in the country

This all takes away all the behind the scenes leg-work a small business would normally have to do allowing them to focus solely on their products and the selling. Consumers and stallholders are primarily from within the Borough, not just Wokingham town centre or the larger towns, but we also welcome consumers from surrounding areas to help the local business grow and access a new consumer group other than those local to them.

The secondary aim of the market alongside supporting local business and creating some Christmas cheer in some tough times is also to extend the reach of those businesses by giving them a platform to interact with people and make connections that will hopefully extend and help their business going into 2021.

It should be noted that reaction to the Christmas Market has been extremely positive and we have had no complaints from the businesses that have so far signed up.

Supplementary Question

While that sounds great, and all this sort of stuff, I would be interested to know how much revenue this is generating and what value for money these businesses are getting?

Particularly at this time I am also curious to know what is happening in other towns? I know what is happening in Wokingham.

Supplementary Answer

Obviously I have not got all that detail but I will try and get that dug out for you and get that back to you.

49.5 Tahir Maher asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question:

Question

Will the Council set up specific arrangements to assist with loneliness, which is currently impacting on many residents across the Borough? It not only impacts on the older population but during this pandemic it is impacting on younger people as well. Existing issues that were present before are now becoming increasingly chronic.

This Council needs to consider and work at three levels to address loneliness:

One to one:

- Launch a local campaign to raise awareness of the health effects of loneliness and isolation amongst target risk groups. Make sure this information is available both off and online;

Neighbourhood:

- Support the voluntary and community sector to further strengthen referral partnerships with frontline healthcare staff and social workers;

Strategic:

- Agree a long-term plan to act to prevent and reduce loneliness, so that it is part of the Council's strategic intent; to regularly measure loneliness and mapping need through needs assessment and/or lifestyle surveys. Results of this can be used to monitor the impact of interventions.

Answer

We already working in several key ways to address this.

First of all on a neighbourhood level we are very aware that Covid has significantly contributed to many residents feeling lonely and isolated. The Council many months ago set up the Wokingham Borough Community Response and one of the key aims was to provide welfare calls to vulnerable and lonely residents. The Council has funded additional money into The Link Visiting Scheme to increase their befriending scheme which involves one to one and group work and that is all about supporting a reduction in loneliness.

The Council has also for many months funded the One Front Door service, which is operated by the CAB, and widely publicised the number at many opportunities so that vulnerable residents, including those experiencing loneliness, can contact One Front Door to get the support needed. During the Covid-19 outbreak we have supported several thousand residents in need. As part of this local Covid groups have formed right across the Borough and these groups have provided a responsive neighbourhood support service to aim to get a real community approach to supporting people in need.

So to give you the latest figures on welfare calls in the last two weeks we have made 6,500. 1800 people already known to Adult Social Care have been contacted. 4,700 calls

and letters to other vulnerable people on the Government list. 150 referrals from that have gone to the CAB and 110 referrals to the Link Befriending Service.

That means that our proactive work has been all about picking up people who are suffering from loneliness and we are trying to do something about it.

On top of that we have the Wokingham Wellbeing Board Strategy which identified social isolation as one of its three key priorities. It set up a sub group involving the Council, the voluntary sector and Health and this reports on a regular basis to the Wellbeing Board. The Wokingham Integrated Partnership has an agreed work programme and this is specifically a project supporting isolation. This Partnership has involved the setting up of a Friendship Alliance, which is the Council, Involve, AgeUk, The LINK and the Wokingham Volunteer Centre. We have spent over £100k funding this project. This was initiated circa 12 months ago and is progressing well. Key parts of this project are:

- Expansion of the Volunteer Transport Scheme;
- Establishing a network of Friendship Champions across the Borough;
- Undertaking community engagement work; and
- The 'Link Express' which will involve a small group of well trained volunteers visiting older people within 2 to 3 weeks of referral to begin the process of improving mood and wellbeing through social connection.

So yes I agree with you that loneliness is a key priority for us. It is a key thing and we are very much aware that people are in need across our Borough and need help with this. We are doing a lot of things to try and do something about it.

Supplementary Question

It is nice to know that there is so much comprehensive work being done. Can you quantify your success in terms of where we were, where we are going to and so forth? Can you quantify that because it is quite, quite varied?

Supplementary Answer

This is obviously a difficult thing to measure because you are talking about people's emotional health. I think the best way I could quantify it right here, right now is obviously referring to the statistic I quoted earlier which is from the phone calls we have made that we have picked up 110 people who have said to us, when we have proactively called them, that they are lonely and they need help and they need someone to talk to basically. That is 110 referrals to The Link Befriending Service. Now The Link Befriending Services is something we are funding. It is something we are supporting. It is something we are promoting and it specifically exists to help people and I am sure that he will not mind me saying this but Councillor Halsall is one of those volunteers who is ringing people up, talking to people on a regular basis, to try and make sure that they are not alone.

