



WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

A Meeting of the **EXECUTIVE** will be held virtually on
THURSDAY 25 MARCH 2021 AT 7.00 PM

Susan Parsonage
Chief Executive
Published on 17 March 2021

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/XTjdV0jbWbE>

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.
99.		APOLOGIES To receive any apologies for absence	
100.		MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS To confirm the Minutes of the Executive Meeting held on 18 February 2021 and the Extraordinary Executive Meeting held on 25 February 2021.	7 - 28
101.		DECLARATION OF INTEREST To receive any declarations of interest	
102.		PUBLIC QUESTION TIME 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 www.wokingham.gov.uk/publicquestions	
102.1	Hillside; Maiden Erlegh	Wesley Budd has asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question: Question For years, many Earley residents have raised concerns about speeding along Redhatch Drive. The road and neighbourhood design contribute to drivers	

regularly traveling in excess of 35mph on this road with its 30mph speed limit. Despite good visibility splays, the speed with which many vehicles travel make this very dangerous for vehicles entering from side streets. The Beech Lane end in particular is used by many school children. Many of the elderly residents living in Redhatch Drive and neighbouring roads find it difficult, as pedestrians or drivers themselves, to accurately judge the speed of fast approaching vehicles. Earley Town Council's submission on the 22nd July 2022 to a WBC speed limit consultation recommended with regards to Redhatch Drive to: retain the current 30 mph speed limit, but install appropriate VAS signage. Additional speed limit signage at the Elm Lane and Beech Lane ends of Redhatch Drive. Request WBC highways engineers investigate possibilities for traffic calming measures, such as chicanes and rumble strips. Will the Executive Member for Highways support Earley Town Council's recommendations for Redhatch Drive?

102.2 None Specific

Mike Smith has asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question:

Question

This month a very large oak tree had to be felled in Earley to help prevent further substantial structural damage done to various properties, some of which were a considerable distance from this tree. The damage to these properties has been very distressing and costly to the homeowners. However, from an environmental and aesthetic point of view, it is also very distressing to many other residents. This is not an isolated instance.

Obviously, such trees can have long reaching impacts stretching decades into the future and can affect many properties quite a distance away. Their preservation is also very important from a Climate Emergency point of view, in their role of sequestering carbon as well as ascetics.

One possible way to reduce the need to fell large, mature trees might be a change of Planning Policy whereby, the impact of trees on or adjacent to planning application properties must be considered in depth where appropriate – perhaps something like a Bat Survey for Trees.

Can the Executive Member for Planning consider this or look at other ways to help to mitigate the need to fell mature trees?

102.3 Hawkedon;
Winnersh

Eileen Kessel has asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question

I am aware that residents are currently experiencing real issues with inconsiderate parking on Mill Lane, caused by motorists picking up children at Hawkedon School. Could the Executive Member for Highways and Transport set out what steps the Council can take to tackle this problem for people living in the area?

102.4 Maiden Erlegh

Norman Jorgensen has asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:

Question

Several areas of Wilderness Road in Earley were plagued with flooding at times of heavy rain and Wokingham Borough Council repaired sections of drains around Betchworth Avenue a couple of years ago. Residents at the Pepper Lane end of Wilderness Road still experienced flooding and the Council were investigating the reasons for this with the intention of fixing it. Please will you tell me how this is progressing?

103.

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

Matters for Consideration

104.	None Specific	COMMUNITY VISION AND CORPORATE PLAN REVIEW	29 - 34
105.	None Specific	HOUSING STRATEGY 2020 - 24	35 - 80
106.	None Specific	DRAFT LEISURE STRATEGY	81 - 108
107.	None Specific	ARTS & CULTURE STRATEGY	109 - 146
108.	None Specific	DELIVERING THE HOUSING 1-4-5 + 100 CHALLENGE	147 - 150
109.	None Specific	EMPLOYMENT HUB	151 - 158

110.	None Specific	HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT POLICY (5-16 YEARS) AND TRAVEL ASSISTANCE POLICY (16 YEARS + WITH SEND) CONSULTATION AND HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT APPEALS PROCESS UPDATE	159 - 206
111.	None Specific	WOKINGHAM SCHOOL ADMISSIONS ARRANGEMENTS 2022/23	207 - 212
112.	None Specific	COVID WINTER GRANT SCHEME SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATE	213 - 218

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 18 FEBRUARY 2021 FROM 6.30 PM TO 7.15 PM**

Committee Members Present

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

Other Councillors Present

Rachel Burgess
Gary Cowan

83. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillor Stuart Munro.

84. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 28 January 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and would be signed by the Leader of Council at a later date.

85. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor John Halsall declared a personal interest in Agenda Items 83, 84, 85 and 86 by virtue of the fact that he was an unpaid Non-Executive Director of Optalis Holdings Ltd.

Councillor UllaKarin Clark declared a personal interest in Agenda Items 83, 84, 85 and 86 by virtue of the fact that she was an unpaid Non-Executive Director of Loddon Homes Ltd.

Councillor John Kaiser declared a personal interest in Agenda Items 83, 84, 85 and 86 by virtue of the fact that he was a Non-Executive Director of Wokingham Housing Ltd and Optalis Holdings Ltd.

Councillor Wayne Smith declared a personal interest in Agenda Items 83, 84, 85 and 86 by virtue of the fact that he was a Non-Executive Director of WBC Holdings Ltd.

Councillors Clark, Halsall, Kaiser and Smith took part in all discussions and voted on all the items.

86. STATEMENT BY THE LEADER

The budget meetings of the Council are where the administration sets out the future. However, we must acknowledge a year which has been extraordinary.

Deaths within the UK for those who have been diagnosed with Covid within 28 days have risen to close to 120,000; a huge rise since we last met.

Please join me in a moment's silence for those who have died during this dreadful pandemic in Wokingham, the UK, and around the world, and those who have suffered not just the effect of the virus itself, but the problems which have accompanied it.

Our lives have changed, unrecognisably for some, and many lives have been so sadly lost. I can only reinforce my condolences for those that have suffered so much.

The weekly rate to 13th February is 76.6 today, which is well below the peak of 606 on the 4th January, but still compares very badly to the below five in August. Sadly, deaths and hospitalisations will continue high for some time but seem to have stopped rising.

Our GPs have been magnificent and have now vaccinated the over 70s (including me), residents in care homes for older adults and their carers, frontline health, social care workers and clinically vulnerable individuals. The next cohort is now being vaccinated. So light is genuinely at the end of the tunnel.

I would like a big thank again to all the carers, doctors, health staff, social care staff, health, police, fire, rescue, ambulance, teachers, school staff, charities, volunteers and our staff. In short everybody who has stepped up to the plate and made it possible for life to continue during these appalling times. It has never been more vital that we play our role.

Many of our critical proactive measures 'going over and above' would not have been possible if we did not have a stable and strong financial foundation on which to fund our numerous measures intended to assist our community.

Covid has had a profound impact on the Council's budgets. We had new responsibilities that needed funding, we lost vital income sources such as car parking and leisure, and we had to put on hold cost reduction programmes in order that our staff focus on the important job in hand, responding to the pandemic. Despite all of this we had the financial resources to go well above the bare minimum and provide so much more for our community, examples of which I have previously conveyed. It is this that illustrates the true strength of our financial management, as recognised by numerous external assessments, and not the misleading and irresponsible claims you hear.

Our response in many ways has been astonishing. We have:

- Utilised the Council's existing emergency planning processes to enact a coordinated, managed, and timely response to the crisis;
- Sought to protect residents in care homes by taking action locally;
- Supported care homes by supplying PPP, critical advice, staff resources where needed;
- Resisted national policy to discharge from hospital to care homes unless testing and controls were in place and I expected to find myself in the jug but I wasn't;
- Reduced homelessness to a single rough sleeper;
- Introduced lateral flow testing, initiated to enable our residents to meet their loved ones in care homes which we had to abort during lockdown;
- Set up a Community Hub with voluntary sector partners to protect and ensure the vulnerable could receive the support they needed;
- Created the concept of the one-front door (in the CAB) to service all our residents, either by the Council or the voluntary sector
- Provided extended care support for vulnerable children recognising that usual family support arrangement was not possible during lockdown;
- Worked closely with GPs and the health sector to enable vaccinations to be rolled out as speedily as possible;
- Maintained critical services for the most vulnerable residents, including children, young people and the wider community;
- Maintained universal services such as waste, recycling, and highways;

- Provided financial support to local businesses and the economy;
- Redeployed staff to those services and activities of greatest need. In the first lockdown we had 107 staff redeployed;
- Maintained local democracy through “virtual” council meetings, accessible by the public;
- Communicated regularly and clearly with residents, businesses, partners, elected Members and staff;
- Considered the impacts on particular parts of the community e.g. ethnic minority groups, vulnerable residents and young people;
- Identified opportunities to positively impact the Council’s Climate Emergency Plan;
- Identified and monitored the financial impacts of Covid;
- Used the risk-based approach to decision-making;
- Planned ahead for the “Restart” and “Recovery” phases of the emergency. It has never been of such profound importance that local government plays its role for the local community;
- Took every opportunity to advance the highways programme.

These are some of the essential measures employed during the pandemic; they have touched every resident and enterprise.

With a steady hand, we are navigating through the emergency to recovery, changing the way we work, supporting all our residents, and ensuring that services run as normally as possible.

This Council will not be found wanting to support residents be it child hunger, poverty, or homelessness. We recognise that many of our critical proactive measures 'going over and above' would not have been possible if we had not had a stable and strong financial foundation on which to fund our numerous measures.

The budget proposals before you tonight are therefore set in this context, one of continual uncertainty and challenge, but one that sets out our stall for a strong recovery.

87. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

87.1 Philip Meadowcroft had asked the Leader of the Council the following question which was answered by the Executive Member for Finance and Housing:

Question

At the last Executive meeting on January 28, you claimed it was an honest mistake that the composition of the Standards Committee was not compliant with the WBC Constitution. As Leader of the Council, you took responsibility since the buck stopped with you on this matter. But, you did not accept when I put it to you that it was symptomatic of a wider disregard of Constitutional rules.

I watched the Audit Committee on February 1, during which Members realised that the Constitution had been flouted because the numbers in the Treasury Management Report, which the Audit Committee had agreed in November 2020, and then forwarded to the

Executive were replaced by new and materially different numbers whilst the approved November numbers were relegated to an appendix.

Were the changes which amended the Audit Committee's approved, as received, Treasury Management Report caused either by another honest mistake (as you admitted regarding the Standards Committee issue) or is this further evidence which suggests that compliance with the Constitution takes second place to the political convenience of the ruling group?

Answer

Councillor Halsall has already explained to you that there was no Constitutional breach with regards to the composition of the Standards Committee and why this was so.

The other part of your question, this is why the reason I am answering it is because I also attended the meeting and it is same posed by the two Liberal Democrat members at the meeting, and as you watched the meeting you would have heard the Officers reply to those allegations.

You have, like the Liberal Democrats at that meeting, suggested that the report considered by the Audit Committee, at the meeting of 23rd November was changed before being presented to the Executive on 28th January. I can categorically confirm this was not the case.

The report reviewed by the Audit Committee was presented to the Executive fully and unabridged as required in the Constitution. Audit Committee is required to review progress against Treasury Management indicators (which they did on this case) and note further information in the report.

At the Executive on 28th January it was asked (and did):

*"note Appendix A, which was **the Treasury Management Mid-Year report** which was agreed at the Audit Committee on 23rd November 2020".*

This stated quite clearly in the covering report recommendations, and furthermore is covered in more detail at the second paragraph of the executive summary to the Executive report.

Therefore, the report the Audit Committee debated and agreed democratically is the one being presented to the Council and does not need to be presented back to the Audit Committee.

However, in passing the report. noted by the Audit Committee to the Executive, our statutory Chief Financial Officer thought it would be helpful for the Executive and the public to be aware of the broader impact of the treasury management activities by including the income generated by our commercial activities funded by the borrowing. This information was conveyed by way of a covering report and I would consider it to be extremely helpful, particularly given the recent media debate around the cost of the Council 's debt to the local taxpayer. So, the Treasury Mid-Term report presented at the Audit Committee was not changed, the Audit Committee discharged their responsibility under the Constitution and the Chief Financial Officer, who is required to provide a covering report in the passing of the Mid-Year report on to the Executive. So there is no Constitutional breach here whatsoever.

What I do find alarming however is there is a real issue here, it is not the alleged breach in the Constitution but the fact that our finances, our borrowings, and our financial returns from our borrowings are in an incredibly healthy state, and that is despite the impact of Covid-19. There are those making alarmist claims that our borrowing is reckless, even to the extent of costing households £10,000. This is of course absolute nonsense and merely irresponsible politics. You can see clearly from the public report produced by our statutory Chief Financial Officer the impact of all our borrowing activities for schools, roads, care homes, housing and everything else comes at a credit to each household at each year. Let me say again, we get our roads, schools and other essential assets for our community at no cost to the Council Taxpayer, in fact they receive a credit. This is achieved because the income from our commercial and investment activities not only funds but exceeds all of the Council's borrowing costs.

This is a remarkable achievement and should be applauded. We should both be assured and delighted about yet another indicator of the strong financial management, which is vital to us being able to meet the needs of our community, particularly during Covid-19. But incredulously this isn't the issue being talked about and this isn't what questions are being asked about, I wonder why? Do you think that it is our Opposition finds it galling that we are holding up so well during this pandemic and we aren't plummeting into any form of financial crisis? This is so wrong and makes no sense to me, petty politics to detract from the fundamental issues. We are strong, ready and capable of being able to continue to step up and meet the needs of our community in delivering the services at the high level that we do.

Supplementary Question

Thank you, Councillor Kaiser for answering my question. My supplementary is directed to you, Councillor Halsall. The criticisms voiced by the Audit Committee I think result from the continuing determination of the ruling group to bulldoze through their needs irrespective of the Constitution. Firstly, it was the Standards Committee and now it is the Audit Committee. Both issues show for me that you have not stuck to the rules like you instruct residents to do so on those Covid signs on lampposts through the Borough. You have undermined the respect, Councillor Halsall, and authority required of your leadership and the compelling need for the affairs of this Council to be seen and conducted in a transparent and lawful manner. The only way forward, Councillor Halsall, since you fulsomely assured at the last Council meeting that you are democrat and that the buck stops with you is for you to stand down. It would be the first step in putting things right. Will you please do that?

Supplementary Answer from Councillor Halsall

Thank you Philip, your opinion.

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

Question

I am very pleased to see that trees have gained a line in the budget, with Tree Inspections being allocated £80,000 for each of the next three years. Trees perform an enormously valuable service by sequestering carbon, filtering particulate matter, stabilising ground water levels to alleviate flood risk, and fostering biodiversity whether alive or dead. Indeed, there have been several attempts to place a monetary value on their service, and while it depends on variables such as maturity and location, a tree's value ranges from a few hundred to several thousand pounds in cost avoidance. As you estimate that the Council is

responsible for around 100,000 trees, would you not agree that, given the value of their service, 80p per tree is hopelessly inadequate?

Answer

Thank you for your very good question and I could not agree with you more for your very valid comments about the very important role that trees perform in protecting our environment.

The budget to support trees in the Borough is not limited to the item proposed through the Medium Term Financial Plan over the next three years that you referred to. Incidentally, this allocation of £80,000 is to fund a further two members of staff to enable the Council to fulfil its duty to inspect all of the trees on its own land in the interests of public safety; and as you can well imagine to protect the public we must do that. This is in line with an updated Tree Inspection Policy which will be considered under the Executive Member Decision, that is myself, on 31st March 2021. Works to trees identified through this inspection regime are undertaken and covered by other budgets.

Trees are an important focus of the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan. In addition to the Tree Inspection Team, the Council employs a number of specialist Tree and Landscape Officers to ensure that important and healthy trees are protected from development. In line with the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan, the Council is preparing a Tree Strategy and a plan to deliver a further 250,000 trees in the Borough. Mr Shenton, I am sure you will very, very, readily agree with that fantastic initiative to satisfy the carbon neutral initiative that we wish to obtain by 2030.

Supplementary Question

I remain slightly concerned that the area is being under resourced because our native deciduous hardwoods are now facing serious threats from an increasing range of pests and diseases. For example, given that ash dieback is likely to disseminate our ash tree population what percentage of the Council's tree cover is under threat and where is the budget to replace those soon to be lost trees?

Supplementary Answer

Like I said we pay due attention to all the trees within the Borough whether they are owned by Wokingham Borough Council or whether they are privately owned as well. We do all our best to protect those trees from any pesticides or any other insects or whatever that might attack them and we work with the Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association which is a very active organisation and we work with that organisation to protect our trees.

88. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

88.1 Gary Cowan had asked the Leader of the Council the following question but as he was not in the meeting when the question was asked the following written response was provided:

Question

If as the letter from the Council to all Members indicates that Council can make changes the restriction on Executive membership and the Leader on the Standards Committee is not a legal requirement but is a local choice adopted by full Council. The letter continued to add that the decision to appoint the Subcommittee in that form and with that

membership was decided by a simple majority of the members present and voting (as required by section 39 of Schedule 12). Any decisions the Committee made subsequently are made with the Council's authority, are lawful and are binding.

My question is why bother to have a Constitution when if it's the law the Council must abide by it but if it's not Council can just change it as recent events has shown?

Answer

I too have many questions on how Local Government works, but sadly it is not a matter for here, it is a matter for Westminster.

You have been a Councillor for a lot longer than I and are aware that modifications are made to the Constitution on a continuous basis by full Council; so, the question is a little disingenuous.

The modifications are required by statute, or by a request of Councillors or Officers through the Constitution Review Working Group.

Any change is always in the full light of a full Council meeting and can be contested publicly by any Member.

The case to which you are referring would not have occurred if any Member had queried the appointments, but for twenty-one months it was unchallenged. Once challenged, I acted immediately to ensure that the Constitution was not anomalous, even though the advice was that it was not strictly necessary.

As you are aware, it was an honest mistake for which I have already apologised to Council.

88.2 Rachel Burgess asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question

There have been numerous resident concerns raised regarding London Road in Wokingham since the new cycle lanes have been introduced. These have included the safety of the new cycle lanes, the safety of, and lack of compliance with, the 'no right turn' at Whitlock Avenue, concerns about three other junctions on this road (William Heelas Way, Froghall Lane and Priest Avenue) and the lack of pedestrian crossing along a long stretch of London Road where numerous families need to cross on the school run.

Residents have raised these issues out of a sense of community safety as well as the desire to support walking and cycling, and they are right to expect the Council to address their concerns. However they have not received a satisfactory answer for months and feel ignored. What is being done to address these concerns?

Answer

The London Road Cycleway scheme, which I think is actually a very nice new cycleway and uses recycled kerbs amongst other things. Like all highway projects it goes through a rigorous process of Road Safety Audits (RSA) at various stages in its design and construction. A stage 1 Road Safety Audit was carried out at feasibility, a stage 2 Road Safety Audit was carried out at the detailed design stage and more recently a stage 3 Road Safety Audit was carried out now that the scheme is operational. The scheme we

have delivered has been in line with all of the recommendations of the stage 1 and stage 2 RSA and the project designers are currently considering the relatively minor recommendations from the stage 3 RSA which we will implement.

It is because of the rigorous safety audit process which is carried out by independent qualified road safety experts that the Council is able to reassure residents that there are no immediate safety concerns with regard to the junctions of William Heelas Way, Whitlock Avenue, Froghall Lane, Priest Avenue and London Road. Whilst this has already been communicated to some residents, the Council remains willing to engage with anybody in the local community who has any lingering doubts, and I would be happy to answer any further questions.

With regard to the specific issue of non-compliance with the no right turn restrictions joining London Road from Whitlock Avenue Officers have met with representatives of the local community on site to discuss what additional measures might be possible to improve compliance. Unfortunately, when people drive dangerously it is quite difficult to do something about that sometimes, apart from putting a policeman there. The meeting concluded that it was not possible to have any additional physical barriers to a right turn without causing significant problems to people turning right into Whitlock Avenue. If you put a barrier across to stop a right turn you also then would not be able to turn into there and if you put some restriction in the middle of the road to stop people bearing right at the end it would mean that cyclists and pedestrians would not be able to cross safely, so we have got a bit of a problem there. We are considering whether additional signage would be appropriate to help drivers to recognise there is no right turn restriction and to obey the Highway Code. That is the fundamental thing people are driving dangerously and really they should be obeying the Highway Code and not doing that.

On the issue of sufficient pedestrian crossing facilities on London Road, it is worth noting that this project has only resulted in the removal of one pedestrian island. There are formal crossing facilities at regular intervals which serve the vast majority of families wishing to cross London Road. In fact I looked at it just before the meeting and on 1.5 miles of road there are actually five pedestrian crossings, which is probably an unusually high number. There are, however, a handful of properties that now have a longer walk to a crossing compared to the previous layout, and I do recognise that.

You may be aware that there is new cycle design guidance from the DfT in Local Transport Note, LTN 1/20. The new guidance was too late for us to incorporate in the design of this project and the Council will be making use of the guidance for new projects and we are looking forward to adopting it shortly.

Supplementary Question

With respect to the Safety Audits you are right that residents do know that they have been carried out but they do not feel that that is addressing their specific concerns. You know they are aware that has been done and the sort of process that has been followed but it is not addressing some of their specific concerns. I think we are all being encouraged to walk and cycle, quite rightly, but we should expect safe and convenient routes to do that. As you know this is a busy 'A' road and lots of people will be trying to cross it and I think if the residents are actually concluding that it is safer for them to drive rather than walk to school then something as gone wrong there.

I appreciate your answer and thank you for that and of what has been looked at. Would you agree to visit the site with me and to meet residents just to explain what has been looked at and sort of understand their concerns directly?

Supplementary Answer

Yes, that is exactly what I was about to suggest. Maybe between us we can help explain things to them a bit more clearly and help them understand what the facilities are, what we are planning, and what the audits have done. So yes I would be happy to meet.

89. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET 2021/22

The Executive considered a report setting out a proposed Housing Revenue Account Budget for 2021/22.

During his introduction the Executive Member for Finance and Housing explained that the Housing Revenue Account was a ringed fenced fund and reminded the meeting that previously the Council had decided, because it was felt that the Council was better placed to administer and maintain these properties, that it would retain its social housing rather than pass them over to a registered provider.

Councillor Kaiser also reported that during the last year, whilst in the middle of the Covid pandemic, the Council had managed to carry out all major repairs that were required to these properties and the vast majority of the repairs that had been scheduled for the year.

RESOLVED that Council be recommended to approve:

- 1) the Housing Revenue Account budget for 2021/22 (Appendix A);
- 2) that Council house dwelling rents be increased by up to 1.50% effective from April 2021 in line with the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2015;
- 3) Garage rents to be increased by 1.16% effective from April 2021 in line with Council's general fees and charges;
- 4) Shared Equity Rents to be increased by 1.13% based on September RPI, effective from April 2021;
- 5) Tenant Service Charges to be set based on cost recovery;
- 6) the Housing Major Repairs (capital) programme for 2021/22 as set out in Appendix B;
- 7) Sheltered room guest charges for 2021/22 remain unchanged at £9.50 per night per room.

90. CAPITAL PROGRAMME AND STRATEGY 2021-2024

The Executive considered a report setting out the proposed Capital Programme and Strategy for 2021-2024 which included the capital investment that would be made during this period and how this would be funded.

Members noted the scale of the Capital programme for 2021-2024, which amounted to £445.5m, and how this was due to be funded, which included approx. £11m from Council resources.

Councillor Jorgensen stated that she was very excited to see the investment in roads and transport, particularly sustainable transport, all of which she felt would help residents.

Councillor Murray was also pleased with the amount of money that was being set aside for climate emergency projects in the budget and the impact that could have on the Council's carbon footprint across the Borough. He was particularly pleased that the Council was managing to fund all of the projects set out in the Capital Programme at what was such a difficult time.

RESOLVED that Council be recommended to agree the following:

- 1) the Capital Strategy for 2021 - 2024 - Appendix A;
- 2) the three-year Capital Programme for 2021 - 2024 – Appendix B;
- 3) the draft vision for capital investment over the next five years - Appendix C;
- 4) the use of developer contribution funding (s106 and CIL) for capital projects as set out in Appendix D. Approval is sought up to the project budget.

91. TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2021-2024

The Executive considered a report setting out the proposed Treasury Management Strategy for 2021-2024.

RESOLVED that Council be recommended to:

- 1) approve the Treasury Management Strategy as set out in Appendix A, including the following additional appendices;
 - Prudential Indicators (Appendix B)
 - Annual Investment Strategy 2021/22 (Appendix C)
 - Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) policy (Appendix D)
- 2) note that Audit Committee agreed the Treasury Management Strategy on 3 February 2021;
- 3) note the cumulative financial impact on the Council of its borrowing activities equates to a net credit to the general fund for the taxpayer of £13.64 per band D equivalent at end of 2021/22 and noting this credit increases to £62.86 at the end of 2023/24.

92. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2021-2024 - REVENUE BUDGET SUBMISSION 2021/22

The Executive considered a report setting out a proposed Medium Term Financial Plan for 2021-2024, including the proposed revenue budget submission for 2021/22.

During his introduction the Executive Member for Finance and Housing advised that the Medium Term Financial Plan set out the Council's revenue budget submission for 2021-22 and highlighted that the budget would pay for all the services and all the costs that the Council expected to incur over the next 12 months.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) Council be recommended to approve the Summary of Budget Movements (SOBM) (as set out in Appendix A to the report);
- 2) the report of the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, relating to Scrutiny of the Budget Setting Process 2021-22 and the Medium Term Financial Plan 2021-2024 (as set out in Appendix B to the report), be noted.

93. BUILDING CONTROL CHARGES

The Executive considered a report setting out proposed charges for the Building Control Shared Service, between Wokingham, the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead and West Berkshire Councils, to take effect on 1 April 2021.

The Executive Member for Environment and Leisure advised that the current schedule of charges had been agreed in May 2020. There was a need to ensure that the service was offered to all local authorities on a true cost recovery basis. It was therefore essential that the service kept charges as low as possible to remain competitive, but at the same time ensuring that sufficient income was generated. This was particularly important so that sufficiently competitive salaries could be offered to recruit and retain staff to provide the high-quality service that residents deserved.

Councillor Batth highlighted Appendix A, which showed the comparison between existing charges and the respective proposed charges which were being increased by 1.6% in line with the CPI index.

RESOLVED: That the setting of the Building Control Charges from 1 April 2021, as set out in Appendix A to the report, be agreed.

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**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE EXECUTIVE
HELD ON 25 FEBRUARY 2021 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.00 PM**

Committee Members Present

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

Other Councillors Present

Gary Cowan
Pauline Helliard-Symons

94. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

95. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

96. STATEMENT BY THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

The Leader of the Council made the following statement:

The weekly rate to 20th February in Wokingham is now 48.5 today, which is well below the peak of 606 on the 4th January but still compares very badly to the below five in August. We suspect that we will hover around this figure for some time. Happily, both hospitalisations and deaths are also stable. Our lives have changed, unrecognisably for some, and many lives have so sadly been lost. I can only restate my condolences for those that have suffered so much.

I would like again to say again to a big thank you to everybody who has stepped up to the plate and made it possible for life to continue during these appalling times.

It has never been more vital that we play our role and continue to observe the rules.

Earlier this week the PM made a statement on a roadmap for easing lockdown restrictions in England. Vaccines are at the heart of the government strategy, with 17million people having received the vaccine. The Government is taking a cautious approach to easing lockdown, guided by the data to avoid surge infections that would put unsustainable pressure on the NHS. When moving from one step to another in the roadmap the Government will examine data to assess the impact of the previous step. This will be based on four tests:

- The vaccine deployment programme continues successfully;
- Evidence showing vaccines are sufficiently effective in reducing hospitalisation;
- Infection rates do not risk a surge in hospitalisation;
- Assessment of risk is not fundamentally changed by new variants or of concern.

As we move forward on the road map, the Council will have a central role in its success. Moreover, this is part of our Recovery strategy. For example, rolling out the vaccination is critical. We are doing all that we can to enable this with our health partners. Expanding and scaling our community testing offer on lateral flow testing will be crucial – building on the Shute End and the Microsoft sites as we know that 1 in 3 people are asymptomatic. To be successful this testing needs to be part of everybody's daily routine. We need to

change the behaviour and continually check for positive cases so that these cases can then self-isolate. We need to have an enhanced tracing regime to ensure those residents who are positive, do self-isolate. We need to rapidly deploy thousands of PCR tests door to door should the data suggest we have a problem in the Borough.

Also, we need to maintain our excellent support to groups particularly at risk from Covid such as those in care home. At the same time, we need to address inequalities ensuring for example that those disenfranchised are testing and receiving vaccinations, and that we are addressing vaccination hesitancy.

Therefore, as part of recovery and outbreak management we need to have a tailored approach to our communities.

Alongside our efforts on Covid Contain as part of Recovery we are also focussing on the following areas.

- Supporting businesses and stimulating job creation and skills;
- Physical and mental wellbeing;
- Maintaining resilient and sustainable services;
- Harnessing digital and data for insight;
- Focussing on children and young people and education;
- Inequality and social inclusion.

We are already moving forward and taking action on these recovery themes and a report will be brought to the Executive on action taken so far and future action.

At the Council in February, I stated that the budget put forward was a budget for recovery. It provides almost half a billion pounds over the next three years for investment in our community and a considerable amount of this will stimulate our local economy and seek to address the housing needs in the Borough for those not currently able to afford to buy their homes. The budget also provided considerable additional ongoing investment into our care services, including the likes of the Domestic Abuse service, to ensure that we can support our residents in overcoming the fall out of this terrible virus. You may also be aware that we have done much work recently on our Poverty Strategy, our Equalities Strategy, these are also a critical part of our recovery strategy.

The main item today is the Council's approach to Covid as reviewed by Overview & Scrutiny. The administration believes that O&S provides a vital function for our decision making and democracy, and has sought to ensure that it is far reaching and unfettered in its work. For example, the budget now is reviewed by O&S prior to adoption over a period in excess of six months.

Thank you to all the officers involved and the work of overview and scrutiny in reviewing our Covid response as we can always learn more. Thank you very much.

97. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

97.1 David Dunham asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question

I would like to ask the Council/Councillors about the issues we have experienced at the Bradbury Centre and the lack of Parking at times.

On an average day at the Bradbury Centre Vaccine centre we see anything from 900+ to a high of 1400 people being vaccinated, people receiving the Pfizer jab have to be monitored for 15 minutes inside before being allowed to leave, the Astra Zeneca again 15 minutes before being allowed to drive.

There are only approximately 15 spaces available free of charge for people to use.

The vaccine centre uses the centre once a week, the Town centre is relatively quiet due to lockdown, there are five other car parks around the Town Centre, that could be used.

Whilst Wokingham are doing extremely well with the vaccination programme, could the Rose Street car park be allocated vaccine centre car park only for that one day a week? The loss of revenue would be minimal in comparison to the benefits, especially as there are many who still need to be vaccinated who are on the vulnerable list.

Waitrose have been kind enough to allow all volunteers to use their car park, so it would be used for those attending to receive their vaccine.

Answer

The way the parking in that car park works at the moment is that we have set aside some space for people getting vaccinations and that is being managed to make sure that people who are not getting vaccinations are not going to be parking in the area that is allocated. I am very happy to take away your suggestion and see if there is enough space there and make adjustments to make sure that there is enough space for the people who have been vaccinated.

Supplementary Question

Currently we have 14 spaces allocated in that car park and if we have roughly, not everybody drives, 8 people every 4 minutes and they did happen to drive, that potentially could be at the most, 32 cars. With the vaccinations they have to sit for 15 minutes as you are probably aware with the Pfizer, indoors, and not drive, sit in their cars for 15 minutes for the other one. We are also having problems; the parking wardens have recently been hovering shall we say to see those who are not parking in those allocated spaces. 5 of those 14 spaces are also disabled spaces which are the ones right next to the old M&S building, so we do not want to put anybody in those. We want those to stay for disabled people. They could do with another line of spaces that is all.

Supplementary Answer

Let me take it away and look at it, David. I am very happy to make sure that there is enough parking.

We obviously do not want to provide too much as we want to make sure that everybody is able to use the car park.

97.2 Anne Chadwick asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Question

The report of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee of Wokingham Borough Council on its response to the Covid-19 pandemic report and recommendations of November 2020 states that the majority of child protection visits remained face-to-face (97%) in June 2020. How have child protection visits been conducted during the latest lockdown?

Answer

Throughout the pandemic children's social workers have been committed to undertaking visits to children in person and face to face. This can be seen in the high number of face to face visits that were completed during periods of national restrictions. Children's Social Care developed a set of Practice Standards that provide a structured decision-making process in relation to all visits to children, to ensure that any risks are mitigated. The standards highlight that all children subject to a Child Protection plan will receive face-to-face visits within the usual statutory timelines, or more frequently if required. There are exceptions and these are:

- When a member of a household or placement has symptoms of COVID-19
- When a member of a household or placement has a confirmed case of COVID-19.
- When a member of a household or placement is within a recommended period of self-isolation.

When any of these circumstances arise, a Covid 19 Visiting and PPE Risk Assessment is undertaken by the allocated Social Worker and their Team Manager. This will give them information on the

- risks to child
- risks to families
- risks to the workforce
- national guidance on social distancing and hygiene
- statutory responsibilities, including safeguarding

Any decision to undertake a virtual visit requires management oversight and agreement.

Since 1st January this year to the 19th February a total of 783 Child Protection visits have been completed by Wokingham social workers. Out of this number 5.4 % have been virtual and 94.6% of visits have been undertaken in person and face to face by a social worker. So, I think you will agree that we are doing our very best to ensure that we have everything covered.

97.3 Daniel Hinton asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question:

Question

Can you give us an update on the current level of Covid in care homes across the Borough?

Answer

At the start of the pandemic, Wokingham Borough Council set up a specialist Covid-19 Taskforce; made up of WBC employees they work closely with care homes across the Borough.

Since then, the team has provided vital support to our care homes and their residents, ensuring they stay as safe as possible, and particularly trying to support them when we have been in the position of having outbreaks.

From daily calls to share information and assist with any issues and concerns; to supporting with risk assessments, problem solving and testing; the team is there to assess the needs of everybody and to put support in place when it is needed.

Working in close partnership with our local providers, we are now seeing fortunately low Covid-19 case numbers in Wokingham. Across our 52 care homes, which is a lot larger than any of the nearby Boroughs, there currently are two Covid positive residents and three Covid positive members of staff, which is a vast improvement on where we were a few months ago.

Following a peak in the case rate in Wokingham at the beginning of January, the rate has now fallen steadily, and we are below the national and South East comparable rates. As the Leader said at the start of the meeting the current rate is below 50 per 100,000 and most encouragingly of all the rate in residents over the age of 60 is now hovering around 30 per 100,000, when the average for the South East is around 69.8.

As I am sure you are aware, Central Government has, announced this week that care home residents will be permitted one designated visitor from 8th March, which is obviously very good news. Our Task Force will continue to work with care homes and colleagues from across the sector to minimise the risk of community transmission and to ensure that Lateral Flow Testing is available and to fully facilitate anyone who is chosen as the chosen visitor.

Supplementary Question

Does WBC have a message for residents to ensure that this forward number continues going forwards?

Supplementary Answer

The situation is very encouraging and as I said we are generally below the Berkshire average, the South East England average etc. But you know that has been achieved for a reason because people here have generally been following the guidelines; keeping 2 metres social distancing, wearing masks where appropriate and washing hands properly. It is really, really important if we want to keep downwards pressure on the rate as hard as possible, to do those things. If you are called for a vaccine, please go because that is the way out of this.

97.4 Sam Akhtar asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

Question

The Council navigated a firm course through the emergency looking after the needy, protecting the residents and standing up for the Borough where necessary. I am delighted that the Executive had the strength of conviction. Well done.

How prepared is the Council for recovery and what is its strategy?

Answer

Thank you, Sam, for your question. It is pleasing and reassuring to hear the appreciation of the Council's response to the pandemic. It means a lot to know that our endeavours were felt amongst the community at such a vital time. Our response is not over yet of

course, so we must keep focused on this and doing all we can. And as you rightly point out, the Council also has a key role to play in recovery.

At Council in February, I stated that the budget put forward was a budget for recovery; it provides almost half a billion pounds over the next three years for investment in our community and a considerable amount of this will stimulate our local economy and seek to address the housing needs in the Borough for those not currently able to afford to buy their homes. The budget also provided considerable additional ongoing investment in our care services, including the likes of the Domestic Abuse service and Mental Health, to ensure we can support our residents in overcoming the fall out of this terrible virus. You may also be aware that we have done much work recently on our Poverty Strategy and our Equalities Strategy. These are also critical parts of our recovery strategy.

In March we will be refreshing our Vision and Corporate Delivery plan in the context of the impact of Covid-19 and the need for recovery and in May I hope to be able to bring a specific Recovery Strategy to the Executive that identifies our key themes for attention. Most of the recovery work is of course already progressing, for example; improving our offer to low to medium mental health support, stimulating economic recovery and helping our children achieve their development potential. However, this strategy will help us bring all these work-streams together and ensure they are not forgotten as we embark on our significant role in helping create a brighter, purposeful and happier future for our whole community.

**97.5 Shahid Younis asked the Leader of the Council the following question:
Question**

Wokingham is one of the affluent places to live, work and bring up a family. However, in certain wards 17% of children live in poverty. What strategy does the Council have in place to reduce child poverty in Wokingham?

Answer

The Executive agreed the Council's approach to tackling poverty at its meeting in January 2021 and work is underway to better understand the causes and effects for residents and families in the Borough and what we can do more of to improve outcomes for all. Child poverty will be a key consideration and actions to reduce poverty generally in the Borough will positively affect children who may be living in poverty because of their family situation.

Regardless of whichever statutory benchmark you look at regarding poverty and hardship, Wokingham still has one of the lowest rates in the country, but even if one person or one child does not have fair and equal opportunity in our Borough that is one too many and we are committed to fighting this.

We are already doing a lot to address this issue; we are not starting from scratch. For example, we have made good progress in addressing the drivers of poverty, through maximising affordable housing, providing good quality Council housing and addressing homelessness to ensure families and children have access to safe and secure accommodation. In fact, I would add that at the Executive next week, or the week after, we will be putting together a paper to increase the amount of council homes that we are building.

We also have a scheme in place to alleviate the impacts on fuel poverty. The scheme has benefited a number of our households through Energy Efficiency upgrades to homes,

which could save residents more than 30% on their annual fuel bills. These savings can help improve financial security of families which will directly benefit children.

Another example is through our out-reach work, often in partnership with the Voluntary and Community Sector, we support our residents to lead self-sustaining lifestyles, including addressing food insecurity through initiatives such as the Grub Club and Social Bites, which has positive benefits for children.

Notwithstanding this positive work that has been taking place and is being strengthened in response to the pandemic, we know we can do more to ensure those who really need our support and help get it.

98. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

98.1 Gary Cowan asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question:

Question

The agenda Page 8 states and I quote:

Care Home in Wokingham are usually run by private or voluntary sector service providers. Wokingham Borough Council has a responsibility to support the needs of the individual and maintain the financial sustainability of the social care market. It does not have a direct responsibility to manage an outbreak within a Wokingham Care Home but has continued to support providers to manage outbreaks during the pandemic.

From the start of the pandemic the Council has worked proactively to deliver support and advice to the care homes and other care settings in the Borough. Adult Social Care has provided support to care homes, through its Care Home Task Force, providing guidance on infection control, support with PPE, distribution of Government grant funding and immediate, targeted support in the event of Covid-19 outbreaks.

My question is, is the Council satisfied that it has worked just as proactively to deliver support and advice to our residents and businesses in the vicinity of the care homes where there has been reported cases of infection and sadly loss of life in the Borough.

Answer

Care homes have been particularly vulnerable to Covid 19 outbreaks but most of all at times when rates of infection are high in the community. High community rates of transmission increase the risk that staff or residents leaving the care home contract the virus, with subsequent onward transmission within the care home setting, amongst those who are elderly and vulnerable.

Outbreaks in Care Homes have been managed effectively and contained through all the necessary infection control measures and public health action to manage this risk of community transmission.

Throughout the pandemic, the Council has worked in partnership with local residents and businesses to minimise the risk of community transmission. Measures have been

introduced throughout Wokingham, including physical barriers to manage pedestrian flows, signage, targeted communication and Covid Marshalls.

The activity of the Marshalls has been directed by Public Health data and local intelligence to ensure resources are deployed where they have been needed. This obviously includes when we have had large outbreaks. Our Covid Support Team works closely with the Police, Localities and Town and Parishes to ensure community compliance and we have completed over 3,000 business and safety inspections.

Wokingham's local Case Tracing Service, which is part of the NHS Test and Trace system, has enabled the Council to ensure welfare needs are understood and that residents have been signposted to services to support their needs. At the time of writing, we have made 416 successful self-isolation calls. That has led to 101 people being referred to the One Front Door System for further support. The service aims to reach residents within the Borough to ensure that support and guidance is made available in a timely fashion to support isolation.

In addition to this we have launched our lateral flow rapid testing programme to all keyworkers in the Borough, there are currently two centres open with a third due to open shortly. The aim of this is that they can work safely, and we can better control and identify the risk of the spread of infection. So far this has done more than 4,000 tests.

Where we have seen Care Home outbreaks, the Council has targeted resources within the local community. This has included Marshal Patrols and an addition in signage, with staff working alongside local residents and businesses to highlight risks and to ensure compliance. For example, when there was an outbreak at the Shinfield View care home we arranged daily Covid Marshalls patrols and located four large temporary feather signs in Shinfield outside key shops and the garage and a number of additional standard signs to reassure the community, and to try and send the right messages out locally.

99. TO CONSIDER ANY REPORTS FROM THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

99.1 Officer Response to the Recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Report - WBC's Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic

The Executive considered a report setting out the Officer response to the recommendations included in the report from the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee following their review of the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Councillor Pauline Helliard-Symons, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee introduced the report. She praised the research that had been undertaken during the review, the contribution made by all of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees and the cross party working undertaken.

Councillor Helliard-Symons highlighted that the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee had been provided with results of the residents' survey regarding how the Council had responded to the pandemic, which had been very positive. Twelve areas had been reviewed and Councillor Helliard-Symons highlighted the impact on people's mental health, poverty and care leavers needing exemption from council tax to the age of 25, as areas that Members had had particular concerns about. She was pleased to note that a number of these had been or were already being addressed.

Staff welfare had been a key priority throughout the pandemic and 45 members of staff were training to become mental health first aiders.

Councillor Helliard-Symons praised the way in which the Council had worked with its partners throughout the pandemic. It was hoped that this would continue and that lessons would continue to be learned. Two recommendations around this had been added.

Councillor Jorgensen commented that there had been quick decision making in a crisis and questioned how this had been funded. Councillor Kaiser indicated that the Council had started the pandemic with a good level of reserves but also a crisis had not been allowed to turn into a disaster. Staff had been very adaptable, and a good level of support had been received from the Voluntary Sector. Government grants had also been received.

With regards to the response from the Voluntary Sector, Councillor Margetts indicated that the response initially focused on food and prescription delivery and was now focused on supporting the vaccination delivery. He praised the partnership working with the Voluntary Sector.

Councillor Clark asked how well the Council was performing in comparison to other local authorities with regards to vaccinations and tests. Councillor Margetts responded that the supply of vaccinations had been an issue, but that vaccination of Group 6 had begun. He believed that Wokingham was slightly further ahead than neighbouring boroughs. The Council was providing support in the form of buildings and volunteers amongst others. He had written to the CCG for further information on vaccinations.

Councillor Clark commented that Children's Services always ensured that children were safe, and the schools and settings were supported. She felt that greater reference could have also been made to Kooth. Councillor Helliard-Symons indicated that the report could not be amended but that Councillor Clark's comments would be taken on board.

Councillor Smith stated that the way staff had adapted to the situation and had interacted with community groups, was admirable.

Councillor Murray praised the focus of the report on mental health. He felt that all Members and more Officers should undertake the mental health first aider training in the future, given the increased focus on this area.

Councillor Kaiser questioned what was being done to involve communities, such as the BAME community, in the vaccination programme. Councillor Margetts responded that positive messages regarding the safety of the vaccination were being targeted.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the Officers' responses be noted and the recommendations as set out in the Overview and Scrutiny report and contained within this report be agreed;
- 2) the Officers' responses be noted and the two additional recommendations submitted by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, at its meeting on 20 January 2021, be agreed.

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TITLE	Community Vision and Corporate Delivery Plan Review
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 25 March 2021
WARD	None specific
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Communities, Insight and Change - Keeley Clements
LEAD MEMBER	Leader of the Council - John Halsall

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

This report sets the results of a review of the Community Vision and the state of delivery against the targets identified within Corporate Delivery Plan.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive note the challenges and opportunities which have arisen over the course of the year and endorse the recommendation that the Community Vision and Corporate Delivery Plan remains appropriate and relevant.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report reviews delivery against the commitments set out in the Corporate Delivery Plan, in the context of significant challenges to delivery over the course of the current financial year. This review is designed to help Members determine whether the Corporate Delivery Plan is still fit for purpose and sets the right direction for the council for the remaining 3 years of the plan period.

In summary:

- The majority of key commitments of the Corporate Delivery Plan (2020-24) continue to be delivered and have progressed well over the course of 2020/21 despite the challenging circumstances presented by COVID-19.
- As of Q3, performance as reflected by KPIs associated with Corporate Delivery Plan show most performance indicators are on course to achieve targets. Of the 53 indicators associated with Corporate Delivery Plan and reported Quarterly:
 - 35 (66%) indicators are green in both Q2 and Q3 and likely to be achieved
 - 11 (21%) indicators are red as of Q3 and are at risk of not being achieved (all but 3 have been directly impacted by COVID-19)
 - Approximately 13% of indicators are currently amber and could move in either direction by the end of the year
- COVID-19 has presented some significant challenges for services across the Council. Some of these are expected to be short-term and will be alleviated once factors like social distancing and other COVID-related restrictions are no longer in

place. However, others will be far reaching in terms of impact and as yet the data and intelligence to support the full extent of the impact is not known.

- There are some significant positives to be taken from this period in terms of the council achieving the vision and objectives in the Corporate Delivery Plan: for example significant progress has been made in terms of developing intelligence about our customers, communities and businesses; many aspects of partnership working have strengthened and become more efficient and effective; and the use of digital platforms has driven modernisation and innovation at an unprecedented pace. There are many examples of how agile, flexible and customer-focused ways of working have delivered great outcomes for Wokingham residents, and these present some exciting opportunities for innovation and future success.
- In terms of the challenges experienced during this financial year which are more likely to endure beyond the short term, actions to address these are already underway. Development of specific plans and strategies will address some of these, for example by continuing to develop our strategic engagement with partners, businesses, voluntary and community sector; we will strengthen our approach to tackling inequality and poverty; and will provide focused support for economic recovery through the business task force.
- Whilst some uncertainty regarding the level and extent of impacts of the pandemic remains, given the performance of the past year and actions in place to support recovery, the themes and ambitions of the Community Vision remain relevant and appropriate, and the Corporate Delivery Plan remains a relevant framework for strategy and delivery.

BACKGROUND

The Community Vision and Corporate Delivery Plan were adopted in February 2020 and set out the strategic priorities for the council for a 4-year period. 6 key strategic themes were established:

- Safe, Strong Communities
- Enriching Lives
- A Clean and Green Borough
- Right Homes, Right Places
- Keeping the Borough Moving
- Changing the Way We Work For You

Since then, unprecedented pressure caused by COVID-19 has impacted upon the lives of all our residents, businesses and council services. We have been continuously responding to changes caused by the waves of the pandemic, lockdown restrictions and social distancing rules. We have supported our residents, particularly those who are vulnerable and businesses, always seeking to maintain critical and universal services.

This report reviews delivery against the commitments set out in the Corporate Delivery Plan in the context of these challenges, to enable Members to establish whether the Plan continues to be fit for purpose and sets the right direction for the council for the coming years.

CURRENT SITUATION

Review of delivery against Corporate Delivery Plan commitments

- Most key commitments of the Corporate Delivery Plan (2020-24) continue to be delivered and have progressed well over the course of 2020/21 despite the challenging circumstances presented by COVID-19.
- All Directorates have taken a pragmatic approach to managing the impact of the pandemic on local public services, challenging themselves and staff across our organisation to rapidly adapt to new and agile ways of working. As an example, between April and July 2020, over 200 FTE hours were redeployed to support COVID-19 priorities.
- As of Q3, performance as reflected by KPIs associated with the Council Vision and Corporate Delivery Plan show most performance indicators are on course to achieve targets. Of the 53 indicators associated with Corporate Delivery Plan and reported Quarterly:
 - 35 (66%) indicators are green in both Q2 and Q3 and likely to be achieved
 - 11 (21%) indicators are red as of Q3 and are at risk of not being achieved (all but 3 are identified as being impacted directly by COVID-19)
 - Remaining 10 (approx. 13%) indicators are amber and could move in either direction by the end of the year
 - In Q3 the majority of red indicators relate to Enriching Lives (RA3 and RA4 leisure centre usage and activity uptake, RA5d and RA5a applicants supported into settled accommodation and homeless preventions; CIC5,

visits to Libraries CS4 EHCP assessments completed within 20wks of referral) and Safe and Strong Communities (AS7 people receiving long term care subject to a review; AS3, people 65+ who received reablement after leaving hospital and remained at home 91 days later and CS1, % of children subject to a child protection plan for second or subsequent time in 24mths)

The council's first year working to the corporate delivery plan has demonstrated that the plan was robust, even in light of unexpected events such as Covid-19. Below are some examples of how the organisation has been able to effectively respond and develop its approach. Through the continued adoption of the corporate delivery plan, the Council will embed good practice and learning linked to the COVID-19 Recovery strategy.

Staff across the council rapidly adapted to agile ways of working, for example during April and July 2020 alone, over 200 FTE hours were redeployed to support Covid-19 priorities, this supported the need to respond quickly to the emerging needs of the Borough whilst maintaining critical core services.

During this period, information and intelligence about local businesses, communities and the needs of our most vulnerable residents was significantly enhanced. This presents potential future benefits for intelligence-led planning and delivery, and more effective community engagement. For example, the rapid fire rollout of welfare calls to the most vulnerable in the Borough was achieved through partnership working with the VCS, a better use of data and an agile response to the needs of residents.

In addition, there has been strengthened engagement with strategic partners (e.g. Health & GPs), local businesses and the voluntary and community sector which will help build on the foundations for effective partnership working into the future.