We are very aware of our role to support the vulnerable and needy in our community during this difficult time and to make sure that no one is left behind.

So in answer to your question that is probably the easiest answer I can give you tonight. We are continuing down this road because we know it is the right thing to do and the feedback we are getting, which I would be happy to share with you, through the individual e-mails I have received tells us that it is the right thing to do.

Response from the Leader of Council

If I could add to that Tahir I was speaking today by invitation to a group of CCGs and health workers, some 200 leaders in the Health sector, and they were exemplifying our neighbourhood approach and what a model approach to reach out to our community, particularly in this area.

49.6 Gary Cowan asked the Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions the following question:

Question

With reference to agenda item 50; Monitoring Customer Satisfaction, the report makes the following statement on 'From feedback to improvement': "Both quantitative and qualitative information is captured, which helps better understand the customer experience from first point of contact to resolution. Evaluating the customer journey in this way will help to understand strengths and weaknesses in ways of working, and actions that need to be taken to improve":

My question is what Members will be involved, and how then will that improvement manifest itself publicly?

Answer

As a Council we exist to serve our residents and our community. The 'Voice of the Customer' project is a key way that we are putting customer services and resident satisfaction at the heart of everything we do as a Council. While we already perform highly on our key measures of customer service, this project will allow us to better understand our resident's journey from identifying they have an issue or query, through to making contact with us and onwards to a hopefully successful resolution.

Gathering feedback from residents, either directly or via their elected representatives, will enable us to better understand their reasons for contacting us and help us to better redesign either our service provision or our channels of communication to better meet the customer service needs.

We would welcome comments and input from Members around this voice of the customer project. Councillor Frewin has already been in contact with Council Officers and has volunteered his help and career expertise in this area, which has been greatly appreciated so far. If other Members wish to offer their insight or expertise, I will gratefully receive it.

How will it manifest itself publicly is a great question? I don't want to pre-empt the results of the work before it is undertaken but I would hope that we:

- will make it easier for residents to directly interact with us;
- will design services in line with the way residents want to use them not how we want them to use them;
- find more ways to support those less able and those reliant on the support of others to access our services; and
- resolve and respond to issues more quickly and use those resolutions to better inform our decision making and our future communications.

Supplementary Question

I welcome that and I think it is a very positive action to take but what I don't want to see is the decisions being taken as to how we are improving our service done, how can I say

through PR, without the involvement of Members. I would think every Member would commit themselves to being able to offer help or comment on this. So what I would suggest is when you get to a situation where you have found the various weaknesses that you do speak to Members and ask them for their observations. I think it is a very positive move and I do welcome it so thank you for that.

Supplementary Answer

Just on that point I have already committed to the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee that once the new Customer Service Strategy is ready to be delivered that I will take it that Committee so that it can go through the formal scrutiny process.

Customer service is an ongoing thing we are not going to stop it. It needs to be at the heart of everything that we do so it is an ongoing prerogative of every Member if they have got an idea of how we can improve our customer service I want to hear it.

49.7 David Hare asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question:

David Hare asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question:

Question

Thank you for Agenda item 49: Support and Care Procurement. This will bring in a framework agreement and resolve the fact, over time, that there are many individual contracts and spot purchases in WBC Adult Services. I hope this will enable a consistent and good quality service for all users, while, in the long term, also reducing cost. As Liberal Democrats, we would encourage this type of development to stabilise services and costs. How is the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services, going to ensure that, while developing this framework, people in care settings do not have disruptive or unnecessary changes to their care?

Answer

Our ambition is for Wokingham Borough to be one of the best Boroughs in the country for adults and carers in need of support and care to live, where they feel safe, included and to be a key part of our community. Our procurement, basically which this is part of, will help us achieve this ambition and with our partners will enable us to prevent, reduce and delay the need for formal support and care and where possible to improve people's health and wellbeing, focusing on prevention and self-help.

Supported Living is a service designed to help people with a wide range of support needs to retain their independence by being supported in their own home. Home care is looking after a person from the comfort of their own home.

At any one time there are approximately 700 people who are in receipt of a supported living or a home care service. Approximately 30 adult care packages are let every month totalling 360 per year. Providers on the framework will support vulnerable adults, adults with disabilities and older people to achieve the desired outcomes that are important and personal to them. They will help deliver Wokingham's ambitions for adult social care in the Borough, to ensure that all residents are enabled to achieve their personal goals and ambitions, in a context which promotes safety, independence and choice.