The drive towards greater uptake of digitally provided services has helped to accelerate the pace of modernisation and innovation in services across the council; addressed "digital exclusion" (e.g. reaching older and more vulnerable groups through technology); provide opportunities for channel shift; and innovative, more efficient means of service delivery and customer engagement. For example, a digital inclusion project has commenced in conjunction with the VCS, supporting the provision of laptops and tablets to those most in need.

Council tax and business rates collection has remained good, however the financial settlement in 2022-23, which may well need to reflect impact of COVID-19 on public finances, as well as any implications from Brexit, is unknown at this stage and may present challenges in resourcing future delivery.

Additional Actions to Address Challenges and Realise Emerging Opportunities

In addition to the work officers across the Council are undertaking to ensure the Corporate Delivery Plan is successfully delivered, there are several additional initiatives underway to address current and likely future challenges, and realise emerging opportunities:

- A Draft Equality Plan (2021-25) will set out priorities to embed the LGA framework for equality and embed the Race at Work Charter
- Strengthening the approach to poverty and inequality, including health inequalities
- Support for economic recovery through the business task force linked to the corporate recovery programme

- Strengthened engagement with strategic partners, businesses and voluntary and community sector will continue across several areas of service delivery

CONCLUSION

- COVID-19 has resulted in devastating consequences for a number of residents and businesses within the Borough. It has also presented several significant challenges for services across the Council. Some of the Council challenges are expected to be short-term and will be alleviated once factors like social distancing and other COVID-related restrictions are no longer in place. Performance against KPIs will continue to be monitored closely to ensure that delivery is on track and that any issues are identified in a timely manner and addressed.
- There are some significant positives to be taken from this period in terms of the Council achieving the Community Vision and objectives in the Corporate Delivery Plan: for example, significant progress has been made in terms of developing intelligence about our customers, communities and businesses; many aspects of partnership working have strengthened and become more efficient and effective; and the use of digital platforms has driven modernisation and innovation at an unprecedented pace. There are many examples of how agile, flexible and customer-focussed ways of working have delivered great outcomes for Wokingham residents, and these present some exciting opportunities for innovation and future success.
- Some uncertainty and challenges remain at this time – for example the extent of impact on vulnerable groups, and uncertainty in terms of future financial settlements provide some challenges in terms of future planning. However, there is consensus that the themes and ambitions of the Corporate Delivery Plan remain relevant and appropriate.
- Due to the Council's continued need to respond to the changing circumstances of COVID-19, this risk monitored to ensure any impact on the Corporate Delivery plan is understood and measured.
- In terms of the challenges experienced during this financial year which are more likely to endure beyond the short term, actions to address these are already underway. Development of specific plans and strategies will address some of these, for example by continuing to develop our strategic engagement with partners, businesses, voluntary and community sector; we will strengthen our approach to tackling inequality and poverty; and will provide focused support for economic recovery through the business task force.

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)	Funding will be in line with the MTFP	n/a	n/a
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	Funding will be in line with the MTFP	n/a	n/a
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	Funding will be in line with the MTFP	n/a	n/a

Other Financial Information

Financial impacts are considered as part of the Council's budget setting process through the MTFP. Where requirement for additional resource is identified through specific projects this will be addressed through the budget setting process.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

None

Public Sector Equality Duty

The corporate plan sets out the Council's approach to equality and due regard has been had to the public sector equality duty through the development of the plan and is recognised within the plan. All individual actions associated with the plan will also have due regard to the public sector equality duty throughout their development.

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 corporate plan sets out the council's strategic direction with regard to climate emergency and as set out in the report, the plan remains sound, and there are no adverse impacts identified on delivery of commitments relating to climate emergency at this time.

List of Background Papers

None

Contact Laura Callan	Service Strategy and Planning
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TITLE	Housing Strategy 2020 - 24
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 25 March 2021
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Place and Growth
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Finance and Housing - John Kaiser

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

To obtain Executive approval to adopt the proposed Housing Strategy 2020-2024.

The strategy sets out the Council's vision for housing in Wokingham Borough from 2020 – 2024. It has four key strategic priorities:

- Address and understand our housing needs
- Support our vulnerable residents through a range of housing options
- Improve the quality, sustainability and management of the Borough's homes
- Enriching people's lives

These objectives reflect the Council's core role in relation to housing supply, housing need and demand, managing and influencing quality. Whilst the Council has a broad role as the strategic housing authority, we are placing special emphasis on the key priorities within the strategy.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive recommend that Council approve the adoption of the proposed Housing Strategy 2020-2024.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Housing plays a huge role in the health, environmental and economic well-being of everyone who lives in the borough. Through this strategy, we will help to ensure that we address and understand our housing need, especially given the economic and social impacts following Covid-19. We will build the right homes in the right places, improve the quality, sustainability and design of the housing stock and support our residents by developing socially inclusive communities.

The Housing Strategy 2020 – 2024 will act as a framework strategy under which other housing strategies such as the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy will sit. As such the strategy format is different to other Council strategies, with this format being more accessible and user friendly so it can be used as a framework document.

The Council has a responsibility to address and understand the housing needs of all its residents and the strategy outlines the Council's role within the wider housing agenda.

The housing strategy outlines how the Council will achieve its responsibilities. A detailed action plan accompanies the strategy and this will be updated on an annual basis. The action plan gives more details on some of the key objectives to be delivered during the strategy period. The accompanying action plan details targets for 2021/22. The strategy is aligned to the Community Vision 2020 – 2024 of which housing plays a key integral role. Some of the key challenges outlined in the Community Vision are also referenced in the housing strategy.

The Housing Strategy 2020-2024 has four key priorities:

1. Address and understand our housing needs
2. Support our vulnerable residents through a range of housing options
3. Improve the quality, sustainability and management of the Borough's homes
4. Enriching people's lives

The expected outcomes of the strategy are:

- Understand and address our housing need, especially given the economic and social impacts following Covid-19.
- Delivery of more high quality sustainable homes in the right places through the Council's 'Housing 1-4-5 Challenge' – where the Council leads on the delivery of 1000 additional homes over the 4 year strategy period providing an average 5% return.
- In addition the enabling and/or delivery of c100 additional new homes, predominantly on brownfield sites, not currently identified in the current draft Local Plan Update but required to bridge the shortfall against the total annual number prescribed by Government
- Deliver a step change in the provision of new affordable homes through the Council's housing companies and Housing Revenue Account
- Delivery of a further 800 affordable homes to be delivered through the Council's
- More opportunities for low cost home ownership including an affordable self-build programme and exploring additional housing options for key workers and essential workers
- The Council helping to deliver the right homes in the right places, with housing policies informing and complementing the new local plan and making sure that infrastructure is delivered first in new housing developments
- Delivering housing and support tailored to meet identified need, by developing more specialist housing for vulnerable people based on need including those at risk of homelessness, adult social care clients, children in care and care leavers
- Improving information and guidance, by enhancing the digital advice and guidance available to residents via the Council's website and other sources
- Developing effective policies and strategies to ensure supported housing meets need through additional supporting policies such as the use of extra care for older people and move on accommodation for care leavers and vulnerable young people
- Improving the quality and management of homes both within the social housing stock and private rented sector, by maintaining Decent Homes Standard and improving customer satisfaction across all new homes and those owned by Housing Associations
- Ensuring the quality and sustainability of design of all homes through energy efficiency and exploring modern methods of construction for housing delivery
- Regenerating old housing stock such as Gorse Ride community in Finchampstead

- Developing more socially inclusive communities and helping to provide all tenants with a stable home for example through additional employment opportunities and skills development

Members, Officers, stakeholders and the public have had the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the draft strategy. The consultation was sent out across the Council, to all Members, the Parish and Town Councils, the RP Partnership, TLIP, MHCLG, Homes England, partners and agencies and local charities. It was also publicised via a press release and our social media.

We received 37 responses in total, of which 27 were from residents. Between 77% - 80% either agreed or strongly agreed with each of the objectives set out in the strategy. 71% felt that the purpose of the Housing Strategy is clear and 61% agreed with the approach taken in the Housing Strategy.

BACKGROUND

The Council's previous Housing Strategy covers the period 2015-18. In 2015, we set out five key priorities:

1. Addressing our housing needs
2. Supporting vulnerable people
3. Tackling homelessness and housing need
4. Enhancing tenant services
5. Expanding opportunities for vulnerable residents

During the previous strategy period a number of key successes were achieved, these include:

- Completed 1182 affordable homes during 2015/16 – 2018/19
- Generated a future pipeline of over 2000 additional affordable homes
- Started work on our first affordable self-build scheme in the Borough
- Commissioned a GRT needs evidence based study to inform the new Local Plan
- Delivered housing schemes through our housing companies such as Phoenix Avenue and Fosters extra care scheme
- Delivered an affordable rented scheme for key workers in Wokingham town centre
- Completed two Extra Care schemes at Fosters and the Birches in Woodley
- Completed a supported housing scheme for young people in Reading Road, to replace supported housing at Seaford Court
- Developed temporary accommodation for vulnerable adults at Foxwood and Broadway House
- Delivered a range of support services to enable vulnerable adults to live more independently
- Maintained low levels of homeless acceptances and repeat homelessness by focusing on practical responses and prevention
- Helped people access private rented housing, through schemes such as the Rent in Advance/ Deposit Loan Scheme
- Assisted 315 young people through a joined-up housing and employment advice service at "Elevate Wokingham"
- Met and maintained the Decent Homes Standard on our own housing stock
Assisted 43 residents to set up their own business through the "Strive" enterprise programme

The Housing Strategy 2020 – 2024 will act as a framework strategy under which other housing strategies such as the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy will sit. As such the strategy format is different to other Council strategies, with this format being more accessible and user friendly so it can be used as a framework document.

The Council has a responsibility to address and understand the housing needs of all its residents and the strategy outlines the Council's role within the wider housing agenda. The draft housing strategy outlines how the Council will achieve its responsibilities. An action plan will accompany the strategy and this will be updated on an annual basis. The action plan gives more details on some of the key objectives to be delivered during the strategy period. The strategy is aligned to the Community Vision 2020 – 2024 of which housing plays a key integral role. Some of the key challenges outlined in the

Community Vision are also referenced in the housing strategy. These include protecting the quality of the environment and sustainability of existing communities with the need for new housing, ensuring the right infrastructure is in place and that we address and manage demand for those who are ageing or have long term health conditions. Tackling issues such as social isolation, pockets of deprivation and unemployment and climate change, are also referenced within the housing strategy. We also need to understand and address the immediate and longer term impact of Covid-19 on our housing needs.

The Housing Strategy 2020-2024 has four key priorities:

1. Address and understand our housing needs
2. Support our vulnerable residents through a range of housing options
3. Improve the quality, sustainability and management of the Borough's homes
4. Enriching people's lives

As part of the public consultation on the draft Housing Strategy, we received 37 responses in total, of which 27 were from residents. Between 77% - 80% either agreed or strongly agreed with each of the objectives set out in the strategy. 71% felt that the purpose of the Housing Strategy is clear and 61% agreed with the approach taken in the Housing Strategy.

There were a number of additional comments received during the strategy consultation, the majority of which have been addressed within the strategy's accompanying action plan. The main concerns have centred around wanting to know where new development is likely to be based and the importance of having an up to date Local Plan; impact of development on the environment and conservation of green spaces; ensuring the right infrastructure is in place to support new and existing communities, and addressing the economic and social impacts arising from Covid and Brexit. There were also comments around ensuring a more diverse and robust private rental sector especially for those who are unemployed or have poor credit history and ensuring there are more opportunities for young people to secure suitable and affordable housing given the high house prices and general unaffordability of the private rental sector within the Borough. There were also several comments about the mix of new housing within the Borough and a perceived over supply of flatted units, especially with the change in demand following the Covid pandemic for more outdoor space and adequate indoor space for home working.

BUSINESS CASE

The Housing Strategy 2020-2024 has four key priorities and their importance are outlined below:

1. Address and understand our housing needs

The population of our Borough is changing. More housing will need to be available to meet demand, with a diverse mix of homes to meet the changing needs of our growing population including a growing older population. There are currently 576 households (Jan 2021) on the Council's Housing Register identified as being in housing need. The Borough also needs to have a range of housing types and an environment and infrastructure that supports growth, helping to retain and attract a professional workforce and essential key workers. We also need to understand and address the housing, economic and social needs following Covid-19.

2. Support our vulnerable residents through a range of housing options

We want to support more people to live independently for longer by offering the right housing options to meet their needs, as well as high quality information and advice to help residents to make informed housing decisions. Investing in housing support for vulnerable people helps keep them healthy. Every £1 invested delivers nearly £2 of benefit through costs avoided to public services including care, health and crime costs, The Health Foundation.

3. Improve the quality, sustainability and management of the Borough's homes

Poor quality housing has a significant impact on residents' health and wellbeing. It is also linked to children's quality of life and educational attainment, due to higher rates of sickness and absence from school. A good choice of high quality and sustainable housing will help the Borough to achieve many of its ambitions, including its vision to be carbon neutral by 2030.

4. Enriching people's lives

As well as helping to provide our residents with sustainable homes, the Council, together with our partners, has a vital role to play in improving people's life chances and reducing worklessness and a reliance on benefits. By investing in programmes and initiatives to help residents and others in housing need, we can transform lives, as well as supporting the local economy and wider community.

The expected outcomes for year 1 of the strategy which are detailed in the accompanying action plan include:

- Delivery of more homes in the Borough – delivery of 140 homes as part of the Council's 1-4-5 housing delivery programme and a further 200 affordable homes to be delivered through the Council's partnership with housing associations. Work towards delivering the additional (c100) homes per annum (all tenures) not currently identified in the current draft Local Plan Update but required to bridge the shortfall against the total annual number prescribed by Government.
- More opportunities for low cost home ownership, such as the affordable self-build programme, achieving outline planning permission at Toutley East by the end of Q2 2021/22
- The Council helping to deliver the right homes in the right places, with housing policies informing and complementing the new local plan and making sure that infrastructure is delivered first in new housing developments, with a target of having a draft affordable housing policy and SPD agreed prior to Council adoption
- Delivering housing and support tailored to meet identified need, by developing more specialist housing for vulnerable people based on need including those at risk of homelessness, adult social care clients, children in care and care leavers. The target for 2021/22 is to deliver 11 units of accommodation for learning disabled clients, 10 units for mental health clients, 7 units for vulnerable young people and 5 units of accommodation for homelessness.
- Improving information and guidance, by enhancing the digital advice and guidance available to residents via the Council's website and other sources, with a user survey carried out to measure impact.

- Devising and implementing how the Council approaches the issues highlighted in the recent Housing White Paper including ensuring the quality and safety of homes, clear information on performance and a strong voice for residents and tenants
- Developing effective policies and strategies to ensure supported housing meets need through additional supporting policies such as the use of extra care for older people and move on accommodation for care leavers and vulnerable young people, developing an extra care policy ready for adoption during 2021/22.
- Improving the quality and management of homes both within the social housing stock and private rented sector, maintaining a target of 100% Decent Homes Standard on homes owned by the Council, Loddon Homes and other partner Housing Associations.
- Ensuring the quality and sustainability of design of all homes through energy efficiency and exploring modern methods of construction for housing delivery. The target for 2021/22 is to set up a programme of retrofitting the Council's housing stock to net zero standards and work with partners to help achieve net zero standards as well as developing a policy and SPD for inclusion in the new local plan.
- Regenerating old housing stock such as the Gorse Ride community in Finchampstead, delivering 46 new homes as part of phase 1 and to be onsite with 249 units as part of phase 2
- Developing more socially inclusive communities and helping to provide all tenants with a stable home for example through additional employment opportunities and skills development, identifying and planning activities around preventative measures and undertaking social value impact assessments on social and community activities

Next Steps

If the Executive approve adoption of the proposed Housing Strategy 2020 – 2024, this will then go to full Council on 20th May for approval and afterwards the strategy will be published in early Summer.

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)	This strategy will be resourced through existing funding within the Council's MTFP and access to wider external funding such as Homes England grants programmes.		
Next Financial Year (Year 2)			
Following Financial Year (Year 3)			

Other Financial Information
The capital approvals needed to enact this strategy will be sought and contained within the annual budget setting process. In addition to meeting Housing needs, the 1-4-5 programme will also provide valuable Revenue resources for the Council.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation
Members, Officers, stakeholders and the public have had the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the draft strategy. The consultation has been made available via the Council’s website, with associated press releases, invitations to respond and social media push.

Public Sector Equality Duty
Due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty has been taken. An equality impact assessment has been carried out and is included as Enclosure 2.

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>
The Housing Strategy will help towards achieving carbon neutrality by 2030 as one of the key priorities is around improving the quality, sustainability and management of the Borough’s housing stock, ensuring that the Council helps to improve carbon efficiency, reduce carbon emissions and fuel poverty.

List of Background Papers
Housing Strategy 2020 – 2024 – Enclosure 1 Year 1 Action Plan – Enclosure 2 Equality Impact Assessment – Enclosure 3 Housing Facts and Figures – Enclosure 4

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Wokingham Borough Council Housing Strategy 2020-2024



“Right Homes, Right Places”

Housing plays a huge role in the health, environmental and economic well-being of everyone who lives in the borough. It is more than just bricks and mortar; everyone is affected by housing. Housing has become the defining economic and social issue of our times.

The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has stated its intention to fix the broken housing market and increase housing supply, unlocking homes in areas where need is greatest and encouraging best practice in delivering high quality design to underpin the creation of great places to live. Our residents and partners have told us they are most concerned about the impact of development upon communities and that some people find challenges in finding an affordable home. We want to improve the outcomes of our residents by delivering the strategic priorities outlined in our **Community Vision 2020 – 2024**, of which housing plays a key integral role. Through this strategy, we will help to ensure that we address and understand our housing need, especially given the economic and social impacts following Covid-19. We will build the right homes in the right places, improve the quality, sustainability and design of the housing stock and support our residents by developing socially inclusive communities.

The Council’s role includes:

- Working with developers and partners to deliver good quality sustainable homes in the right places.
- Investing in our own housing stock and delivering ambitious estate regeneration programmes.
- Working with landlords to improve standards of private rental sector properties.
- Working across different departments, agencies and other Berkshire authorities to ensure effective infrastructure delivery to mitigate against development and support new and existing communities.
- Prioritising people with additional support needs to access appropriate accommodation and support.
- Acting as the corporate parent and providing for children in care and young people leaving care.
- Improving the health and wellbeing of the Borough’s residents by helping to provide stable homes and develop well connected and socially inclusive communities.

Key facts and figures

- **167,979** people live in Wokingham Borough, and this is expected to grow by **5.4%** by **2030**, to **177,100** people (ONS, 2018)
- The average price of a home in the Borough is **£416,612** compared to a national average of **£234,853** (HM Land Registry, August 2019)
- Those on the Council’s Housing Register identified as being in **housing need** stands at **563 households** (October, 2020)

Our housing priorities – what we will do	
Priority	Why is this important?
Address and understand our housing needs	The population of our Borough is changing. More housing will be needed to meet demand, with a diverse mix of homes to meet the changing needs of our growing population including a growing older population as well as helping to retain and attract a professional workforce including essential keyworkers. As part of this we will invest in our own housing stock and deliver a step change in the provision of new affordable homes through the Council’s housing companies and Housing Revenue Account. We also need to understand and address the immediate and longer impact of Covid-19 on our housing needs.
Support our vulnerable residents through a range of housing options	We want to support more people to live independently and keep healthy for longer by offering the right housing options to meet their needs. Following the impact of Covid-19 we will offer more support to those who are homeless, sleeping rough or at risk of homelessness. We prioritise those children in care and young people leaving care, ensuring that there are clear housing pathways to a stable home, helping young people in need by providing additional support to live independently.
Improve the quality, sustainability and management of the Borough’s homes	Poor quality housing has a significant impact on residents’ health and wellbeing. It is also linked to children’s quality of life and educational attainment, due to higher rates of sickness and absence from school. A good choice of high quality, sustainable and well managed housing will help the Borough to achieve many of its ambitions, including its vision to be carbon neutral by 2030.
Enriching people’s lives	The Council, together with our partners, has a vital role to play in creating vibrant inclusive communities, improving people’s life chances and reducing worklessness and a reliance on benefits. By investing in programmes and initiatives to help residents and others in housing need, we can transform lives, as well as supporting the local economy and wider community.

Our successes since the last Housing Strategy	Our challenges going forward
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a Local Authority we delivered one of the highest numbers of affordable homes in England, completing 1182 affordable homes during 2015/16 – 2018/19 and generating a future pipeline of over 2000 additional affordable homes • Due to the large number of affordable homes delivered, compared to other Berkshire and Greater London authorities the number of people on our Housing Register remains static but low • By securing external grant funding from Homes England, our housing companies delivered affordable housing schemes such as Phoenix Avenue, Fosters extra care scheme and a supported housing scheme for young people at risk of homelessness in Reading Road • Delivered an affordable rented scheme for key workers in Wokingham town centre • Completed 2 Extra Care schemes for older people at Fosters and the Birches in Woodley • Developed temporary accommodation for adults at Foxwood and Broadway House • Delivered a range of support services to enable vulnerable adults to live more independently • Maintained low levels of homelessness by focusing on practical responses and prevention and enhancing housing pathways to help end rough sleeping • Helped people access and secure private rented housing, through schemes such as the Rent in Advance/ Deposit Loan Scheme • Assisted 315 young people through a joined-up housing and employment advice service at “Elevate Wokingham” • Met and maintained the Decent Homes Standard target on our own housing stock • Enabled 43 residents to set up their own business through the “Strive” enterprise programme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have a challenge within the Borough to manage and balance need with requirement for new housing, whilst protecting the quality of our environment and the sustainability of our existing communities. Creating places and communities fit for the future that are inclusive to all and have the right infrastructure in place. Ensuring that our homes are affordable, sustainable and of good quality and supporting those with specialist needs or who are at risk of homelessness. • We need to understand and address the impact of Covid-19 on our housing requirements, especially for our older and vulnerable residents. • Wokingham Borough has a growing population with many thriving communities but with an increasing proportion of residents with long term health conditions, such as dementia, and people with learning disabilities or difficulties, it is important that we address and manage demand for long term care and maintain high quality services. • Tackling health issues and social isolation is a challenge in the Borough, particularly in older people, those with mental health issues and carers. There are pockets of deprivation, unemployment and a risk of poverty within working families. There has been an increase in the number of children and young people seeking support for mental health issues. • To tackle climate change, achieve carbon neutrality by 2030, while adapting for a growing population and seeking out value for money.

What do our residents say?

In the New Homes Survey 2020:

- **83%** of respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied with their new home
- **74%** of housing association tenants were satisfied with their new home
- **94%** agree that their house and area are attractive
- **83%** do not feel socially isolated with **74%** seeing their community as good or growing

What we are going to do - how we will address our priorities

Priority	Outcomes	What are we going to do?
Address and understand our housing needs	Delivery of more homes in the Borough	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council to lead on the delivery of 1000 additional homes over the 4 year strategy period (Housing 1-4-5 Challenge*) with at least 50% being classified as affordable Work towards ensuring delivery of the number of homes per annum (all tenures) set out in the Local Plan Update and prescribed by Government and maintaining a robust 5 year housing land supply An additional 800 affordable homes to be delivered through the Council's partnership with housing associations
	More opportunities for low cost home ownership and private renting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver the Council's first affordable self-build scheme and develop other opportunities for community led housing Explore new tenures and opportunities to help those who want to get onto the home ownership ladder Work with private landlords to expand the private rented sector to increase the range of available housing options
	The Council helps to deliver the right homes in the right places	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a strong evidence base of need and develop housing policies which will inform and complement the new Local Plan Ensure that any development with housing provision addresses local need and essential infrastructure is delivered up front Make the best use of Council-owned land setting the standard for high quality sustainable housing Continue to deliver high quality affordable and market homes for local people in Wokingham Borough by working with a range of partners and agencies Ensure we can meet the housing needs of the Borough's key workers Implement a new Allocations Policy to ensure best use of the Borough's affordable housing stock Address the housing needs of our Gypsy Roma Traveller and boat dweller communities
Supporting our vulnerable residents through a range of housing options	Delivering housing and support tailored to meet identified need	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing more supported housing for vulnerable people based on need including rough sleepers, homeless or those at risk of homelessness, adult social care clients, children in care and care leavers Continue to provide a range of housing support services to help vulnerable people live independently Delivery of a new council owned care home Delivery of two additional semi-independent living schemes for young people and care leavers in Wokingham, providing housing pathways for those in need of support
	Improving guidance and information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to improve access to information, advice and guidance on housing, distributing information through a variety of partners including our town and parish councils, Citizens Advice Wokingham, voluntary and charity sector partners Enhance the digital advice and guidance available to residents via the Council's website and social media
	Developing effective policies and strategies to ensure supported housing meets need	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing policies and strategies around the development and use of housing for vulnerable residents including a learning disability accommodation strategy, accommodation for those with mental health, the use of extra care for older people and move on accommodation for care leavers and vulnerable young people
Improving the quality, sustainability and management of the Borough's homes	Improving the quality and management of homes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve the quality and on-going management of homes and environment on all new developments Make best use of existing homes and assets to help tackle housing need as well as over-crowding and under-occupation Ensure all landlords in the Borough engage with and listen to their tenants and deliver the best possible housing management service Ensure that the Council continues to engage with and involve its tenants through the Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel and ensure the core values of their Tenants Charter are reflected across all housing Support our Private Rented Sector (PRS) residents and work with PRS landlords to improve standards of properties Improve the temporary and emergency accommodation offer for rough sleepers and homeless residents Ensure that fire safety, health and safety remains the top priority in every home and housing scheme
	Ensuring quality and sustainability of design of all homes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The adoption of a new Local Plan, Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document and Borough Design Guide Improve energy efficiency, reduce carbon emissions and fuel poverty, working towards net zero carbon by 2030 Explore more innovative ways of housing delivery including modern methods of construction
	Regenerating communities and housing stock	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to deliver regeneration programmes of older, poor quality housing stock such as at Gorse Ride in Finchampstead Ensure any regeneration projects are led by the local community and address their needs and priorities
Enriching people's lives	Developing more socially inclusive communities through employment opportunities and skills development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote independence, health and wellbeing to all residents Work to provide all tenants with a stable home to increase life chances Create communities and homes, not housing and estates, ensuring that the impact on existing communities from new development is minimised during the development period and is positive in the longer term Continue to expand employment and training opportunities for all residents including exploring and implementing opportunities for vulnerable residents Improve day to day housing affordability through preventative projects to tackle challenges such as fuel poverty Work together with partner Housing Associations (RPs) on specific activities which contribute to social and community inclusion and reduce any stigma relating to social housing

How will we measure success? We will use the following example indicators to measure our progress against the high level outcomes:

Address and understand our housing needs	Supporting our vulnerable residents through a range of housing options	Improving the quality and sustainability of the Borough's housing stock	Enriching people's lives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of new homes delivered Number of affordable homes delivered Delivery of an affordable self-build project at Toutley Implementation of new Allocations Policy Delivery of additional GRT pitches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Numbers of people accessing information, advice and guidance Number of care leavers and LD residents in suitable accommodation % of those presenting as homeless, homeless acceptances and use of B&B Delivery of supported housing projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> % of affordable housing stock which meets the Decent Homes Standard Ensure all new homes are carbon-neutral Adoption of a new Local Plan Affordable Housing SPD and Borough Design Guide 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of households lifted out of fuel poverty Number of residents participating in business enterprise/skills development courses % satisfaction levels in the annual New Homes survey

An accompanying action plan has been developed which will be updated annually and will set out how the Council will deliver against the priorities set out above. Progress will be monitored by the Council, AHIG (member/officer group) and the Housing Delivery/RP Partnership. Local housing data is collated, analysed and published every 6 months in the Housing Facts and Figures report available on the Council's website.

* The Council's housing development challenge that aims to deliver 1000 homes over a 4 year period generating a 5% return rate on investment

SUMMARY ACTION PLAN FOR HOUSING STRATEGY 2020-2024 – YEAR 1 ACTIONS & TARGETS

	Priorities	Outcomes	Actions/Targets for 2021 - 2022	Lead Service Area	Progress/To Note
Objective j : Address and Understand our Housing Needs					
i	Understand and address the housing, economic and social needs following the Covid-19 pandemic	Mitigate where possible the social and economic impacts and ensure future strategies and housing provision reflect lessons learned and changes in requirements following Covid	Monitor housing data each quarter including number of evictions and mortgage defaults	Place Commissioning	On-going – Housing Facts and figures published quarterly and reviewed by Council's Affordable housing Implementation Group (AHIG)
			Work corporately and with partners to address housing-related social and economic impacts and support tenants and shared owners impacted by the pandemic	Place Commissioning / Commercial Property / Loddon Homes	On-going work
			Review affordable housing design to address any changes in requirements or demand following Covid – eg outside space, working/schooling from home etc	Place Commissioning / Commercial Property / Loddon Homes	
			Review Borough Design Guide to reflect changing requirements and demands post-Covid, incorporating the Government's proposals around green infrastructure standards in new developments to support health and wellbeing	Place Commissioning / Planning Policy	
ii	Wokingham Borough Council to complete 1,000 additional homes over the strategy period (to include at least 50% affordable)	A range of high quality affordable housing across the borough to meet housing needs, including new and innovative tenures	Work towards overall target of 1,000 Council led homes, over a 4 year period with a 5% return on investment (the 'Housing 1-4-5' challenge). 2021/22 target to deliver 140 homes.	Place Commissioning Team / Commercial Property	As at Jan 21, there were 46 housing completions during 2020/21, 149 new homes on site, 657 being progressed and 549 at early stages of investigation.
			Work towards delivering the additional (c100) homes per annum (all tenures) not currently identified in the current draft Local Plan Update but required to bridge the shortfall against the total annual number prescribed by Government. The additional homes to be provided where possible on brownfield sites	Commercial Property	C100 per annum - final number to be confirmed
			Explore additional housing options for key workers and essential workers in the Borough on low incomes such as Rent to Buy and First Homes	Place Commissioning Team	Plan for delivery to be confirmed
iii	An additional 800 affordable homes to be delivered through the council's partnership with housing associations	A range of high quality affordable housing across the borough to meet housing needs, predominantly through social rented and shared ownership affordable tenures	Over 200 affordable housing completions expected during 2020/21 and over 200 affordable housing completions are expected during 2021/22 (more will be added to the development programme as the RPs go into contract on other sites)	Place Commissioning Team	465 completions in 2019/20, 365 in 2018/19 and 482 in 2017/18. Current 2020/21 completions under target mainly due to Covid and future years targets reduced as nearing end of several major strategic developments

SUMMARY ACTION PLAN FOR HOUSING STRATEGY 2020-2024 – YEAR 1 ACTIONS & TARGETS

	Priorities	Outcomes	Actions/Targets for 2021 - 2022	Lead Service Area	Progress/To Note
iv	Develop opportunities for community led housing schemes	Affordable housing provision through self-build schemes and community led housing initiatives	Outline planning permission for affordable self-build homes at Toutley East (by end of Q2 2021/22)	Place Commissioning Team/ Commercial Property	Stage 2 design of overall Toutley East proposals underway
			Explore opportunities for joint working with Community Council Berkshire on a rural housing enabler post	Place Commissioning Team	
			Deliver community led housing training and awareness raising events	Place Commissioning Team	
v	Develop a strong evidence base of need and develop new housing policies which will inform and complement the new Local Plan	Ensure planning and delivery of the right affordable homes and specialist accommodation delivered in the right places through clear robust evidence of affordable housing need and specialist housing need, updated affordable housing policies within the new local plan, a refreshed Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and a new Specialist Housing SPD	Affordable housing and specialist housing need evidence report produced	Place Commissioning / Planning Policy	A draft affordable housing policy has been produced which will be used in the Draft Local Plan consultation. Work has commenced
			Draft affordable housing policy produced for consultation as part of the draft local plan	Place Commissioning/ Planning Policy	
			Draft Affordable Housing SPD agreed prior to Council adoption	Place Commissioning/Planning Policy	
			Draft Specialist Housing SPD agreed prior to Council adoption	Place Commissioning/Planning Policy	
vi	Address the accommodation needs of our gypsy and traveller communities and boat dweller communities	Address unmet need and identify potentially suitable Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) sites	Explore opportunities to expand existing GRT provision across the Borough	Place Commissioning/ Commercial Property	Initial paper highlighting potential options for
			Improve the quality and safety of GRT site provision across the Borough	Place Commissioning/ Commercial Property	increasing GRT provision has been produced
		Address unmet need and identify potentially suitable mooring pitches for boat dwellers	Boat Dwellers needs assessment completed	Place Commissioning/Planning Policy	
vii	Implement a new Allocations Policy	Delivery of a new Allocations Policy to ensure best use of the affordable housing stock	New Allocations Policy agreed and implemented	Place Commissioning/ Operational Housing	Work on a new Allocations Policy has already commenced
viii	Work with Private Landlords to increase and improve accommodation in the private rental sector	Investigate potential for a new Landlord Forum	Options appraisal for new Landlord Forum completed	Place Commissioning/Operational Housing	Work on a new Landlords Forum has commenced
Objective ii : Supporting our vulnerable residents through a range of housing options					
i	Continue to improve access to information, advice and guidance on housing	Improved access to information, advice and guidance on housing for vulnerable groups such as care leavers and children on the edge of care, those with disabilities and mental health issues	Advice and guidance distributed through a variety of partners including our town and parish councils, Citizens Advice Wokingham, voluntary and charity sector partners Improved digital advice and guidance to residents through the Council's website and social media, through "Housing Online". User survey to be carried out to measure impact.	Operational Housing	

SUMMARY ACTION PLAN FOR HOUSING STRATEGY 2020-2024 – YEAR 1 ACTIONS & TARGETS

	Priorities	Outcomes	Actions/Targets for 2021 - 2022	Lead Service Area	Progress/To Note
ii	Develop more supported housing for vulnerable people based on need	Provision of supported housing will meet the needs of vulnerable groups	To continue with the programme of provision of council-owned accommodation for clients with mental health requirements and learning disabled (LD) requirements, delivering 11 units of LD specific accommodation during 2021/22. To secure accommodation for those at risk of homelessness utilising NSAP (Next Step Accommodation Programme), delivering 5 units of accommodation during 2021/22.	People & Place Commissioning/Operational Housing	Provision of Council-owned properties currently being refurbished to meet the needs of learning disabled clients. Additional properties being purchased at Hatch Farm Dairies in Winnersh will also meet the needs of mental health clients.
iii	Continue to provide a range of housing support services to help vulnerable people live independently	Reduce the numbers of people going into residential care	Ongoing housing support services, providing savings to the Council of X during 2021/22.	Operational Housing/People Commissioning	
iv	Develop policies around the development and use of housing for vulnerable residents	Housing pathways for all vulnerable groups identified and place	Learning Disabled accommodation strategy drafted Draft Extra Care Policy produced and agreed prior to adoption Move on accommodation for care leavers and vulnerable young people identified	People & Place Commissioning	
v	Delivery of a council owned care scheme	Delivery of council owned care scheme in order to produce savings for adult social care budgets	Outline planning permission for care home at Toutley East (by end of Q2 2021/22)	People Commissioning/Adult Social Care	Business case developed for care home on Toutley & Stage 2 design proposals on overall Toutley East Underway
vi	Delivery of additional supported housing for young people	Delivery of schemes at London Road and Seaford Court providing different levels of support/housing pathways for young people in need	London Road (7 units) scheme complete end Q2 2021/22 Seaford Court (c.10 units) on site and progressing to completion	People Commissioning / Place Commissioning / Property	London Road scheme expected to complete Summer 2021. Purchase of Seaford Court currently being progressed
vii	Supporting residents facing domestic abuse	Delivery of a strategic approach to supporting domestic abuse survivors	Complete a housing needs assessment of provision, identifying gaps and areas requiring strengthened support	Community Safety Team	Initial workshops have commenced to look at the requirements of the new Domestic Abuse Bill and required housing pathways for domestic abuse survivors
Objective iii: Improving the quality, sustainability and management of the Borough's housing stock					
i	Respond to the Government's Housing White Paper	Delivery of a robust action plan to address the aspirations set out in the Housing White Paper	Develop and start to deliver an action to meet the aspirations raised in the White Paper - to improve quality and safety of homes, improve the standard of service from landlords and increase the voice of tenants and residents	Operational Housing/ Place Commissioning	Initial work has commenced and being discussed the Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel (TLIP)
ii	Make best use of existing homes and assets	Rationalisation of stock where necessary. Increase the number of homes owned by the Council and its Housing Companies.	Delivery of the HRA business plan to utilise capacity for additional borrowing and development of new Business Plan for Loddon Homes	Operational Housing /Loddon Homes	New HRA Business Plan agreed, Loddon Homes Business Plan in development

SUMMARY ACTION PLAN FOR HOUSING STRATEGY 2020-2024 – YEAR 1 ACTIONS & TARGETS

	Priorities	Outcomes	Actions/Targets for 2021 - 2022	Lead Service Area	Progress/To Note
iii	Improve the quality and management of homes owned by the Council and Housing Associations	A range of high quality affordable housing to meet housing needs	Maintain target of 100% Decent Homes Standard on homes owned by the Council, Loddon Homes and other partner housing associations	Operational Housing / Loddon Homes/ Place Commissioning	
iv	Engagement with tenants	Council continues to engage with and involve its tenants through the Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel (TLIP)	Continued engagement through TLIP	Operational Housing / Loddon Homes / Place Commissioning	
		Improved customer satisfaction across all social housing providers	Overall customer satisfaction target x% (tbc) for HRA Housing, Loddon Homes and partner housing association		
v	Explore more innovative ways of housing delivery including modern methods of construction	Strong pipeline of housing delivery across the Borough utilising different methods of construction, with MMC options to be built into site appraisals	First Modern Methods of Construction scheme to be on site by end of 2021/22	Commercial Property / Place Commissioning	Site identified and pre-planning discussions underway
vi	Adoption of planning policies governing housing	Adoption of a new local plan and Affordable Housing SPD incorporating standards on lifetime homes, space and design	Draft Affordable Housing SPD ready for wider consultation	Place Commissioning / Planning Policy	Both subject to progress with Local Plan Update
			Review of the Council's design guide underway		
vii	Delivery of housing regeneration projects	Regeneration of old housing stock such as at Gorse Ride in Finchampstead	Delivery of 46 new homes as part of phase 1 of the Gorse Ride regeneration	Place Commissioning / Commercial Property / Loddon Homes	Phase 1 nearing completion & Phase 2 Planning agreed and initial contractor partner appointment underway
			Phase 2 (249 units) of the Gorse Ride regeneration to be onsite		
viii	Supporting Private Rented Sector (PRS) residents	Support of PRS residents and work with PRS landlords to prevent homelessness and increase standards and quality of private sector housing	Explore the possibility of setting up a Landlord Forum in the Borough	Operational Housing / Place Commissioning	Work on establishing a Landlord Forum has commenced
			Continue to provide a Rent in Advance/Deposit Loan scheme, with homes to be inspected before agreement		
ix	Reduce rough sleeping and homelessness and improve the temporary and emergency accommodation offer	Providing good quality local accommodation where possible to those with a local connection to Wokingham Borough	Replacement of existing temporary accommodation at Foxwood, Wokingham	Operational Housing	Continuation of the 'Everyone In' approach introduced during 2020
			Delivery of Grovelands additional temporary accommodation by end of Q4 2021/22		
			Targets: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No rough sleepers No-one in temporary accommodation for longer than 12 weeks No care leavers to be housed in temporary accommodation No families in Bed & Breakfast 		
x	Maintaining a balance of tenure types	Maintain a balance of tenure types across existing homes and ensure that new provision meets demand	Implementation of the Affordable Housing planning policy ensuring a minimum of 35% provision of affordable housing across all new development	Place Commissioning / Planning	In line with current targets
xi	Improve energy efficiency, reduce carbon emissions and fuel poverty, working towards net zero carbon by 2030	Improve energy performance of the housing stock	Set up a programme of retrofitting our the Council's housing stock to net zero standards and work with partners to help achieve net zero standards	Place Commissioning / Planning Policy	Retrofit programme to be developed based on EPC ratings of the Council's housing stock and available budgets
		Major residential developments to achieve carbon neutrality and to be designed and built to achieve BREEAM excellent standard from 2022	Policy and SPD to be developed for inclusion in the new Local Plan		

SUMMARY ACTION PLAN FOR HOUSING STRATEGY 2020-2024 – YEAR 1 ACTIONS & TARGETS

	Priorities	Outcomes	Actions/Targets for 2021 - 2022	Lead Service Area	Progress/To Note
<u>Objective iv: Enriching people’s lives</u>					
i.	Develop a social value calculator	Enable the social housing value of any new housing scheme, project or investment to be calculated	Social Value Calculator developed and adopted	Place Commissioning	Initial training completed an model for assessment identified
ii.	Promote independence, health and wellbeing to all residents	Enable people to develop the skills required to secure of maintain their home with a strong emphasis on preventative activities	Identify and plan activities around preventative measures	Place Commissioning	
iii.	Provide all tenants with a stable home	Provide all tenants with a stable home will increase life chances	Ensure a joined up approach to understanding and tackling the root causes of housing crises	Place Commissioning/Operational Housing	
iv.	Expanding employment and training opportunities	Continue to expand employment and training opportunities for all residents	Run more business enterprise programmes to help residents establish new businesses	Place Commissioning	Linking in with wider Covid Recovery Plan skills and employment stream
v.	Partnership working	Working with partners to explore and implement opportunities for vulnerable residents	Identify specific activities and programmes working with our Registered Provider partners	Place Commissioning	
		Working with partners on specific activities which contribute to social and community inclusion	Agree a calculator for assessing social value on social and community activities		
vi.	Living Cost Affordability	Taking advantage of funding opportunities to deliver preventative projects to reduce living costs and improve affordability such as fuel poverty	Identify and apply for relevant funding programmes	Place Commissioning	

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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:	19/02/20
Service:	Place Commissioning
Project, policy or service EQIA relates to:	Housing Strategy 2020 – 2024
Completed by:	Frances Haywood, Senior Strategy Officer
Has the EQIA been discussed at services team meeting:	
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:

Affordable housing and economic prosperity are key themes within the Council plan. The new Housing Strategy 2020 – 24 will act as a framework underneath which more specialist housing strategies and policies will be aligned (such as the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, Learning Disabled accommodation strategy, etc). The aim of the Housing Strategy is to ensure that all residents can access well-designed, affordable and sustainable homes and effective support services in the Borough. There are 4 key objectives within the strategy:

- Addressing our housing needs
- Supporting vulnerable residents through a range of housing options

- Improving the quality, sustainability and management of the Borough's housing stock
- Enhancing people's lives

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:

As part of development of the strategy there will be both consultation with internal officers and well as more widely with the general public and partner agencies such as the Registered Provider partnership, Homes England and local charities. The strategy will be discussed at leadership teams to ensure input from across a range of service areas.

An action plan will be developed and updated annually setting out how we will deliver against the priorities within the strategy. Progress will be monitored by the Council (via leadership teams as appropriate), the Affordable Housing Implementation Group (member/officer group) and the Registered Provider partnership, all of whom meet frequently throughout the year.

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

The strategy will ensure that all residents can access well-designed, affordable and sustainable homes and effective support services in the Borough. A good choice of high quality housing will help the Borough achieve many of its ambitions. For instance, good quality settled homes can improve a child's life chances by providing the right environment for educational attainment. They can also help to improve the health and wellbeing of the Borough's residents. As part of the wider Thames Valley Berkshire functional economic area, the Council has committed to growing the local economy, which will also benefit from a healthy and competitive housing market.

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

The key objectives set out in the strategy are:

- Addressing our housing needs
- Supporting our vulnerable residents through a range of housing options
- Improving the quality, sustainability and management of the Borough's housing stock
- Enhancing people's lives

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:	Positive	No specific impact relating to race has been identified. Adoption of the Housing Strategy is likely to have a positive impact on residents and service users from ethnic backgrounds by helping to address housing needs and ensuring good quality and well designed homes for all. Whilst some may not have a local connection and therefore not entitled to access some services provided in the borough, the council will continue to provide an individualistic approach to vulnerable groups such as rough sleepers and will provide access to the appropriate services where wanted and required.

Gender:	Positive	No specific impact relating to gender has been identified. In terms of housing need, single males are less likely to be accepted as unintentionally homeless and in priority need and therefore at greater risk of becoming homeless and sleeping rough. However, there is good practice and joint working between different agencies, e.g., health and homelessness services, outreach services, with regular meetings taking place. The council needs to ensure that this joined up working continues and we work more closely with charities such as Wokingham In Need to examine where there can be additional support provided during “pinch points”.
Disabilities:	Positive	Those in urgent housing need are likely to have complex needs and in addition to physical health issues can have any combination of additional needs such as severe mental illness, learning disability and/or problems with substance misuse/addiction. One of the priorities of the strategy is to support vulnerable residents through a range of housing options which includes continuing to provide access to information, advice and guidance and developing more supported housing in relation to need.
Age:	Positive	It is likely that the housing strategy will have a positive impact on all age groups including children (by aiming to provide a stable home for all residents), young people (delivering more supported housing for vulnerable young people and providing a range of affordable homes), as well as older people (enabling them to live independently where possible but also providing a range of specific older persons accommodation).
Sexual orientation:	Positive	It is considered that the Housing Strategy will benefit all types of people. No specific impact relating to sexual orientation has been identified. Support is provided where appropriate through a multi-agency approach.
Religion/belief:	Positive	It is considered that the Housing Strategy will benefit all types of people. No specific impact relating to religion or belief has been identified. Support is provided where appropriate through a multi-agency approach.
Gender re-assignment:	Positive	It is considered that the Housing Strategy will benefit all types of people. No specific impact relating to gender reassignment has been identified. Support is provided where appropriate through a multi-agency approach.
Pregnancy and Maternity:	Positive	No specific impact relating to pregnancy or maternity has been identified. The priorities in the strategy are to address housing needs and support vulnerable residents through a range of housing options.
Marriage and civil partnership:	Positive	No specific impact relating to marriage or civil partnership has been identified. It is considered that the Housing Strategy will benefit all types of people.

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 or 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:....

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**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

Housing Facts and Figures Report April 2020 to September 2020

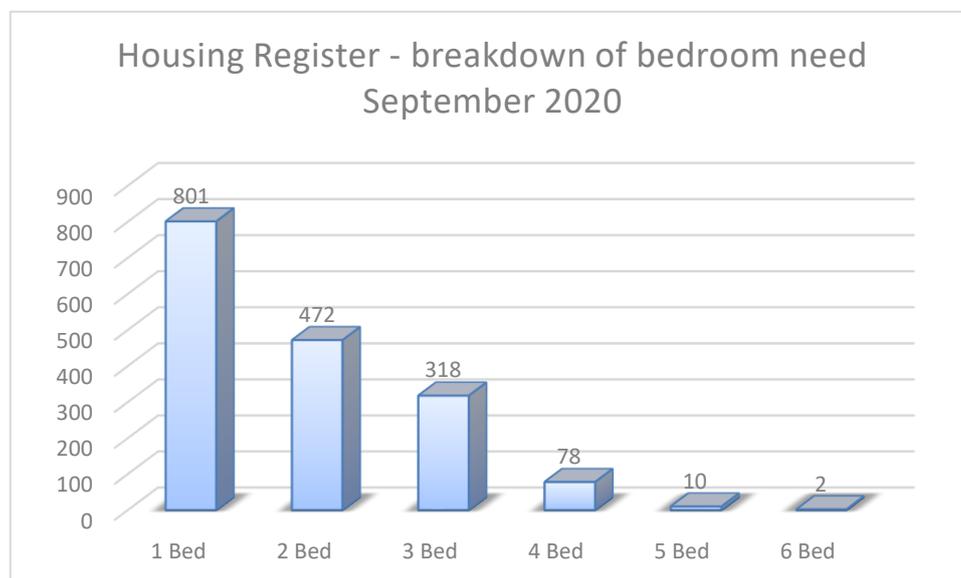
This document has been produced to provide stakeholders and colleagues with information about key housing issues in Wokingham Borough, and to underpin our Housing Strategy.

1. Housing Need

1.1 Housing Register

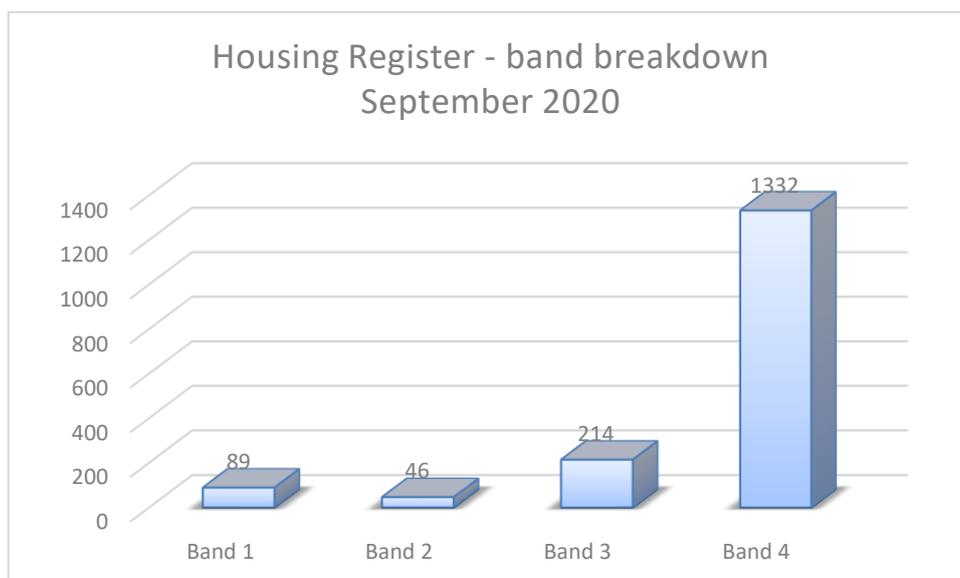
As of the end of September 2020, there were 1,681 households on the council's housing register for social housing in the borough. This is a significant increase from the same time last year, when 1,493 households were on the register. The graph below shows that the majority of households on the register are in need of one and two bedroom properties.

Figure 1: Breakdown of the housing register in Wokingham Borough by bedroom need (September 2020).