It is the intention that through this procurement exercise we will continue to meet all of our obligations under the Care Act, ensuring a sustainable and vibrant market that provides high quality services to residents and offers value for money for the Council. At the centre of this is our aim to ensure that services are personalised and are in the best interest of our clients. We recognise the importance of ensuring continuity for all residents and minimising disruption.

The Care and Support Framework is being developed in collaboration with our local market and social care providers and they will have the opportunity to work with us when making this framework. We will continue to work with all our care providers and make this as open and transparent as possible. It is anticipated that virtually all of the providers we currently work with will join the framework. These providers will transfer with their current packages of care, with the client experiencing no disruption in service.

There will be a six month mobilisation for the new framework. We will work closely with providers that may choose not to engage with the procurement exercise or may be unsuccessful in their tender submissions. These packages will be reviewed, and a decision may be made to change provision to a framework provider where it is in the best interests of the client. This would be managed and clients would be fully supported via a social worker. Alternatively clients can be offered direct payments allowing them to receive their existing service with their existing provider if they choose to do so.

We recognise that at times people's needs may be better met by providers who are not on the framework and our process will allow us to use these providers as we need, ensuring that the clients' interest is the main focus and priority.

Supplementary Question

My supplementary is two-fold in some ways because you said that you would hopefully be able to reduce some people's care because this was all streamlined and so on and I wondered how that will happen? I would have hoped that they were getting the care they need at the moment.

Also the fact that you say that you might well be able to use services outside the framework. I am not sure how that works because you are setting up a framework and then you say we could also use providers outside the framework if you need to.

Supplementary Answer

All existing contracts for care will remain in place until the framework starts. So there will be no change to any resident who is using a contract at the moment.

To deal with your second point first we want the best for our residents and we will always, if somebody wants to use another provider and wants to bring that into the discussion, we will always look at those people. The framework is not a rigid set of rules and it will change over time to reflect basically what is happening in the market place, what people want, and what the situation is that people want.

Our aim is very much to use this to drive quality, to increase choice and to create more stability as well as for the sake of the Council to create more financial control over what we are doing going forwards.

We are the biggest budget in the Council and everybody knows the situation with national funding of adult social care, which is a continuing pressure, and it is very important that

every pound we spend is spent wisely but the full focus is going to be on achieving the right levels of care for residents. What will happen basically when the framework starts is that people will have the option of staying on the existing contract or moving into the framework and they can choose to stay on the existing contract if they wish to. That is very much the aim of what we are doing here. Better quality, more security basically and a better deal for residents and a better relationship with our suppliers going forward.

49.8 Chris Bowring asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question:

Question

Relating to Agenda Item 49 "Support and Care Procurement" – How does the proposed framework for Support and Care procurement tie into your wider plan for Adult Social Care in Wokingham Borough?

Answer

I won't repeat things that I have just said to David but to answer your question directly our ambition is for Wokingham Borough to be one of the best Boroughs in the country and the Care and Support Framework will help us achieve this ambition and work with our partners to enable us to prevent, reduce and delay the need for formal support and care and where possible to improve people's health and wellbeing, focusing mainly on prevention and self-help. The final specifications will require providers to deliver reablement and strength based commissioning where the individual will always be at the centre of any support.

Adult Social Care will work closely with all the adult social care providers to ensure a high quality choice of services are provided to support and safeguard vulnerable residents, enabling them to achieve our key priority which is to remain independent as long as possible in their own homes and communities. Through this Framework we will ensure that improvements are made in the training and development of the carer workforce.

The Framework will strengthen our commissioning practice, improving the strategic oversight of commissioned activity, market intelligence and engagement with our providers. This will create a much greater stability of placements for our most vulnerable and increase quality assurance resulting in improved outcomes.

So basically in terms of your question how will it support our wider plan? Our wider plan is to drive quality to make sure that every pound of taxpayers' money is spent wisely and also to deliver on budget. This Department is the biggest in the Council in terms of expenditure. It has been on budget for three years now in an environment where we are underfunded by central Government and there is increasing pressure on us. For me that is no mean achievement but we are not going to rest on our laurels. We are going to keep going and this is a key part in doing it.

Supplementary Question

You said to David that Adult Social Care is clearly the largest budget in the Council and you indicated how the framework will deliver longer term contracts with more control. Are there any other steps that you have taken that would ensure that we provide high quality services and keep expenditure under control?

Supplementary Answer

Two main things that I would talk about in answer to your question. Since I have been in post, and the current DASS, a key priority for us has been to improve our financial

forecasting and keep better budget controls of where we are. We spent the first probably three to four months that I was in this position just working on strengthening our forecasting so that we always knew our expenditure and our current financial position by streamlining the IT, employing a better accountant and working hard in that area.