In relation to the Bands applicant were placed in, from Band 1 to Band 4, with Band 1 being the highest priority and Band 4 the lowest, the vast majority of those on the register are in Band 4 as shown in the graph below:

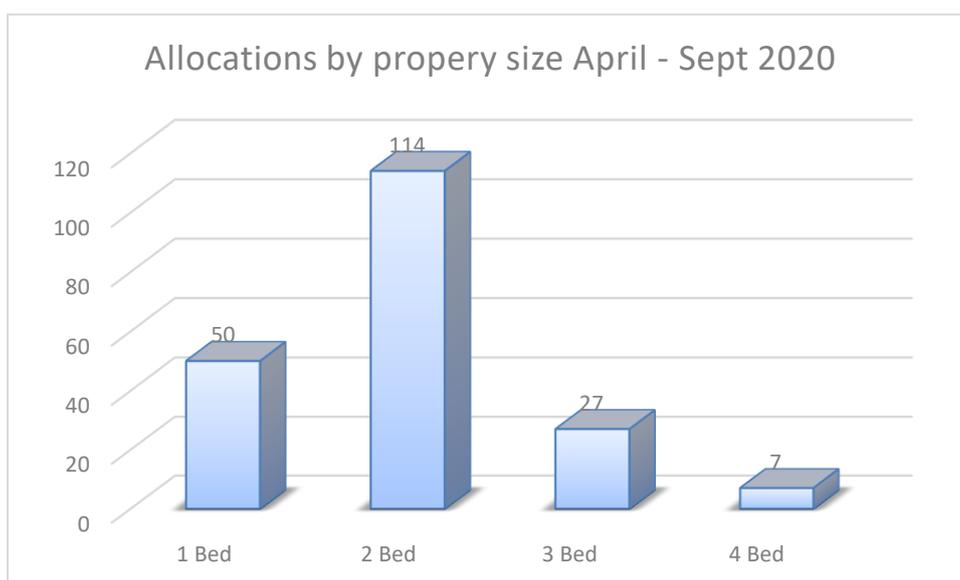
Figure 2: Breakdown of the housing register in Wokingham Borough by band (September 2020).



1.2 Allocations

Between April 2020 and September 2020, 198 allocations were completed, slightly fewer than the same time last year when 212 allocations were completed. Of these allocations, the highest proportion were for two bedroom properties, as shown in the graph below:

Figure 3: Allocations by property size April 2020 to September 2020.

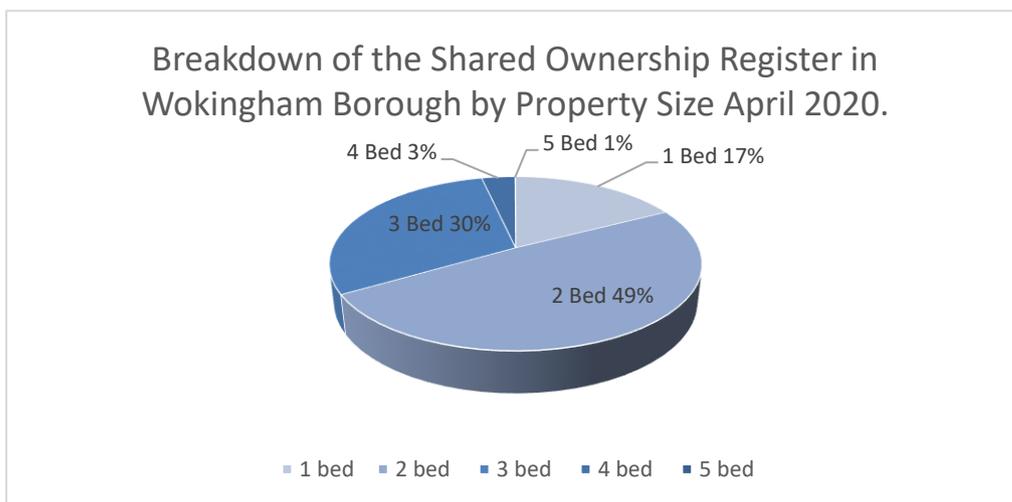


1.3 Shared Ownership Register

Applicants on the shared ownership register have a different level of need to the council's housing register; however applicants need to meet eligibility criteria including a cap on total household income of less than £80,000. Priority is given to existing social tenants and those with a local

connection. In April 2020, there were 1595 households who had registered their interest in a shared ownership property within Wokingham Borough, of these 629 currently live in the local area. Of the 1595 households currently on the register, just under half (49%) have requested 2 bed accommodation. Updated figures are not yet available. A breakdown of need by bedroom size is shown in the graph below.

Figure 4: Breakdown of the shared ownership register in Wokingham Borough by property size April 2020.

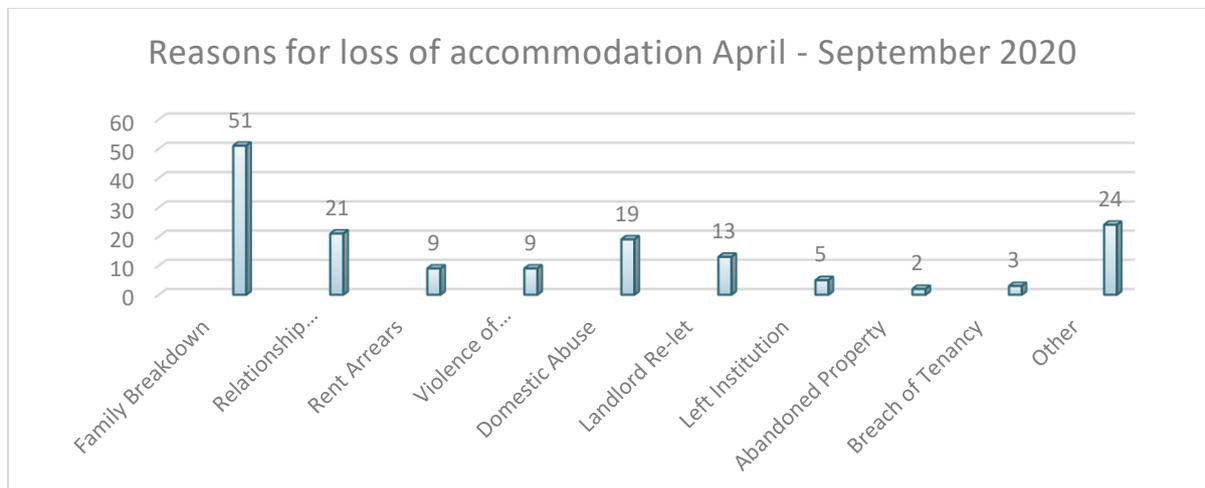


1.3 Homelessness Presentations

Between April 2020 and the end of September 2020, the council received 156 homelessness presentations. This is 18 more than the first two quarters of the previous financial year, when 138 presentations were recorded. In the 2019/20 financial year, there were 252 presentations in total. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic was one of the main factors for the increase in presentations. We expect the number of presentations this year to be higher than the previous financial year.

The graph below shows the main reasons why applicants have presented themselves as homeless between April 2020 and September 2020. Family or friends no longer being able to accommodate them is the biggest reason, as shown in the graphs below.

Figure 5: Reason for loss of previous accommodation April to September 2020.

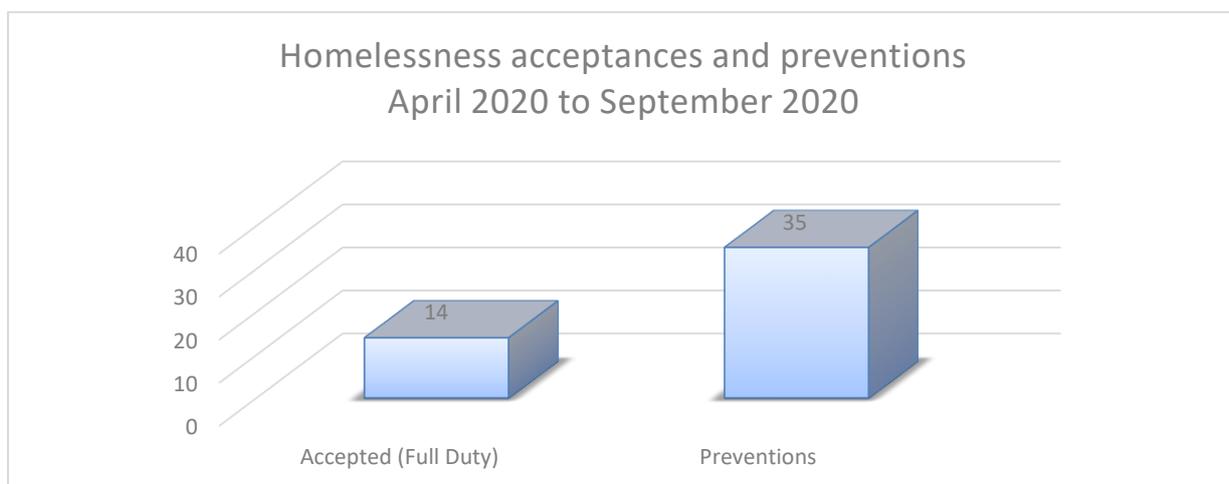


1.5 Homelessness Acceptances and Preventions

There were 14 homelessness acceptances in the first two quarters of the 2020/21 financial year, a decrease from the same time last year when 42 were accepted. There are still a high number of cases going through the required processes and we would expect to see a rise in the number of full acceptances in the next quarter.

The number of preventions in the first and second quarter of the 20/21 financial year was 35, a slight increase on from the same time last year when 33 preventions were recorded. The graph below shows the number of homelessness acceptances and preventions from April 2020 to September 2020:

Figure 6: Homelessness acceptances and preventions April 2020 to September 2020.



2. Affordable Housing Supply

The charts below show how many new affordable homes have been completed through our partnership with Registered Providers. During 2019/20, we had 465 completions, which consisted of 217 social rented properties, 220 shared ownership and 28 intermediate/affordable rent. We are anticipating over 300 completions in 2020/21, although we are anticipating some slippage with the economic uncertainty following Covid-19. There were 92 affordable homes completed during quarters 1 & 2 of 2020/21, which consisted of 40 social rented properties and 52 shared ownership properties.

Figure 7: Affordable housing completions 2009/10 – 2020/21.

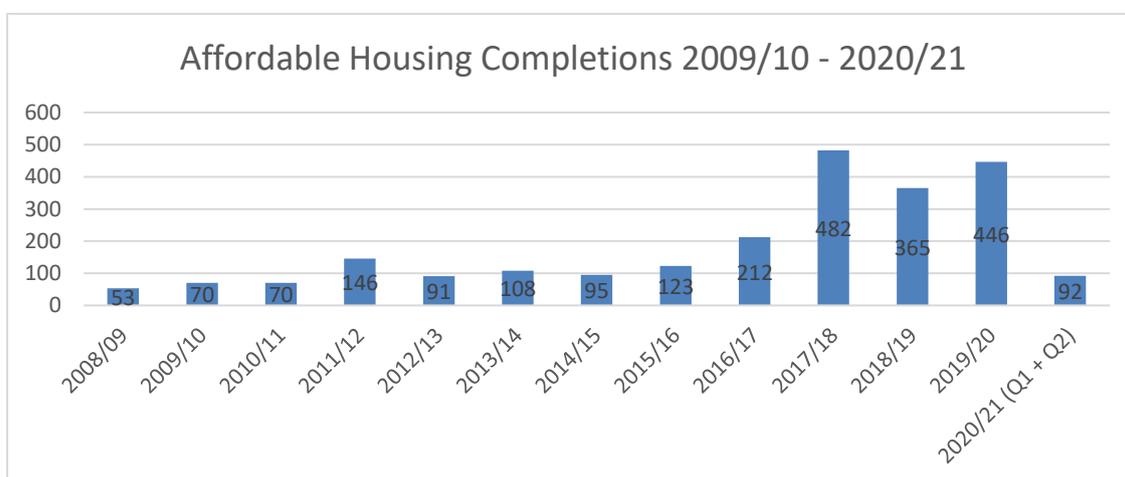


Figure 8: Affordable housing completions by tenure April 2020 to September 2020.



The Wokingham Equity Loan Scheme was launched in October 2010; the scheme enabled applicants to purchase a property on the open market with additional financial assistance in the form of an equity loan, jointly funded by the Council and Catalyst Housing Group. A maximum loan of £50,000 was available to applicants. The scheme has now closed, but overall the scheme assisted 22 households into home ownership. Eighteen of the loans have now been redeemed. All have made a small profit, which is being recycled into funds for affordable housing. We would like to run the scheme again in the future subject to funding.

3. Buying a Home

3.1 House Prices

National

The government has extended the Help to Buy equity loan deadline for new homes to be finished from the end of December to February 28th. The government has introduced a Stamp Duty Holiday, which will see reduced rates of Stamp Duty Land Tax (SDLT) applied for residential properties purchased from 8 July 2020 until 31 March 2021 inclusive. This only applies to properties valued up to £500,000.

Rightmove's Housing Price Index for September 2020 states that the price of property coming to market was up 0.2% in September, just £269 below the record set in July 2020:

- Second-stepper sector of three-or four-bedroom homes hits new record of £291,618, as more buyers seek larger homes.
- Northern regions strongest for price jumps, with Yorkshire & the Humber, East Midlands, West Midlands, North East, North West and Scotland all at new records
- Sales agreed compared to this time last year stronger for larger homes –more than doubling in the largest 'top of the ladder' homes sector (+104%), and growing strongly in the second-stepper sector (+55%)
- National sales agreed for the whole year to date are down just 5% on the same period in 2019, with East of England (+4%) and South East (+1%) already ahead, while Scotland (-21%) and Wales (-16%) still lag behind due to their later reopening
- Rightmove estimates that there are nearly 40% more sales currently going through the buying and selling process compared to this time last year, leading to congestion of sales in progress.

The up-sizing trend has continued at pace over the past month, leading to record asking prices for three – four bedroom houses. This price record has been fuelled by buyers looking for more space, including both those who need extra space for their families and those looking for room to work from home. Overall prices have remained steady since they hit a record in July.

Nationally, sales agreed for the whole year to date are now down by only 5% on the same period last year. Two regions –the East of England (+4%) and the South East (+1%) –have already overtaken the number of sales agreed for the same period last year, helped by higher average prices causing the stamp duty holiday to have more of an impact for buyers and sellers in these areas.

In London, sales agreed for the year to date are down by just 3%, with a two-speed market in play. There is strong sales activity in Outer London, especially for top-of-the-ladder homes, while areas like Zone 1 are finding it more challenging, where sales are down by 14% for the whole year to date compared to the same period last year.

Savills have reported that house prices rose by 2.3% in August, the strongest single month of growth since February 2004. Single monthly growth should be viewed with caution, however this brings annual growth for 2020 to 3.7%, which is the fastest growth in over three years.

Growth over the past two months more than reverses the price falls seen earlier in the summer. The supply/demand mismatch has increased competition in the mainstream market, supporting the current value growth. The stamp duty holiday has also contributed to greater buyer demand.

Data shows that there were 50% more sales agreed subject to contract in the first week of September than the same time in 2019. The market has been boosted by pent-up demand until now, but it seems this demand is starting to return to normal.

Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) continue to point to a strong upturn in activity across the market, as indicators on enquiries, agreed sales and new listings all remain strongly positive. Nevertheless, respondents still foresee sales weakening further ahead amid the challenging macro-economic environment, evidenced by the twelve-month expectations series moving deeper into negative territory in the latest returns.

For the fourth consecutive month there has been an increase in new buyer enquires, new instructions, agreed sales and house prices. The rate of growth has slightly slowed however the near term outlook still looks positive with the upturn in sales expected to continue for the next three months.

The longer term view is still one that will see a slow down across the market in line with the end of the stamp duty holiday, job losses and the end of the furlough scheme.

In the lettings market, tenant demand reportedly rose for the fourth month in succession (non seasonally adjusted monthly series). That said, while respondents saw a pick-up in tenant demand across all parts of the UK last month, London now stands out as the only area in which a negative trend in tenant demand was cited in September.

Local

Latest available data from HM Land Registry shows that average price of a house (regardless of type or size) in June 2020 was £429,389. This is an increase of £27,641 (6.88%) from June 2019 when the average price was £401,748.

The average price paid for a house in Wokingham is significantly higher than the national average across England. The average for Wokingham in June 2020 was £429,389 compared against the average price in England, which was £254,423. This is an increase of 68.76% against the national average.

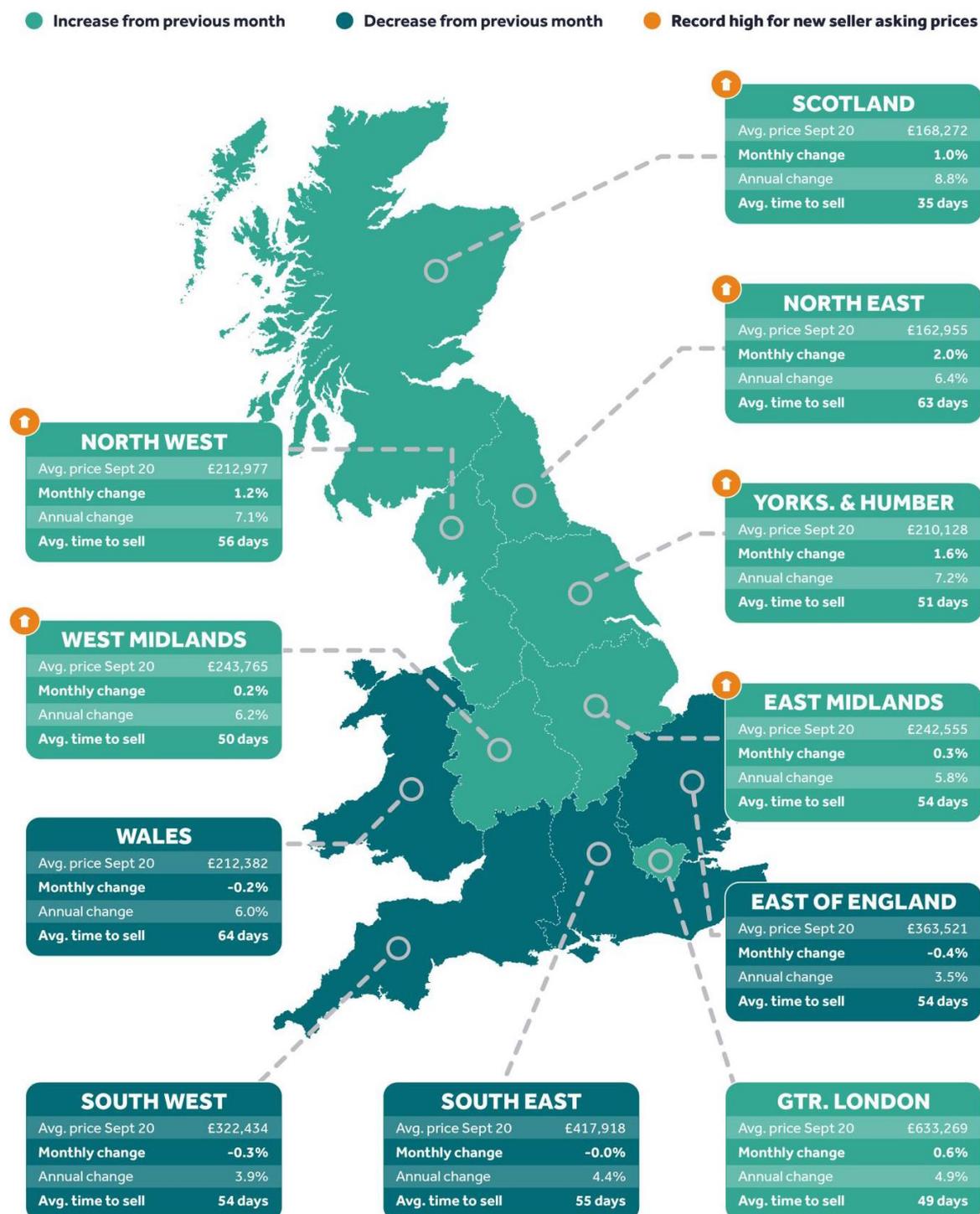
The table below shows the average asking prices for different property types since July 2016 in Wokingham Borough.

Table 1: Average asking prices in Wokingham Borough July 2016 – June 2020.

Month	Average price All property types	Average price Detached houses	Average price Semi-detached houses	Average price Terraced houses	Average price Flats and maisonettes
July 2016	£421,143	£627,274	£399,208	£315,401	£231,786
Jan 2017	£418,666	£626,513	£394,637	£311,217	£232,237
July 2017	£416,838	£621,954	£393,886	£309,259	£232,577
Jan 2018	£421,910	£630,923	£399,809	£312,388	£233,520
July 2018	£413,433	£620,235	£390,261	£306,780	£228,105
Jan 2019	£399,842	£601,993	£378,401	£295,430	£218,993
Feb 2019	£404,665	£608,508	£383,204	£298,804	£222,113
Mar 2019	£402,724	£605,585	£381,608	£297,806	£220,283
Apr 2019	£408,101	£612,392	£387,050	£302,971	£222,866
May 2019	£403,165	£604,657	£382,822	£300,130	£219,319
Jun 2019	£408,287	£612,329	£387,864	£303,952	£221,941
Jul 2019	£413,723	£621,270	£393,115	£307,755	£224,437
Aug 2019	£416,612	£627,204	£396,207	£310,106	£224,375
Jan 2020	£406,721	£611,883	£388,786	£302,505	£217,765
Jun 2020	£429,389	£636,778	£402,328	£313,592	£225,126

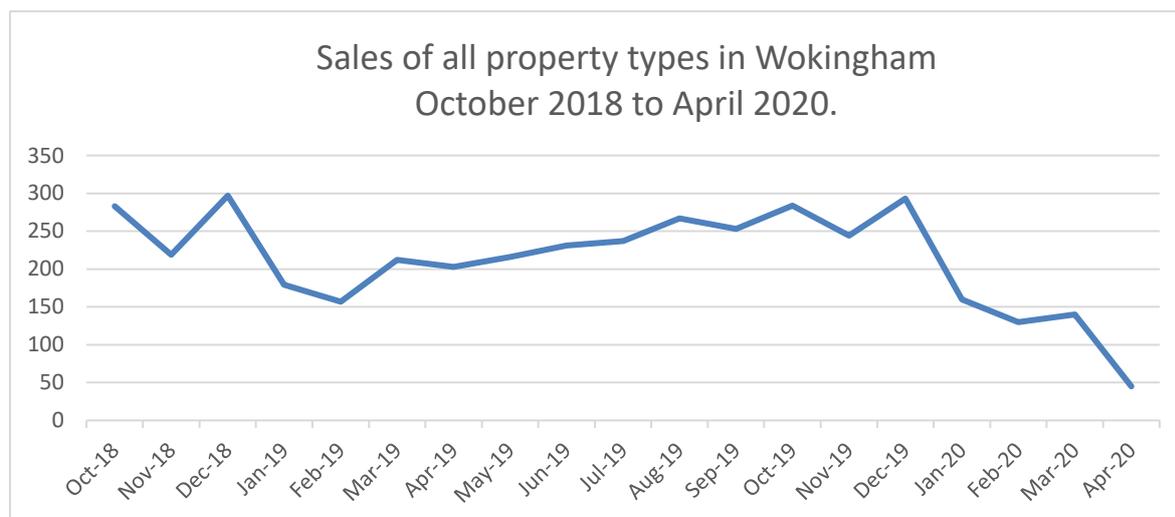
According to Rightmove, as of September 2020, the South East had the second highest average price paid for a home within the United Kingdom. The average price in the South East is £417,918, which is only second behind the prices seen in London. There was no increase or decrease in average price between August and September 2020. However, this is a 0.2% decrease from July 2020. The South East housing market appears to have plateaued.

Figure 9: Map showing regional change in housing market



Property sales within Wokingham have been in decline from December 2018 where a high of 297 sales were recorded by the Land Registry. Sales figures dropped as low as 157 in February 2019, which can be closely linked to the political uncertainty at the time surrounding Brexit. The last record of sales at April 2020 saw 45 sales within the area; this very low figure can be linked to the initial impacts of Covid-19.

Figure 10: Sales of all property types in Wokingham October 2018 to April 2020



Construction workers were encouraged to return to work in May 2020 and sites across the borough are now fully operational. The short term strength of the housing market will give house builders confidence in building out sites, however a number of house builders within the borough have noted that they have experienced a 3 – 4 month delay to their construction programme following the lockdown earlier in the year. Even though sites are now fully operational again, it can be expected that the previous projected delivery rates across sites within the borough will not be achieved in the current year.

Within the RICS August 2020 UK Residential Market Survey, a number of contributors within the surrounding areas have given a short commentary on their view of the current housing market. Even though there is no commentary for Wokingham itself, it is interesting nonetheless to understand how surrounding areas are responding to the current situation:

Tim Green, MRICS, South Oxfordshire, Green & Co. (Oxford) Ltd., tim.green@greenand.co.uk - *The initial resurgence soon caught up, maybe as a result of summer holidays now being taken. Everyone hoping for a positive September.*

Perry Stock, Fellow, Nr Leatherhead, Perry Stock FRICS, perry@perrystock.co.uk - *A tidal flow from Urban to Suburban and rural locations.*

A Bro Tremellen, MRICS, Southampton, Chris Tremellen, chris.tremellen@outlook.com - *Very active market with prices rising.*

Tony Jamieson, MRICS, Guildford, Clarke Gammon Wellers, tony.jamieson@clarkegammon.co.uk - *Market still very active with the correctly priced properties getting multiple interest.*

Paul Lynch, AssocRICS, Guildford, Romans, plynch@romans.co.uk - *Smaller 1 and 2 bedroom flats/apartments struggling as demand from investors and first time buyers dwindling. Mid/upper market family homes ranging from £500k - £900k performing well and achieving close to or at asking prices.*

Matt Ward, Reading, mattward@haslams.co.uk - *Pent-up demand, lifestyle change and stamp duty holiday.*

3.2 Help to Buy

The Help to Buy mortgage guarantee scheme helps people buy a newly built home or an existing property with a deposit of only 5% of the purchase price. Up to 20% of the purchase price is available to the buyer through an equity loan (the maximum loan outside London is £120,000). The scheme closed for new applicants in December 2016, however the equity loan and Help to Buy ISA are still running. The loans are available on new and existing houses with a value of up to £600,000. The scheme is not available for those wishing to purchase a second home or buy-to-let property and only repayment mortgages are offered under the scheme. The guarantee protects the lender rather than the borrower against losses. Borrowers remain fully responsible for their mortgage payments and any shortfall in the normal way.

The first phase of Help to Buy was launched in April 2013, but only provided help to first-time buyers buying new-build homes. The extended scheme introduced in October 2013 applied to all buyers and all types of homes, up to a value of £600,000. The table below shows Help to Buy sales in Wokingham Borough from January 2014 to September 2020.

Table 2: Help to Buy sales in Wokingham Borough January 2014 to September 2020.

Scheme	Developer	Number of 'Help to Buy' properties sold
Montague Park, Wokingham	David Wilson	39
Montague Park, Wokingham	Barrett	65
Foundry Court, Wokingham	Bellway	6
44 Finchampstead Road, Wokingham	First Alliance Properties	5
Sibley Park, Earley	Charles Church	29
Mulberry Grove, Wokingham	Crest Nicholson	31
Loddon Park, Woodley	Taylor Wimpey	70
Ladbroke Mews, Woodley	Hicks	1
Arborfield Garrison site	Crest Nicholson	1
Market Place Mews, Wokingham	Kirkby Homes	1
Shinfield Meadows, Shinfield	Bovis Homes	3
Shinfield Meadows, Shinfield	Bloor Homes	15
Hatchwood Mill, Winnersh	Bovis Homes	3
Emmbrook Place, Wokingham	Bovis Homes	1
Oakham Park, Crowthorne	Bewley Homes	3
Mulberry Place, Woodley	Antler Homes	2
Eldridge Park, Wokingham	Berkley Homes	2
Barkham Place, Arborfield	Crest Nicholson	1
Brook House, Wokingham	Edgewater (Wokingham) Ltd	3
Copsewood, Wokingham	Linden Homes	3

Shinfield Meadows, Shinfield	Linden Homes	2
Mulberry House, Wokingham	Paradigm	2
Brookers Hill, Shinfield	TA Fisher (Holdings) Ltd	6
Kingsley Park at Arborfield	Redrow	3
Riseley Place, Basingstoke Road	Riseley Holdings	6
Aston Gate, Wargrave	RJ and L Edwards	3
Hillborn, Arborfield Green	Millgate Developments	3
Finchwood Park, Finchampstead	Legal & General	115
Total		424

3.3 Affordability

Open Property Group found that UK property prices in 2020 need to fall by an average of 37%, to make owning a home affordable for a single person earning an average wage. Table 3 below is an illustration of purchaser affordability for property types within the borough.

Table 3: Purchaser affordability by property type in Wokingham Borough September 2020.

Property type	Average selling price in the Borough	Deposit required (assuming 80% mortgage)	Minimal annual income required (assuming 3.5 times annual salary)	Average monthly mortgage payment (assuming 5% interest rate over 25 years)
All	£429,389	£85,879	£98,146	£2,031
Detached	£636,778	£127,356	£145,549	£3,012
Semi-detached	£402,328	£80,466	£91,961	£1,903
Terraced	£313,592	£62,718	£71,678	£1,483
Flat/Maisonette	£225,126	£45,025	£51,457	£1,064

3.4 Mortgage repossessions

The Ministry of Justice publishes quarterly statistics on mortgage possession actions in county courts. However, it is worth noting that the figures do not indicate how many properties have actually been repossessed. Repossessions can occur without a court order being made and not all court orders will result in repossession.

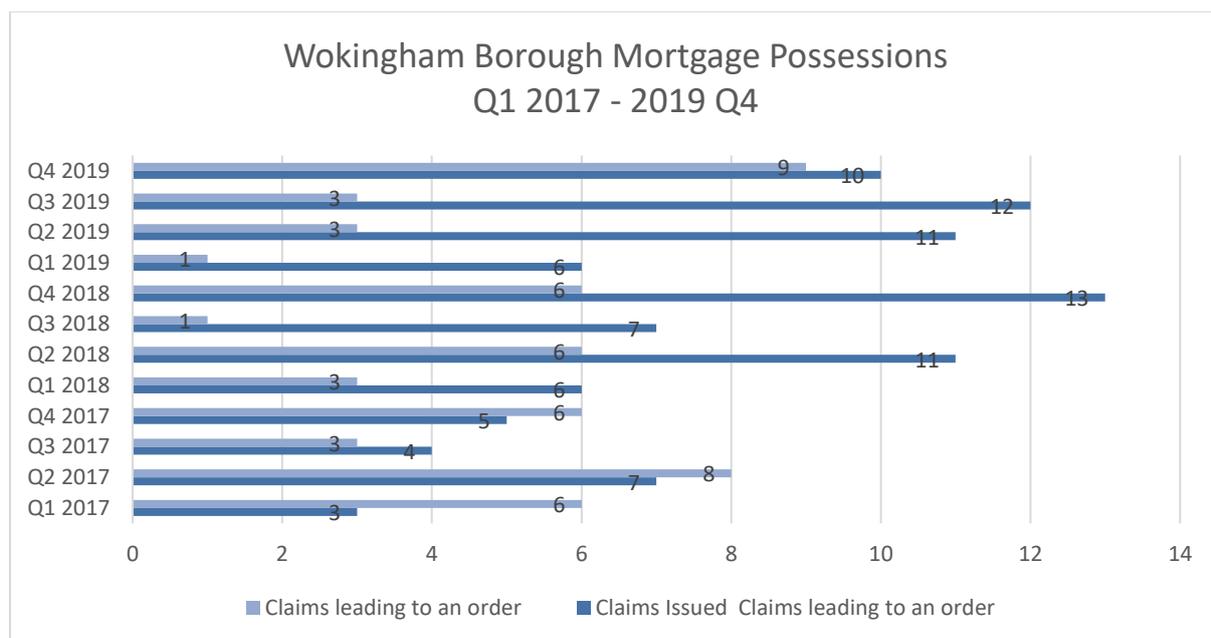
Claims are issued when a claimant (lender) begins an action. The court may grant an order for possession entitling the claimant to apply for a warrant of eviction, but parties are still able to

negotiate to prevent the evictions taking place. The 'orders made' figures also include suspended orders. These are made when the court grants possession, but suspends the order provided the defendant complies with terms, which usually involves payment of the mortgage plus some towards the arrears.

As a result of FCA announcements and the passing of the Coronavirus Act in March 2020, possession actions of all types have dropped to unprecedentedly low levels. As a result, the data is unlikely to be representative of general trends in possession actions. Caution should therefore be used when interpreting and applying these figures. Mortgage claims, orders, warrants and repossessions have decreased significantly. Compared to the same quarter last year, mortgage possession claims, orders and warrants have decreased by 97%, 96% and almost 100% respectively. No repossessions by county court bailiffs have been recorded for this quarter.

The MoJ have not yet updated the data tables for 2020/21 due to capacity issues as a result of Covid-19. In the fourth quarter of 2019, the number of claims issued was 10 and the number of orders was 9. Further detail is shown in Figure 11.

Figure 11: Wokingham Borough mortgage possessions (Quarter 4, 2019).



4. Renting a home privately

The latest HomeLet Rental Index shows that average rents across the UK in September 2020 had risen by 2.1% to £987 compared to September 2019 (an increase of 0.2% on last August 2020). Commenting on this data, Martin Totty Chief Executive at HomeLet said: *“whilst it’s undoubtedly the case many landlords are being supportive of their tenants and agreeing temporary reductions or deferrals, it will be encouraging for them to see rents agreed on new tenancies, in almost all parts of the country, are continuing to hold up and generally edge forward. This is likely because tenant demand remains strong whilst supply may be a little more constrained if some landlords are selling into a stronger sales market, even if that could be a short term phenomenon. It also doesn’t help tenants much if, for them, the prospect of securing first time mortgage finance remains as elusive as ever. So, those landlords*

committed to the sector for the long term and having shown their willingness to confront the multiple headwinds of: taxation change; new regulatory requirements; and, in certain circumstances, longer notice periods to gain possession of their properties, may still be rewarded for their flexibility and their perseverance with reasonable returns on their investment risk.”

Data from Zoopla shows that the average asking rent in Wokingham is £1,021 per calendar month. Table 4 gives a breakdown of asking rents for privately rented homes as of October 2020, together with the applicable Local Housing Allowance (LHA) and the potential shortfall between these figures.

Table 4: Average asking rents in Wokingham Borough October 2020.

Property Type	LHA April 2020 (pcm)	Average Asking Rent (pcm)	Potential Shortfall (pcm)
1 Bed Flat	£795	£744	-
2 Bed Flat	£950	£1,088	£138
2 Bed House	£950	£1,117	£167
3 Bed House	£1,150.01	£1,425	£275
4 Bed House	£1,549.99	£2,249	£700

4.2 Landlord Possession

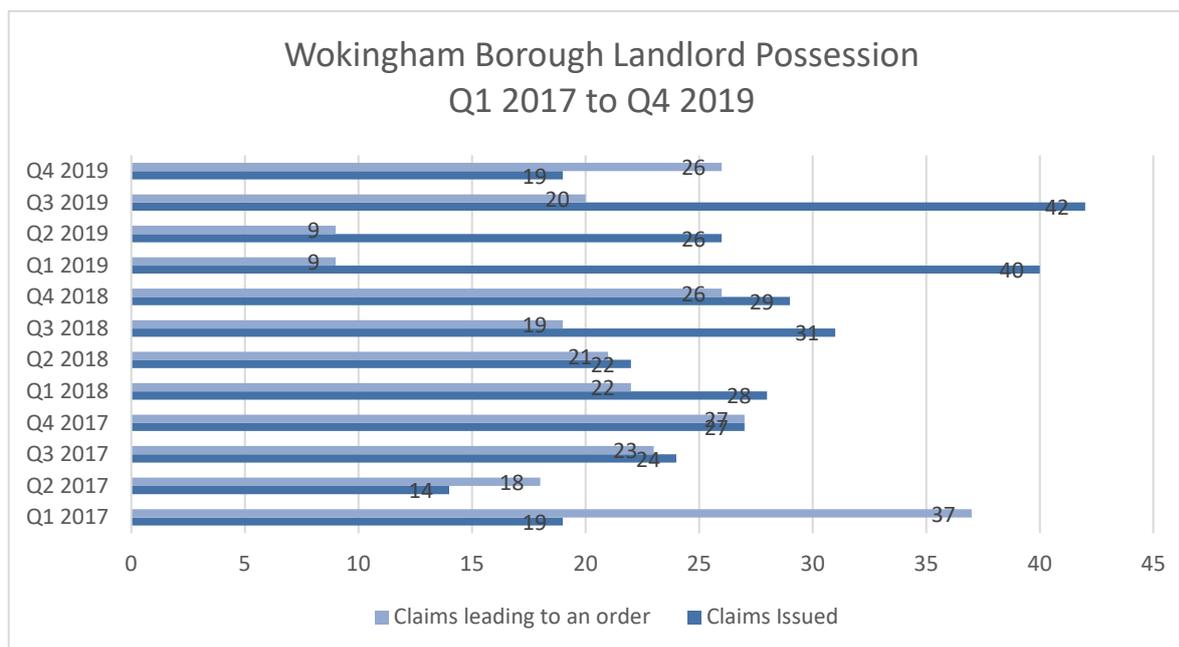
As with mortgage repossessions, the Ministry of Justice publishes quarterly statistics on landlord possession actions in county court. When a claimant (landlord) brings possession proceedings, the order is considered issued. At the subsequent hearing, the court may grant an order for possession entitling the claimant to apply for a warrant of eviction, but the parties are still able to negotiate to prevent the eviction actually taking place.

As a result of FCA announcements and the passing of the Coronavirus Act in March 2020, possession actions of all types have dropped to unprecedentedly low levels. As a result, the data is unlikely to be representative of general trends in possession actions. Caution should therefore be used when interpreting and applying these figures.

Landlord possession claims, orders and warrants decreased by 89%, 97% and 98% respectively (compared to the same quarter last year). No repossessions by county court bailiffs have been recorded for this quarter.

The MoJ have not yet updated the data tables for 2020/21 due to capacity issues because of Covid-19. Figures for suspended possession orders are included in the data for Figure 12. Claims issued decreased in quarter 2 of 2019 on the previous quarter, but claims leading to an order remained the same.

Figure 12: Landlord possessions in Wokingham Borough Quarter 4, 2019.



5. Wokingham Borough Council Housing Management Information

5.1 Welfare Reform

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)

The Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) values stated in this report relate to paid sums between 1st April 2020 and 30th September 2020 in line with Department for Work and Pensions reporting guidelines. The total DHP fund available for the year is £239,158. It is important to note that DHP payments are utilised by both private tenants and local authority tenants.

The DHP spend in detail can be seen in the table below:

Table 5: DHP spend April 2020 to September 2020

Month	UCDHP-PTEN	UCDHP-LAHRA	Total UC pmt	Housing Benefit	Total DHP paid	Cumulative total	Fund Remaining
April	£2,786.31	£1,419.17	£4,205.48	£2,576.74	£6,782.22	£6,782.22	£232,375.78
May	£4,275.20	£5,295.11	£9,570.31	£4,378.74	£13,949.05	£20,731.27	£218,426.73
June	£11,007.46	£4,245.89	£15,253.35	£8,303.82	£23,557.17	£44,288.44	£194,869.56
July	£8,166.47	£3,574.22	£11,740.69	£2,633.74	£14,374.43	£58,662.87	£180,495.13
Aug	£11,215.00	£4,406.11	£15,621.11	£3,674.76	£19,295.87	£77,958.74	£161,199.26
Sept	£7,307.08	£4,075.51	£11,382.59	£5,834.46	£17,217.05	£95,175.79	£143,982.21
Oct							
Nov							
Dec							
Jan							

Feb							
Mar							

*UCDHP-PTEN (Universal Credit DHP payments to private sector tenants)

*UCDHP – LAHRA (Universal Credit DHP payments to Local Authority tenants)

*HB (Housing Benefit DHP payments)

DHP spend has never overspent other than within allowable amounts. Last year we underspent. There is an increase in overall spend but well within profile (£19k pm). There has not been a significant rise in DHP applications during the pandemic, although the award amounts have been larger due to the impact of Covid-19.

Local Welfare Provision (LWP)

In total, the Council has received 26 applications for help via the LWP in this financial year so far, as shown in the table below:

Table 6: LWP applications in 2020/21

Applications Received		Applications Refused	Withdrawn
April	1	0	
May	3	1	
June	3	0	
Jul	4	1	
Aug	3	1	
Sept	4	1	
Oct			
Nov			
Dec			
Jan			
Feb			
Mar			
Total	18		

The amounts paid each month can be seen in the table below:

Table 7: LWP spend in 2020/21.

Amounts paid	
April	£0
May	£399.98
June	£277.96
Jul	£727.63
Aug	£751.96

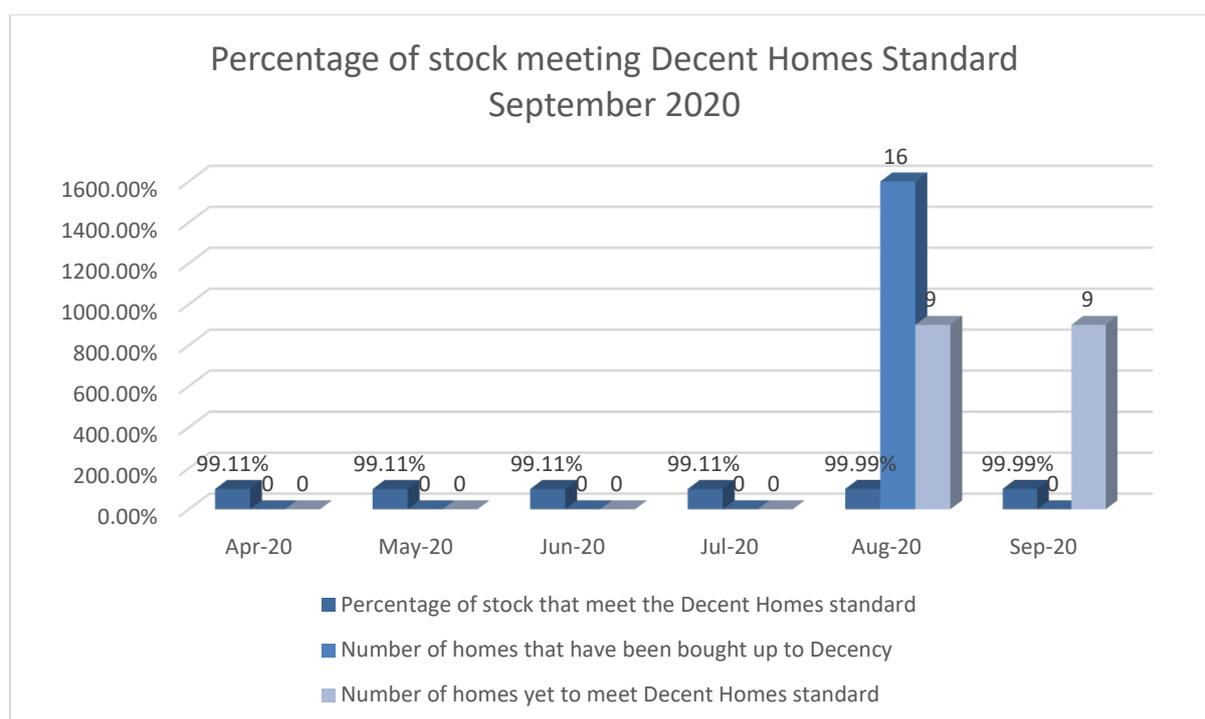
Sept	£1,710.69
Oct	
Nov	
Dec	
Jan	
Feb	
Mar	
Total for year	£3,868.22

LWP spend is always low and has never overspent. There is a slight increase in spend overall in 20/21 but well with the monthly profile (approx. £1.9k pm). There has not been a sharp rise in claims to LWP during COVID and this is mainly due to the number of other forms of support that have been made available to our residents, either from DWP, utility companies or other responses from WBC.

5.2 Decent Homes

At the end of September 2020, the percentage of stock that meets the Decent Homes Standard remained at 99.99% (9 homes, a reduction from 25 at the beginning of the year):

Figure 13: Percentage of stock meeting Decent Homes Standard September 2020.



At the beginning of the financial year, our reporting system indicated 25 properties fell out of the Decent Homes Standard. By the end of the second quarter all 25 properties were inspected by the teams surveyors and 16 of the 25 properties did not fail the standard, meaning there are 9 properties that are yet to meet the standard. It is anticipated that these 9 properties will have works completed by the end of the calendar year, although this is dependent on covid restrictions.

5.3 Voids

The average re-let time for a void (empty) property in the first two quarters of the 2020/21 financial year was 39 days, 9 days higher than the target set of 30 days. Please note that this re-let time does not include exception properties. Typically, a high number of nominations and refusals are the main reason for exception properties. Exception properties are long-term lets and are defined by:

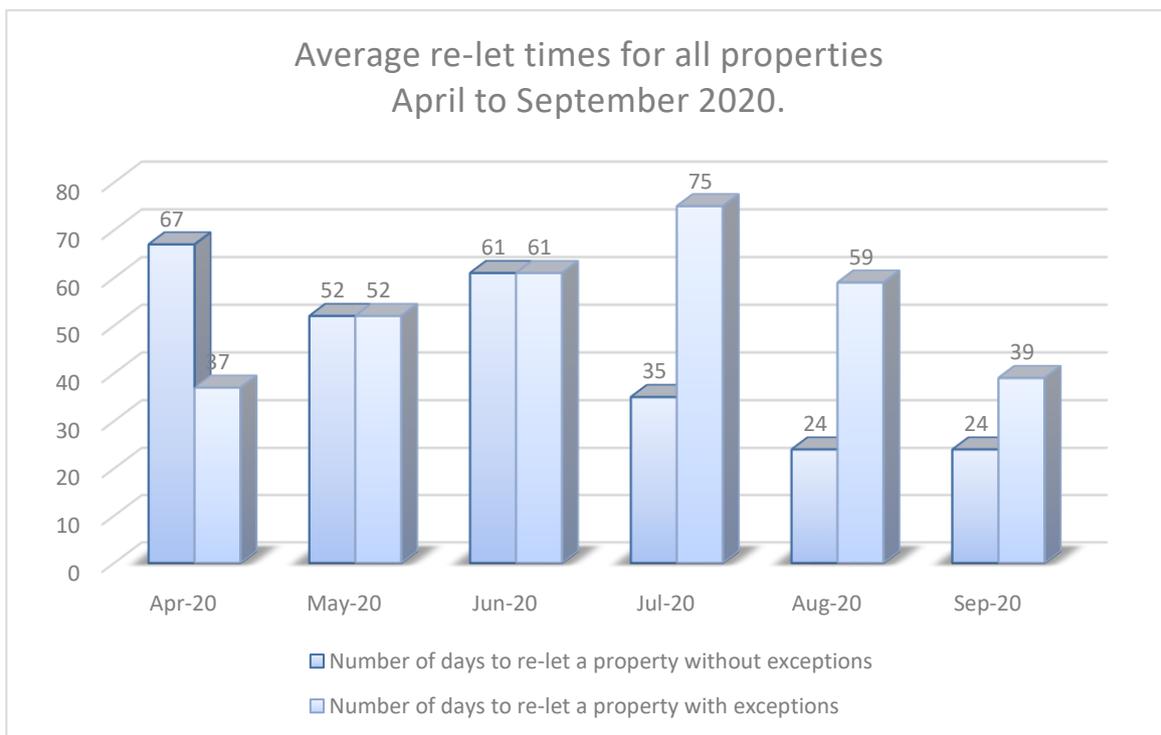
- A re-let that had more than three nominations to the property (meaning three refusals).
- A property has been put on hold from another team. For example, the Housing Needs Team may ask for a property to be put on hold as it may be suitable for a vulnerable nominee.

If including exception properties, the average re-let times for properties was 59 days.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the service had a lot of exception properties. A high number of properties that were available for letting were put on hold to ensure tenant, staff and contractor safety and whilst the voids team amended processes to enable the letting of properties safely and within government guidelines.

The average re-let times for all properties can be seen in the graph below:

Figure 14: Average re-let times for all properties April to September 2020.



The graph below highlights the number of properties re-let and the number accepted on the first offer.

Figure 15: Number of properties re-let and the number accepted on first offer April to September 2020.

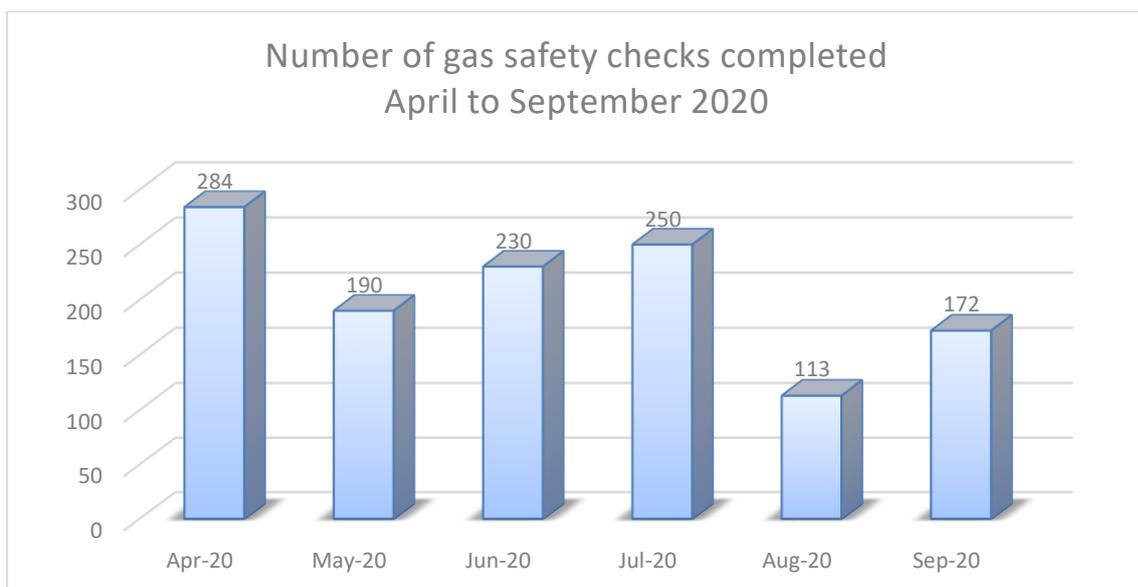


As shown above, 88% of properties re-let were accepted on the first offer. This high percentage of accepted properties are a factor in ensuring re-let times were within target.