I mean the other thing I would say, which is something that is going to launch fairly shortly, is we have spent the last 12 months working on a programme to improve the way we manage demand. This service, probably 90% of the expenditure, is on commissioned services rather than staff and the whole point of this demand management approach is that you cannot get better in this service by reducing staff or increasing staff it is about how you spend the money, how you recognise the need and identify what people need earlier. Trying to enable them to live at home if they need support from the voluntary sector and trying to direct them to that. We are going to be adopting an approach which has been successful in several other councils and the aim is simply we will improve quality to people that way and if Adult Social Care does nothing different every year our costs, due to the ageing population and their increasing need, will rise by 4% a year. The aim of this programme as well is that it will slow our increase in costs by roughly 50% so we will be doing more with taxpayers' money and improving quality.

50. FEES AND CHARGES

The Executive considered a report setting out the proposed fees and charges for Council services, including those for the Wokingham element of the Public Protection Partnership.

The Executive Member for Finance and Housing introduced the report, the purpose of which was to ensure that appropriate fees and charges were levied for each service, and highlighted that most of the charges would be enacted from 1 December 2020. However sports, cemeteries, housing, training course and youth and community charges would take effect from 1 January 2021 (sports) and 1 April 2021 respectively.

In response to a question about the new artificial cricket pitch and nets at Cantley Park the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure confirmed that private cricket clubs, schools and the public would be able to use these facilities and several enquiries had already been received.

Following a query by Councillor Kaiser, about why some of the sports and leisure charges had increased by a higher percentage than other charges, Councillor Batth explained that these charges had not been increased for some time and due to the current financial pressures caused by Covid it was felt that they should be brought into line with many other local authorities. Councillor Batth confirmed that benchmarking had taken place to ensure that these charges remained competitive and despite the increase they were still the cheapest when compared with the benchmarked authorities.

In order to support the community and businesses after the devastating impact on the livelihoods of those and the people who worked for them Councillor Kaiser proposed that an additional recommendation be added which would agree an ongoing policy of free Saturday car parking in the Council's car parks during the run up to Christmas in December. This year being Saturday 5th, 12th and 19th December which would be supported by a supplementary estimate of up to £20k. This would help both residents and business owners alike at this very difficult time. This additional recommendation was supported.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the schedule of fees and charges, as set out in Appendix A to the report, be approved to be effective from the dates listed on the schedule;
- 2) Wokingham's discretionary fees and charges for the Public Protection Partnership be approved and the statutory charges be noted, as set out in Appendix B, effective from 1 April 2021;
- 3) an ongoing policy of free Saturday car parking in Council car parks during the run up to Christmas in December, this year being Saturday the 5th, 12th and 19th December supported by a supplementary estimate of up to £20k be approved.

51. SUPPORT AND CARE PROCUREMENT

The Executive considered a report relating to a proposed Support and Care Procurement Framework. This procurement exercise would enable Adult Social Care to commission high quality, cost effective care for vulnerable adults in need of supported living or home care.

The Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services advised that the Framework would formalise the process for letting contracts which would lead to competition being generated, better quality of services, forecasting and relationships with suppliers and the provision of longer contracts.

The intention was that the Framework, which sets up a spend of £74m over five years, most of which will be on statutory care commissioned services, would be in place in the Summer 2021. It was confirmed that the Framework would be set up to ensure that if a supplier was not performing there would be an opportunity to stop using that particular supplier.

RESOLVED that full Council be recommended to approve:

- 1) Officers to proceed with the Support and Care procurement, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report;
- 2) Officers to create a compliant framework, from which to call off support and care packages;
- 3) The Director of Adult Social Services to have delegated authority to approve business cases to enter into call off agreements with successful organisations for individual or block contracts where price and quality benefits are achieved.

52. SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATE 20/21 – MONITORING CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

The Executive considered a report relating to a proposal to fund the implementation of a user-friendly multi-channel tool to measure customer satisfaction and gather feedback from customers in real time which could then be used to inform service improvement and increase satisfaction.

The Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions went through the report and advised that the request was to fund access to the GovMetrics insight tool which was already used by 70 local authorities around the country to gather

resident feedback, compare key measures and to educate service redesign. Investing in this software would help the Council improve its customer service to residents and better target where service improvements were required and why, which would then deliver future cost savings. In addition the information provided would enable target switching of services to self-service and the promotion of existing self-service options; thereby lowering costs and enabling staff to focus their time and efforts on residents who needed more detailed help and support. It would also help the Council to respond to repeat issues faster and better understand the frustrations and challenges that residents have when trying to access Council services.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) a Supplementary Estimate for £20,000 be approved;
- 2) the ongoing annual costs of £12,500 per annum for a further 2 years be noted.