5.4 Gas Servicing

We completed 1,239 gas services between April 2020 and September 2020. The graph below shows the number of gas services completed in this financial year so far:

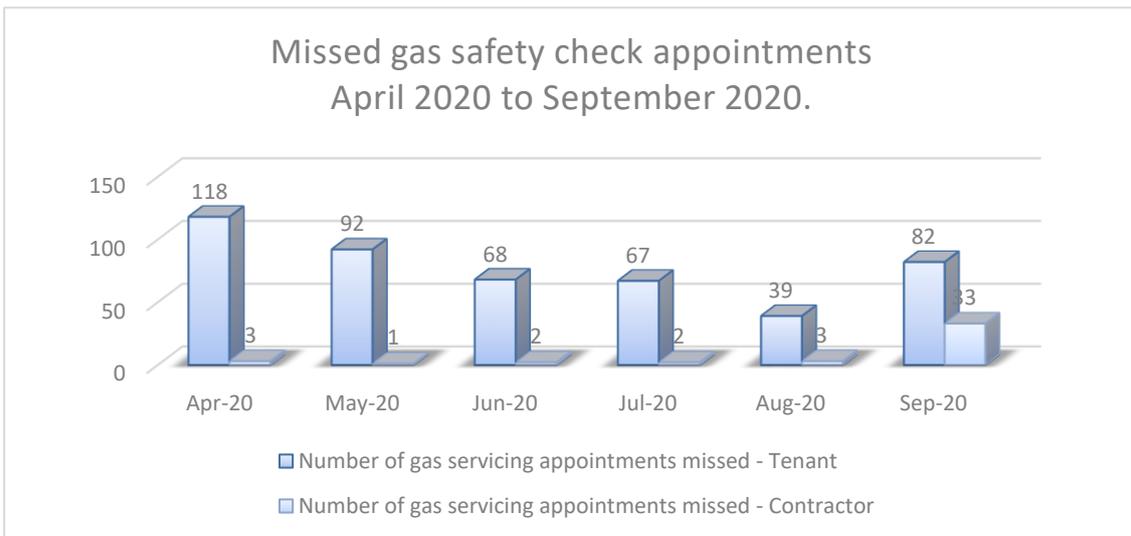
Figure 16: Number of gas safety checks completed April to September 2020.



The service has achieved a 100% compliance rate throughout the year so far. In the last three years, the service has achieved a 100% compliance rate except for one month when the service had a difficult case to resolve.

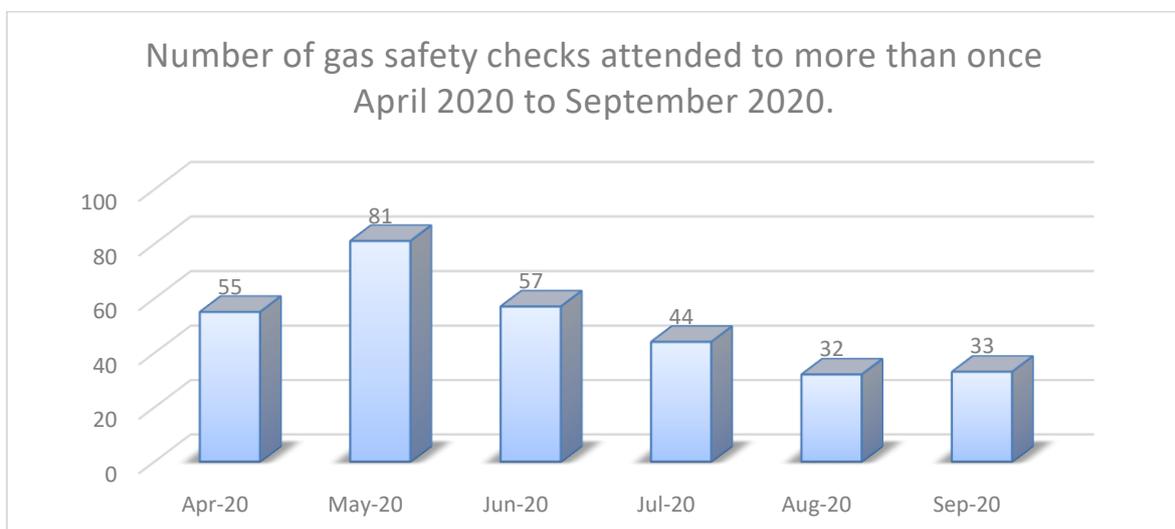
One issue that has continued in this financial year from the last, is the number of missed appointments. In this financial year so far, there have been 510 missed appointments. Looking at the historical data, there appears to be a correlation with the number of gas services and missed appointments; the higher the number of safety checks, the more missed appointments:

Figure 17: Missed gas safety check appointments April 2020 to September 2020.



Efforts have been made to reduce the number of missed appointments, including advice in Housing Matters and the latest Annual Report also provides similar advice. By the end of the second quarter of this year there were 302 occasions when a property had to be attended more than once, as highlighted below:

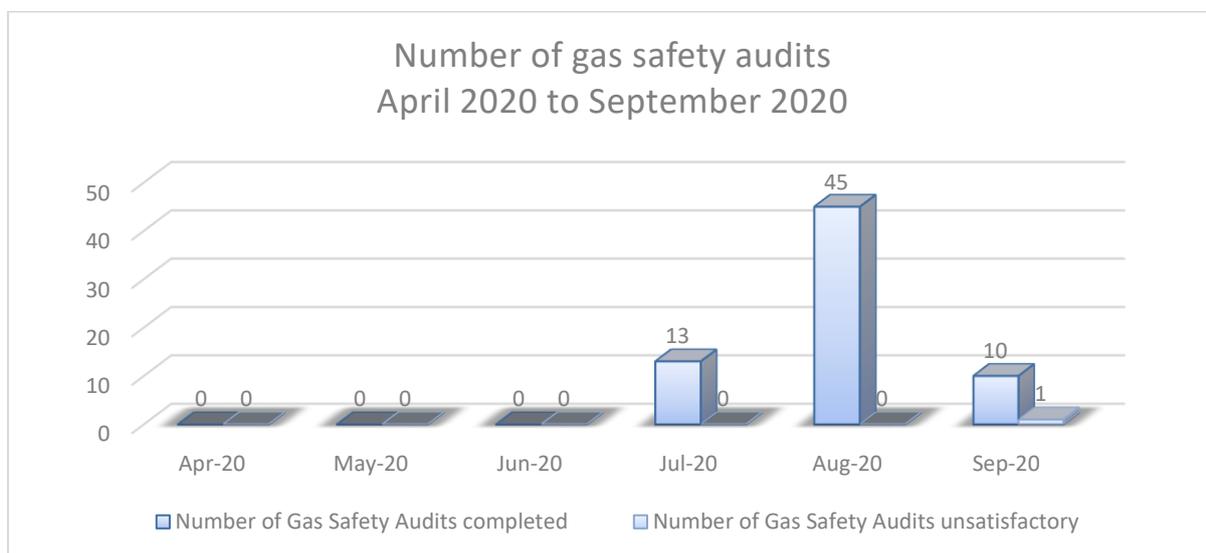
Figure 18: Number of gas safety checks attended to more than once April 2020 to September 2020.



In each month of the quarter there were instances of tenants being visited four or more times before the contractor was able to gain access. Please note this figure does not include cold calls made by the contractor. As cold calls are not official appointments made by the service they are not recorded as a missed appointment. It is important to note that the gas engineers contracted by the service do not receive payment if a service is not completed, so any missed appointments do not cost the service any additional fees. In light of the high number of missed appointments, it is still very positive to see a 100% compliance rate so far in this financial year.

Throughout the first quarter of the financial year, gas safety audits were not being undertaken due to restrictions around Covid 19 and ensuring tenant and contractor safety. Audits resumed in the second quarter of the year, when 68 audits were completed. August saw 45 audits undertaken due to the backlog of the first quarter:

Figure 19: Number of gas safety audits April 2020 to September 2020.



As shown above, there was one audit failed in September 2020. However, this was due to an issue with the LGSR (the gas safety certificate) being completed incorrectly and did not constitute a health and safety risk at the property in question.

6. Private Sector Housing

6.1 Housing Related Service Requests

A total of 846 housing related service requests were received from April 2020 to September 2020 by the Public Protection Partnership. These are broken down by complaint type in Table 8 overleaf.

Table 8: Housing related service requests by complaint April to September 2020.

Type of Complaint	Number of Complaints
Drainage	16
Accumulations	45
Bonfire/Smoke	248
Filthy & Verminous	2
Immigration Inspections	1
Empty Properties	6
Pest Related	107
Noise	262
Asbestos	7
Light	8
Animal Advice	7
Other	137

A total of 43 complaints were received specifically related to poor housing condition between April 2020 and September 2020. A breakdown of the tenure type of complainants is below in Table 9.

Table 9: Housing related service requests by tenure April to September 2020.

Type of Tenure	Number of Complaints
Owner Occupied	7
Private Rented	28
LA	1
Housing Association	0
Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO)	3
Mobile Home	4

6.2 Formal Action Taken Under the Housing Act 2004 & Associated Legislation

No housing improvement notices were served between April 2020 and September 2020.

6.3 House in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Mandatory Licensing

A total of 110 HMO applications were received during this period. 12 are being processed, 61 have been issued, 17 are pending issue, 1 refused, 3 new applications yet to be processed, 8 subsequently withdrawn, 2 licenses revoked, 4 out for consultation and 2 licences have been superseded.

6.4 Housing General

6.4.1 Landlord Accreditation

This scheme is currently suspended.

6.4.2 Park Homes and Caravan Sites

As at September 2020, there were 56 site licences in place.

6.4.3 Immigration Inspections

One immigration inspection was completed during this period.

6.5 Flexible Home Improvement Loan Scheme

Between April 2020 and September 2020, six enquiries were received.

Contributions provided by:

Section 1 Housing Needs – Baljinder Reyatt, Policy and Performance Specialist.

Section 2 Affordable Housing Supply – Frances Haywood, Senior Strategy Officer.

Section 3 Buying a Home – Victoria Higgins, Housing Policy Officer and Simon Taylor, Specialist Planning Monitoring Officer.

Section 4 Renting a Home Privately – Victoria Higgins, Housing Policy Officer.

Section 5 Housing Management Information – Baljinder Reyatt, Policy and Performance Specialist.

Section 6 Private Sector Housing – George Lawrence – Strategic Manager PPP.

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TITLE	Draft Leisure Strategy
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 25 th March 2021
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Environment and Leisure - Parry Batth

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

The report seeks approval for a new draft leisure strategy and to consult extensively with residents and stakeholders.

The Council's current strategy requires updating and broadening to incorporate the extensive provision for informal physical activity as well as sports. The strategy has the potential over time to significantly enhance the leisure offer in the Borough to the benefit of the vast majority of residents, improving quality of life and enhancing well-being. The strategy is closely aligned with the principles and priorities of key national agencies such as Sport England (SE) and Public Health England (PHE) and has the potential to leverage external funding. The strategy is potentially a key strand for delivering the Council's priority for Enriching Lives but it also contributes to the other priorities of: a Clean and Green Borough; Safe, Strong Communities; and Keeping the Borough Moving. At a time of enormous challenge to the health and well-being of us all, the strategy makes an important contribution to planning for recovery and to maintaining the Borough's reputation and Community Vision: for Wokingham Borough to be a great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive:

- 1) endorses the principles and content of the draft Leisure Strategy;
- 2) approves the draft Strategy for consultation with residents and stakeholders;
- 3) agrees to consider the results of the consultation and any resulting changes to the draft Strategy at a future meeting of the Executive;
- 4) notes that an initial Action Plan for implementing the Strategy will be presented alongside the consultation feedback to the Executive.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the context of a growing population and the Borough's reputation as an excellent place to live with a high quality of life, the quality of the leisure offer can play a significant role in enhancing well-being and enriching the lives of residents. An up to date strategy that aligns with both national imperatives and local priorities is extremely useful in shaping future provision, co-ordinating and aligning activity across a range of partners and stakeholders and for maximising the impact of collective resources.

The strategy builds on and will help realise the benefits of the Council's recent and ongoing transformational programme of new and improved facilities with over £50m invested or committed.

There has been a growing demand to enhance and improve access to the Borough's leisure offer with the benefits of physical activity to well-being thrown into stark relief by the impacts of the COVID pandemic, particularly with regard to more informal activity and use of outdoor spaces. The Borough's current Leisure Strategy focused on sports provision and in particular the Council's own leisure services in the, then, context of planning to contract out the management of leisure facilities to secure high quality and cost-effective provision. Now this process has been completed the Borough's contracted leisure provider is of course a key partner, particularly given the significant recent investment in new and improved leisure facilities, but this new draft strategy broadens its scope to incorporate the many opportunities provided by the extensive and growing network of high quality open-spaces. Embracing country parks, new 'greenways' linking our strategic development locations, children's play and encouraging active travel.

Effective delivery of the leisure strategy will be dependent on the actions and resources of a wide range of agencies, partners and stakeholders, including our residents. Extensive consultation and engagement is proposed as a means of further developing the strategy and related action plan, fostering positive relationships and joint working into the future through a new 'Active Wokingham' partnership. It is the intention to conduct this consultation exercise from April through to the end of June with the hope that by then the impact of the pandemic on our daily lives will have reduced and enable a face to face component of the consultation.

BACKGROUND

The Leisure Strategy is set firmly within our overarching community vision: 'A great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business.' Physical activity and sports play a fundamental role in supporting the well-being of the Borough's people and communities as is also explicitly recognised in the Borough's Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2018 -2021. Furthermore, the very significant health benefits of physical activity are universal, from the very young to the elderly: helping to raise achievement in schools, enabling self-care for those with long-term conditions and helping to prevent mental and physical illness across all age-groups. This is why increasing levels of participation in sports and active leisure pursuits, and reducing the numbers of people who are inactive, is so important. The draft strategy therefore reflects key national as well as local priorities:

HM Government Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation

This wide-ranging detailed strategy was launched in December 2015. The Government strategy aims to change the way in which sport and physical activity is considered, shifting from simply how many people take part, to what people and society get out of participating and what more can be done to encourage everyone to have a physically active lifestyle.

Sport England: towards an active nation, strategy 2016-2021

Sport England launched its new five-year national strategy in May 2016. It responds to the Government's Sporting Future strategy and has a stronger focus on reaching those who are least active and helping to deliver the strategy's wider outcomes.

Public Health England (PHE)

PHE have a strong influence on policy and practice nationally with regard to promoting increased levels of physical activity. They also have a strong evidence base of what works and are a key source of data for informing local strategies and priorities.

In their forward to the 2019 update of the physical activity guidelines the Chief Medical Officers re-emphasised the significance of physical activity:

'In 2010, we were among the first nations in the world to set out evidence for how much and what kinds of physical activity we need to do to keep ourselves healthy.'

Since then, the evidence has become more compelling and the message is clear:

"If physical activity were a drug, we would refer to it as a miracle cure, due to the great many illnesses it can prevent and help treat"

Physical activity is not just a health issue. It brings people together to enjoy shared activities and contributes to building strong communities whilst supporting the economy to grow.'

BUSINESS CASE

In the context of a growing population and the Borough's reputation as an excellent place to live with a high quality of life, the quality of the leisure offer can play a significant role in enhancing this reputation, enriching the lives of residents and building thriving

communities. Wokingham Borough performs very well in relation to levels of participation in physical activity compared to other areas of the country and indeed was recently given the accolade of being the healthiest place to live in the country (Health Index for England, Office for National Statistics 2021).

Nevertheless the numbers of residents across all age-groups who are overweight or obese has been increasing and the strategy aims to contribute to halting and then reversing this trend. An up to date strategy that aligns with both national imperatives and local priorities is extremely useful in shaping future provision, extending reach to more vulnerable cohorts and communities, co-ordinating and aligning activity across a range of stakeholders and for generating and maximising the impact of collective resources.

The strategy builds on and will help realise the benefits of the Council's recent and ongoing transformational programme of new and improved facilities with over £50m invested or committed, including:

- Bulmershe Leisure Centre (completed)	£14.5m
- Ryeish Green & Arborfield leisure facilities (completed)	£ 4.9m
- Parking and toilet facilities California Country Park (completed)	£ 2.1m
- Loddon Valley Leisure Centre (completed)	£2.0m
- Embrook 3G Football Pitch (completed)	£800,000
- Cantley Park 'Greenway' enhancements (completed)	£320,000
- Carnival Pool Leisure Centre (underway)	£23m
- Cantley Park Enhancements (underway)	£ 2.2m
- Dinton Pastures Country Park activities centre (underway)	£ 1.8m
- Arborfield Primary School 3G Football Pitch (underway)	£800,000

Physical activities are universal in their ability to contribute to well-being and impact on all residents across all age-groups. In addition they can support better outcomes for more vulnerable groups, be this tackling social isolation, improving health and well-being or educational attainment. The priorities in the strategy reflect both these universal and targeted strands of activity. The strategy has also been broadened to encompass more informal or 'non-sports' forms of physical activity that, in particular, are facilitated by the Borough's extensive network of high quality open-spaces and 'greenways', including 'active travel' initiatives that have strong links to our response to the Climate Emergency. Unsurprisingly the strategy therefore links to a range of the Council's key priorities and has touch points with a large number of Council services.

In order to effectively implement the strategy there is a need to reach out to and engage a wide range of stakeholders, operating within a complex ecosystem of delivery partners that will ultimately be pivotal to success. The strategy therefore also proposes the development of an 'Active Wokingham' partnership to further develop annual Action Plans as a vehicle for the implementation of the strategy into the future. It is therefore essential that there is an effective consultation and engagement process to ensure that the strategy is fit for purpose, stakeholders can align with and endorse key principles and contribute directly to more detailed plans focused on delivery.

Set within the context of national policy, the draft strategy sets out an ambitious vision, key priorities and desired outcomes, with a more detailed initial action plan to support delivery of the longer-term outcomes to be developed. All these elements will form part of the consultation in order to maximise the input and contribution of stakeholders at both strategic and operational levels. It is proposed that consultation on the strategy will

take place from April through to the end of June with the hope that by then the impact of the pandemic on our daily lives will have reduced and enable a face to face component of the consultation.

It is worth noting that the Council has in parallel developed an Arts & Culture Strategy (also on tonight’s agenda) and that both strategies play a complementary role in ‘enriching lives’, as well as having connections between them, particularly in relation to the shared use of indoor and outdoor leisure venues and country parks, creating animated spaces and some areas of activity, such as dance, contributing to both.

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
Additional capital resources will be sought on an ongoing basis from CIL and through funding bids to agencies such as Sport England and the Football Foundation, as well as elements of other capital funding streams such as housing and transport where applicable.
Revenue costs will be met from existing budgets with a strong focus on commercialisation and income generation to minimise net costs whilst maintaining programmes to increase access for more vulnerable residents.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation
Extensive stakeholder and public consultation on the draft strategy and action plan is planned to take place from April to the end of June. The early focus in April will be on organisational stakeholders with a more proactive public facing consultation in May and June.

Public Sector Equality Duty
Due regard has been taken to the Public Equality Duty and an Equalities Impact Assessment is attached to this report.

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>
In promoting physical activity and the use of outdoor spaces the draft strategy both promotes and integrates with ‘active travel’ initiatives and the enhancement of publically accessible open-space. This contributes to reducing our carbon footprint by reducing

car use, enhancing bio-diversity and tree planting where this enhances the attractiveness of open spaces for public use.

List of Background Papers

None

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2021-2025

Wokingham Borough Leisure Strategy

February 2021

»» Introduction

We established our community vision in 2020 with the ambition for Wokingham Borough to be a great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business. Linked to this overarching vision, physical activity and sports play a fundamental role in supporting the physical and emotional well-being of the Borough's people and communities as is also explicitly recognised in the Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2018 -2021. Furthermore, the very significant health benefits of physical activity are universal, from the very young to the elderly - helping to raise achievement in schools, enabling self-care for those with long-term conditions and helping to prevent mental and physical illness across all age-groups. This is why increasing levels of participation in sports and active leisure pursuits, and reducing the numbers of people who are inactive, is so important.

At the time of writing this importance is heightened by the impacts and challenges of the COVID pandemic and looking forward to Covid-19 Recovery. We know that a range of conditions linked to lack of exercise and excess weight greatly increase the severity of symptoms of the virus. Whilst there are challenges of participating in organised sport, especially team sports, many people are turning to walking, cycling and other outdoor physical activities to maintain levels of fitness and enhance mental as well as physical well-being.

Fortunately the Borough is blessed with a rich mix of assets to provide all our residents and communities with varied opportunities to take-up and enjoy leisure pursuits and be more physically active, including - indoor and outdoor sports facilities; country parks, nature reserves and suitable alternative natural greenspaces (SANGS) all with attractive green and blue spaces; play areas; allotments; and an extensive network of footpaths and cycle routes. The latter and the promotion of 'active travel' are now also forming a key strand in the Council's plans to address the local 'Climate Emergency' declared in July 2019.

These assets need ongoing investment and development to provide high quality leisure environments that our citizens want to use, to drive up levels of participation and to cater for the Borough's growing population and new communities. Leisure infrastructure and accessible opportunities for all, alongside arts and culture, are a key element of supporting a high quality of life for residents, attracting visitors and supporting the attractiveness of the Borough for businesses and sustaining its thriving economy.

This is why the Council, working with a range of partners, has made a step-change in its levels of investment over recent years despite a very challenging funding environment.

Creative use of developer contributions has provided significant levels of capital to invest in these new and improved facilities, with external agencies such as Sport England and the Football Foundation providing additional investment. Alongside this the Council has also procured a new national operator, 'Places Leisure', to run our indoor leisure centres. This competitive procurement has helped drive value for money and the new leisure contract will ensure that not only are the centres maintained to a high standard but also that the Council now has an income stream to reinvest in the future, balancing a more commercial approach to drive income whilst ensuring programmes to provide, encourage and increase access for the more vulnerable continue. The national and local context for the strategy is set out in Appendix 1.



Our Investment in Leisure



COMPLETED

IN PROGRESS

BULMERSHE LEISURE CENTRE

£ 14.5m

PARKING AND TOILET FACILITIES AT CALIFORNIA COUNTRY PARK

£ 2.1m

EMBROOK 3G FOOTBALL PITCH

£ 800k

RYEISH GREEN & ARBRORFIELD LEISURE FACILITIES

£ 4.9m

NETWORK OF "GREENWAYS" INC ATTRACTIVE WALKING & CYCLING ROUTES

£ 320k (Cantley)

LODDON VALLEY LEISURE CENTRE REFURBISHMENT

£ 2.2m

NEW ARBORFIELD PRIMARY SCHOOL 3G FOOTBALL PITCH (JUNE 2021)

£ 800K

CANTLEY PARK ENHANCEMENT INC. PLAY-AREA

£ 2.2m

CARNIVAL POOL LEISURE CENTRE

£ 23m

NEW ACTIVITY CENTRE BUILDING AT DINTON PASTURES

£ 1.8m

NEW OUTDOOR PLAY FACILITIES AT CALIFORNIA COUNTRY PARK

£ 300k

TOTAL £52.9m

KEY FIGURES

1.3m FITNESS ATTENDANCES

157k attending swim lessons

24k SHINE Attendances

Taking Leisure forward through our Strategy

Our strategy to achieve this vision is straightforward as although Wokingham Borough has one of the highest rates of participation in physical activity in the country, the numbers of people across all age groups who are overweight or obese is increasing. We aim to halt and reverse this trend over the lifetime of the strategy through:

Fostering both physical and emotional wellbeing through universal access to high quality leisure opportunities

Targeted provision to reduce social isolation and those facing additional barriers to access and participation; especially those communities with higher health inequalities

Reducing levels of inactivity and, in particular, tackling increasing levels of excess weight and obesity

Commercialisation to ensure that high quality facilities remain affordable, accessible and sustainable into the future whilst protecting provision for the more vulnerable

>> Vision

Wokingham Borough is renowned as one of the most 'active' and best places to live in the whole of the UK. A place where everyone can easily access high quality indoor and outdoor spaces for active leisure pursuits and do so in increasing numbers; decreasing health inequalities and enhancing health & wellbeing across all our communities and particularly benefiting the more vulnerable.

>> Key Priorities and Outcomes

Promoting Health and Wellbeing (General)



Proportion of **more physically active adults** meeting the guidelines of the Chief Medical Officer (completing 150 mins exercise of moderate intensity or 75 mins of vigorous intensity/week).

The **activity levels for children and young people** more broadly.

Ensuring **effective provision of facilities & open-space for new & existing communities** through the planning process.

The proportion of **adults physically inactive** (completing <30 minutes of physical activity/week).

The proportion of **adults classified as overweight or obese**

The proportion of **children and young people** who are **physical inactive**

The proportion of **overweight & obese children and young people**.

Raising participation and reducing levels of inactivity (targeted)



Engagement and the **number of programmes that reduce social isolation**.
 The **availability** and take-up of targeted sessions for those in **ethnic minority communities**.
 Engagement with & participation rates for all groups where **current levels are below average** and to **reduce the health and wellbeing gap**, including those **experiencing poverty** and other dimensions of **deprivation**.

The **range of mental health & emotional wellbeing programmes** & the number of beneficiaries.
 - Doing exercise & other physical activity can have a **positive impact on your mood, improve your sleep, and reduce stress/anxiety**. Even a short burst of **10 minutes brisk walk** helps **increase mental awareness, energy and positive mood**. It has been identified that physical activity can help **reduce depression by 30%**



Focused initiatives to **engage children in care and looked after children**.
 Ensure appropriate provision to **ensure accessible opportunities for people of all ages with disabilities**.
 Use physical activity opportunities to **help tackle local health inequalities**

Maintain and Extend Accessibility to Indoor Leisure facilities



High quality facilities maintained to a **high standard**.
 Flexible **new and established facilities** that meet **growing & changing demand** over time.
Increasing footfall and levels of use.
Identify and address barriers to accessing activity

Maintain and Extend Accessibility to Outdoor Spaces



The formal and informal use of a **high quality interconnected network of outdoor spaces**, including **country parks, 'greenways' and children's play facilities**.
 Develop and increase **physical activity sessions offered in outdoor spaces** and the **associated numbers participating**.
 The number of **organised outdoor public events** and overall attendance.
 Playing Pitch strategy to meet future demand and to secure investment.
 Increase the **number of clubs accessing and utilising outdoor spaces**.

Key Priorities and Outcomes

5

Fostering Enjoyment and Sporting Excellence (pathways)



Increase the **number of sport sponsorship participants performing at a high level** (county and national standard).

A **thriving and diverse network of sports clubs** catering for **all levels of ability** and **providing pathways from grassroots to elite**.

Promoting and supporting **volunteering** to underpin widespread **access to opportunities** and **progression pathways to all**

6

Raising Levels of Active Travel



Increase the proportion of **adults** and **young people** **walking for travel at least three days per week**.

Increase the proportion of **adults** and **young people** **cycling for travel at least three days a week**

7

Ensure Financial Sustainability



Maximise **income generated** by and the **viability of sports and leisure facilities**

Maximise **external funding from all potential sources**, e.g. Sports England, national sports governing bodies, CIL.

Maximising **income generation from country parks** by increasing **visitor numbers** and **spend per customer**.

Further **develop income generation programmes** including sports, leisure and cultural activities.

Generating income from **expanding the range of outdoor sports and outdoor events** across country parks.

Partnerships & Delivery

The success of this strategy will be reliant on an effective multi-partner approach to delivery and collaboration both across the council and with external stakeholders.

To achieve the outcomes set out in the strategy, responsibility will lie with all key internal and external stakeholders groups, setting individual action plans. We will as a collective strive to achieve the outcomes and action needed within the lifespan of the strategy.

The Leisure Strategy is set firmly within our overarching community vision: 'A great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business.' It contributes particularly to the aligned Strategic Priorities of:

- Enriching Lives;
- A Clean and Green Borough;
- Safe, Strong Communities; and
- Keeping the Borough Moving.

The Leisure Strategy also links to a number of other more specific and operational council strategies and priorities that involve a wide range of services and a significant investment of resources to provide the infrastructure that supports an active Borough and healthy communities:

Partnerships & Delivery

Health & Wellbeing Strategy/Public Health	MyJourney	Ageing Well	Rights of Way Improvement Plan
Early Years & Children's Play	Parks & Open Spaces	Local Plan	SDLs
Physical Activity in Schools	Arts & Culture Strategy	Children in Care & Care Leavers Strategy	Berkshire West Healthy Weight Strategy

Our leisure provider, Places Leisure, in particular has a key role in delivery. Not only do they have the day-to-day responsibility for our leisure sites but they are also contracted to deliver against key performance areas for the leisure service. These incorporate increasing participation across our communities with a focus on targeted provision for more vulnerable groups working in tandem with our in-house team. These jointly delivered physical activity programmes include:

- SHINE= Older people – dedicated over 60's exercise programme.
 - **S**ome **H**ealth **I**mprovements **N**eed **E**xercise
- Ageing Actively – a programme for those older residents experiencing loneliness or isolation.
- Walking for health – volunteer led walks.
- Children – Sporting holiday camps.
- Dedicated sessions focused on a range of health conditions to enhance well-being:
 - Mental health and wellbeing – for those affected by a mental health condition;
 - Cardiac Rehab – those with cardiac conditions;
 - GP referral – conditions such as stroke, diabetes, osteoarthritis and lower back pain;
 - Long term health – conditions such as COPD, Parkinson's, physical disabilities;
 - Cancer Rehab – for those affected by cancer;
 - Steady Steps – over 65's who have had a fall, at risk of falling or unsteady on their feet.
 - Escape Pain – for those affected by pain;
 - Dementia friendly physical activity sessions.
- A range of outdoor activities and water sports opportunities for all ages in our country parks.
- Promoting and encouraging WBC staff to be physically active, including 'active travel'.
- Arts and culture – delivering an arts and culture programme sharing use of indoor and outdoor leisure venues and country parks, creating animated spaces with some areas of activity, such as dance, contributing to both arts and sports.

Partnerships & Delivery

External Stakeholders

Further developing partnership working with external stakeholders will be key to successfully resourcing and delivering the ambitions of the strategy. Stakeholders range from national, sub-regional and local organisations as well as other public, voluntary and private sector partners:

SPORT ENGLAND	WOKINGHAM SPORT COUNCIL	NEIGHBOURING LOCAL AUTHORITIES	TOWN & PARISH COUNCILS
NATIONAL GOVERNING BODIES E.G. FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION, SWIM ENGLAND	GET BERKSHIRE ACTIVE	VOLUNTARY SECTOR & CHARITIES	HEALTH PARTNERS
BERKSHIRE SPORTS PARTNERSHIP	BERKSHIRE COUNTY SPORTS CLUB	LOCAL BUSINESSES & BUSINESS PARKS	PRIVATE SECTOR PROVIDERS E.G. GYMS & CHILDRENS PLAY

In order to maximise collaboration and effective implementation of the strategy it is proposed to further develop an 'Active Wokingham' (Borough) partnership across internal and external stakeholders and create a dynamic network of organisations working together to increase opportunities, participation and enjoyment in sport and physical activity across the whole Borough. Through this collaborative engagement we will be able to optimise our collective resources to ensure all residents, whether inactive or active, have access to and are motivated to participate in physical activity and sport. In the first instance the Council will work to establish this partnership through the development of an Action Plan for the delivery of the Strategy.

The Action Plan will run for three years from April 2021 – March 2024 with greater detail for the first year but to be reviewed and updated on an annual basis. The Action Plan will include challenging targets and measurable key performance indicators of relevance to our local communities and the Borough's established track-record as an 'active place' but with aspirations to be even better. These will also be reviewed annually to enable continuous improvement and development and align with the health and well-being action groups reporting dashboard. Active Wokingham (Borough) will have an ongoing role in the promotion, development, delivery and evaluation of the Leisure Strategy and associated Action Plan.

In doing this it is also envisaged that Active Wokingham (Borough) will have a key role to play in:

- Sourcing funding, maximising use of resources;
- Building creative collaboration;
- Exploiting income generation opportunities;
- Ensuring robust governance practices;
- Using community insight and effective evaluation practices;
- Supporting and growing volunteering;
- Encouraging innovation and best practice in all areas;
- Delivering meaningful engagement and consultation;
- Providing effective communications.

»» By Building on our current offer...

Adults

Young People & Children

LEISURE CENTRE FACILITIES:

- GYM
- SWIM
- CLASSES
- INDOOR & OUTDOOR SPORTS

PARKS AND OPEN SPACES

- SPORTS TEAMS
- WALKING 4 HEALTH (SPORT & LEISURE INITIATIVE)
- GREENWAYS
- 3G FOOTBALL FACILITIES
- TENNIS

SHINE - PHYSICAL ACTIVITY SESSIONS & CLASSES FOR OLDER ADULTS INC.

- ZUMBA, LINE DANCING, PILATES, WALKING FOOTBALL, AQUAFIT, TENNIS AND MORE

PREVENTION PROGRAMMES

- CARDIAC REHAB
- MINDFUL HEALTH & WELLBEING
- LONG TERM HEALTH
- STEADY STEPS
- GP REFERRAL

WORKPLACE HEALTH FOR WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL STAFF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY SESSIONS & CLASSES

- SPINNING (BIKE), BOOTCAMP, ZUMBA AND PILATES

DISABILITY SESSIONS FOR ADULTS

DISABILITY SESSIONS FOR ADULTS

AGEING ACTIVELY - SOCIAL ISOLATION AND ACTIVITIES FOR ADULTS WITH DEMENTIA

LEISURE CENTRE FACILITIES:

- GYM
- SWIM
- CLASSES
- INDOOR & OUTDOOR SPORTS
- SWIMMING LESSONS
- SOFT PLAY
- DUAL USE FOR SCHOOLS IN THE BOROUGH INC. BULMERSHE, ADDINGTON, BOHUNT & OAKBANK
- FREE SWIMMING SESSIONS FOR THOSE WITH FREE SCHOOL MEALS

PARKS AND OPEN SPACES

- SPORTS TEAMS
- OUTDOOR PLAY AREAS/PARKS
- GREENWAYS
- 3G FOOTBALL FACILITIES
- TENNIS

WOKINGHAM ACTIVE KIDS (WAK)

HOLIDAY CAMPS

- MULTI-SPORT - INC. TRAMPOLINING, HOCKEY, BADMINTON, BASKETBALL, RUGBY AND SWIMMING
- SPORT SPECIFIC - NETBALL, FOOTBALL
- FREE WAK DAY FOR HOUSING/TENANTS SERVICES FAMILIES

CWAN - CHILDREN WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS ACTIVITY DAY

➤➤ Appendix 1: National & Local Context

National Context

Some awareness of the national policy background is helpful in understanding why the Council invests significantly in leisure provision. In addition, aligning with national priorities also provides greater opportunities to bid for and secure grant funding.

HM Government Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation

This wide-ranging detailed strategy was launched in December 2015. The most relevant points to inform a local strategy are summarised below. The Government strategy aims to change the way in which sport is considered, from simply how many people take part, to what people and society get out of participating and what more can be done to encourage everyone to have a physically active lifestyle.

The funding decisions of Government will also now be made on the basis of the social good that sport and physical activity can deliver, not simply the number of participants.

The five key outcomes which will define success in sport are:

- *Physical well-being;*
- *Mental well-being;*
- *Individual development;*
- *Social and community development;*
- *Economic development.*

The funding will primarily be focusing on those people who tend not to take part in sport, including women and girls, disabled people, those in lower socio-economic groups and older people. All new Government funding will go to organisations which can deliver some or all of the five outcomes. Those organisations which show that they can work collaboratively and tailor their work at the local level will be the most likely to receive funding.

The Government strategy also broadened Sport England's remit so that it became responsible for promoting sport outside of school from the age of 5 rather than 14.

Sport England: towards an active nation, strategy 2016-2021

Sport England launched its new five-year national strategy in May 2016. It responds to the Government's Sporting Future strategy and has a stronger focus on reaching those who are least active and helping to deliver the strategy's wider outcomes.

➤➤ Appendix 1: National & Local Context

The key changes that Sport England are making to the way that they work are:

- Focusing more money and resources on tackling inactivity;
- Investing more in children and young people from the age of five;
- Helping those who are active now to carry on, but at lower cost to the public purse over time;
- Putting customers at the heart of what they do, responding to how people organise their lives and helping the sector to be more welcoming and inclusive, especially of those groups currently under-represented in sport;
- Helping sport to keep pace with the digital expectations of customers;
- Working nationally where it makes sense to do so (for example on infrastructure and workforce) but encouraging stronger local collaboration to deliver a more joined-up experience of sport and activity for customers;
- Working with a wider range of partners, including the private sector, using their expertise as well as Sport England investment to help others align their resources;
- Working with our sector to encourage innovation and share best practice particularly through applying the principles and practical learning of behaviour change.

Funding streams from Sport England are now closely aligned with these priorities.

Public Health England (PHE)

PHE have a strong influence on policy and practice nationally with regard to promoting increased levels of physical activity. They also have a strong evidence base of what works and are a key source of data for informing local strategies and priorities. They produce a range of publications many of which are updated regularly, including:

- Health matters: getting every adult active every day' (updated July 2016);
- Physical activity guidelines: UK Chief Medical Officers' report (updated September 2019);
- Physical activity data tool (updated November 2019).

In their forward to the 2019 update of the physical activity guidelines the Chief Medical Officers re-emphasised the significance of physical activity:

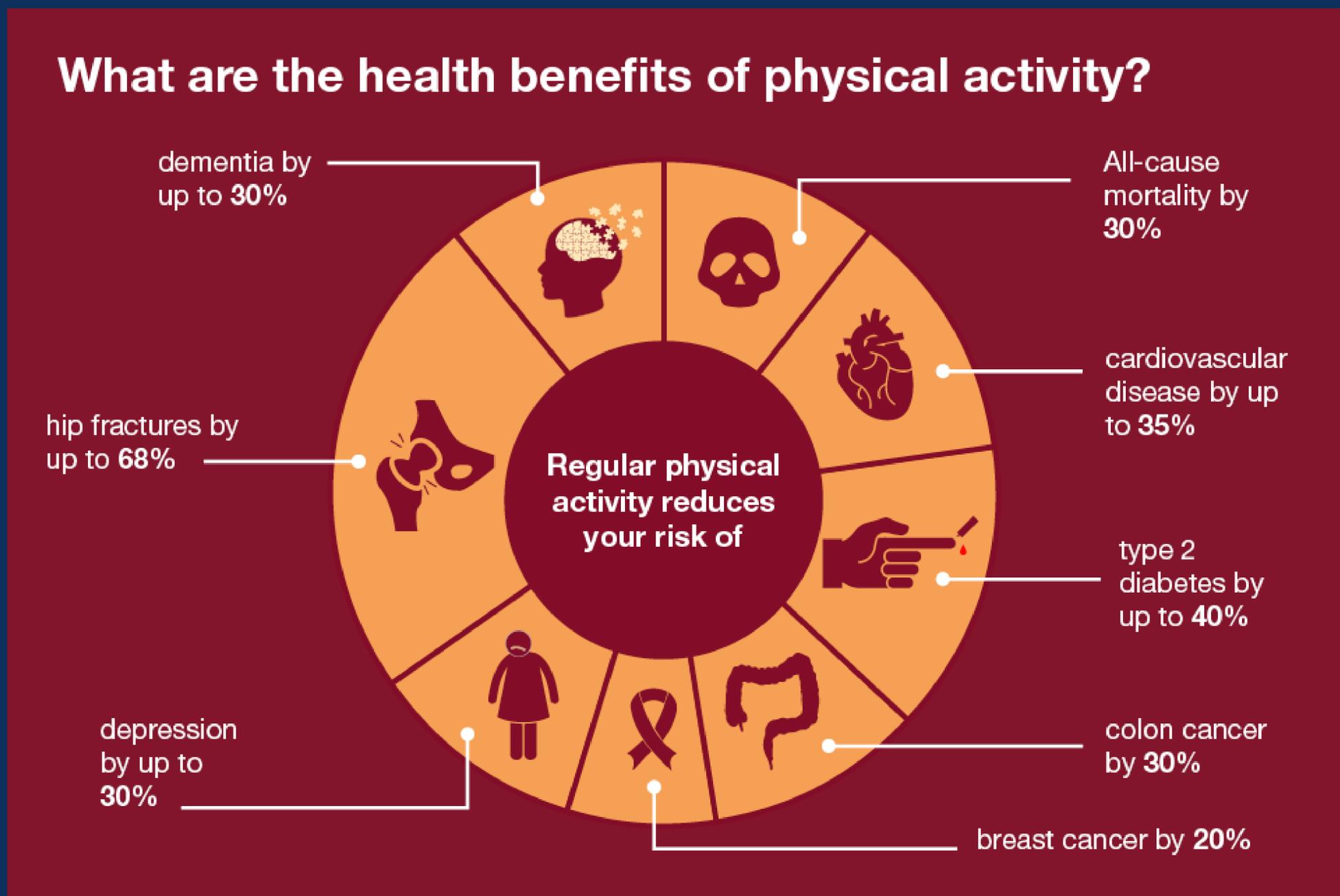
'In 2010, we were among the first nations in the world to set out evidence for how much and what kinds of physical activity we need to do to keep ourselves healthy. Since then, the evidence has become more compelling and the message is clear:

"If physical activity were a drug, we would refer to it as a miracle cure, due to the great many illnesses it can prevent and help treat"

Physical activity is not just a health issue. It brings people together to enjoy shared activities and contributes to building strong communities whilst supporting the economy to grow.'

Appendix 1: National & Local Context

PHE summarise the many benefits of physical activity with the following infographic:



Public Health England Health Matters Blog, 2016:

Healthy Weight

Key current policy drivers for the healthy weight agenda (which incorporates physical activity) include the Public Health Outcomes framework, the Local government association guidance including 'Making Obesity Everybody's Business' 2017, NICE guidance relating to the healthy weight agenda both in relation to prevention and treatment, the NHS outcome framework and long-term plan. The Government childhood obesity strategy A Plan for Action, 2018 outlined the aim to halve childhood obesity by 2030 and to significantly reduce the gap in obesity between children from the most and least deprived areas.

Guidance on 'What Good Healthy Weight for all ages Looks Like' was published by (ADPH, 2019). More recently in 2020 Government launched the policy paper: 'Tackling obesity: empowering adults and children to live healthier lives' in July 2020. As part of this commitment to healthy weight PHE launched the 'Better Health Campaign' which includes a call to action for people to take steps to move towards a healthier weight urging people to take stock of how they live their lives in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Key messages encourage behaviour changes to eat better and be more physically active and move more to prevent or delay the onset of serious diseases.

➤➤ Appendix 1: National & Local Context

Local Context

It has recently been reported from the Office for National Statistics & Lane Clark & Peacock financial services that Wokingham Borough is the healthiest place to live. Scores were based on a variety of factors such as obesity rates, mental and physical wellbeing. Despite being ranked #1 nationally there is plenty of work to do at a local level to help improve indicators of health.

*On the majority of public health Indicators used within the PHE physical activity data tool, Wokingham Borough performs well in comparison with national and regional averages. **By building on our current offer (p8), working with our partners (p7) and continuing our investment in our leisure services (p3), our strategy will deliver the key priorities and outcomes (P4 & P5). Although some of these public health indicators cannot be addressed through our Leisure offer alone, they provide a vital part of the pathway to improvement. The local public health strategy, inline with national Strategy "PHE Strategy 2020 to 2025", is compiled to further address these issues.***

Moreover, overall 'performance' has improved with the percentage of physically active adults rising from 69.5% in 2015/16 to 75.3% in 2018/9 (a rise of 5.8% compared to a rise of only 1.5% across the south east and 1.1% nationally as a whole). This is a significant increase in a relatively short space of time. Similarly, levels of obesity and being over-weight compare favourably with national and regional averages. Nevertheless, there is no room for complacency:

1 in 6 2018/19 data indicates that 13.9% local adults remain inactive

↑ 17% The number of people aged over 65 in Wokingham borough is estimated to increase between 2018 and 2025 from **29,600 to 34,514**.

Unsurprisingly given the breadth of health and other benefits generated by physical activity, measures to increase levels of participation will link to and support a range of Council priorities and strategies over and above the Health & Wellbeing Strategy and involve a wide-range of Council services. Hence this Leisure Strategy directly links to and supports delivery of a number of strategic priorities to deliver our Community Vision, in particular with a focus on:

- *Enriching Lives: enjoyment, achievement (including sporting excellence), fulfilment, social interaction and community cohesion;*
- *Clean, Green and Safe Places: a range of high quality open-spaces and country parks, play areas and outdoor sports facilities providing choice and accessibility to all;*
- *Safe, Strong Communities: interaction, socialisation and helping communities to thrive.*
- *Keep the Borough Moving: an extensive network of footpaths and cycle ways connecting people with places they want to go and encouraging widespread adoption of 'active travel' options.*

Whilst a different focus, there are also links to the Borough's Cultural Strategy, particularly in relation to the shared use of venues and country parks, creating animated spaces and delivering a high quality of life that supports well-being, thriving communities and economic success.

Appendix 2: Testimonials

LTH gym

"I wanted to write to thank for your help in getting me back to fitness after my serious cycling injury. I remember when I first walked into the gym a year or so ago. I could only walk short distances and serious exercise seemed a long way off. Your advice and guidance in the Long Term Health Conditions Programme run by Wokingham BC has made an enormous difference to my ability to get back to leading a normal life. Here I am a year later and I have joined the local gym so that I can maintain and further improve my current fitness. Without the LHCP gym this just wouldn't have happened."



Circuits – GP referral

"Monday circuits at Bulmershe. A fun way to push your boundaries, attending this has built up my fitness levels, cycled 24 mile round trip in France and ditched the bus pass in favour of walking from Woodley to Reading! Lower back class at Bulmershe is extremely beneficial in getting rid of those niggling pains, certainly helps with weeding"

Lower back class – GP referral

"Just wanted to say how much I enjoy the Lower Back Class when I'm well and able to attend. Due to a change in my diagnosis, I am now unable to do treadmill or gym work, but the Lower Back class enables me to take things at my own pace and not over exert myself".

GP referral

"I was put on the GP referral course following the 12 week Macmillan course after my cancer treatment had finished. There were only a couple of the classes that I could attend, Badminton being one of them. I have to say I thoroughly enjoy these classes. Before my diagnosis the only exercise I got was walking my Dog. Now, after joining the referral programme which I started in April 2016 i have lost three stone in weight and changed my eating habits. The badminton is especially good for me as I had my lymph nodes removed and get a lot of pain and stiffness in my right arm and I find it so much better after playing Badminton. Kirk is a very good motivator and is always giving tips and encouragement when needed. It is a good group of people who do not take it too seriously. At the end of the day if you can exercise and enjoy yourself whilst doing it then it cannot be a bad thing. I for one would be most disappointed if the classes were cancelled."



Appendix 2: Testimonials

Aqua

"I love the aquafit on a Tuesday evening. This class got me moving at a point when, following a major Achilles operation and some 9 plus months on crutches some years ago, I was very concerned when asked to join the GP scheme about doing a normal gym type class where my full weight would be on my Achilles. Aga is a great teacher so that you can tell if you are doing something wrong (and her reminders of what you should not do help you to put things right when you don't have the right stature etc.) As someone who is struggling with weight-loss and to improve fitness levels alongside that, I find these classes have helped me with the transition from previously doing very little exercise to become more supple and building my core muscles – again all helping with the weight loss."



THANK YOU.
What a brilliant idea!
I'll be having a go at these,
especially the Tai Chi.
(RE SHINE Virtual)

Many Thanks for doing this I
can assure you it will make a
HUGE difference to many of
us Well Done Shine

Thank you this is really
excellent ! Had a go at the
Standing exercise this
morning, really, really good.
Thank you so much

Dear Shine Team,
This is fantastic - thank you
all so much - admin,
teachers, everyone!
Best wishes to you all
(RE SHINE Virtual)

I was so pleased to get this to add to my daily
routine during the lockdown.
Walking for an hour around a smallish garden
can be a bit boring so thank you
for thinking of this video link to exercise - I
usually attend one of Sonias
classes, it was much appreciated

Thanks everyone,
We have been doing the tai
chi and thoroughly enjoying
it. We are also going to do
others. Much appreciated.

Hi there, Many thanks for
your email. What a great
idea. Well done the SHINE
team, Best wishes
(RE SHINE Virtual)

Thank you team and
especially Sonia, I have
really missed my class on
Wednesday.
Lovely to have her in my
home. Keep well everyone's
(RE SHINE Virtual)

I would like to congratulate you and
Sonia on the
excellent Standing exercise you tube
video. Please let Sonia know how much I
appreciating this after 3 weeks of no
Zumba gold, no looking after 1 year old
and no carrying shopping!
(RE SHINE Virtual)

➤➤ Appendix 3: Consultations

Leisure Strategy Consultation Timeline

Objective – To consult with all residents, key stakeholder groups (sports clubs, sports council, national governing bodies (e.g. Football foundation), GBA, PFP), Health Partners, Town and Parish councils, staff and councillors on updated Leisure strategy. This will then feedback to create the final version of the strategy.

ACTION	TIMESCALE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finalise and issue consultation survey – Link to all social media platforms, internal comms, add to news centre, push to all key groups as listed above (encouraging to share on their platforms/groups). Link the above with comms on timelines/messages to promote survey. 	<p>APRIL/MAY/JUNE</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attend town centres – Wokingham/Woodley – encourage face-to-face consultation 	<p>APRIL/MAY WEEKENDS (COVID DEPENDANT)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote through existing physical activity programmes/Leisure provider (PFP marketing tools and platform). 	<p>APRIL/MAY/JUNE</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote through attended key groups – Such as – (Health and wellbeing sub group, Sports Council, Football Foundation, Get Berkshire Active, Volunteer groups). 	<p>APRIL/MAY/JUNE</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Issue survey link to all town and parish council Clarks – offering to attend a meeting to promote the consultation. 	<p>APRIL/MAY</p>

Appendix 4: New Developments

Carnival Pool



Virtual Classes



Arborfield Primary 3G



Classes in the Park



Cantley Park 3G



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:	19.02.21
Service:	Strategy and Commissioning (Place)
Project, policy or service EQIA relates to:	Draft Leisure Strategy
Completed by:	Susan Bentley
Has the EQIA been discussed at services team meeting:	19/2/21
Signed off by:	Beverley Thompson
Sign off date:	19/2/21

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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 existing Leisure strategy created in 2017 is to be refreshed in line with current service and council plans. The strategy plays a key part in the council's community vision by supporting physical activity and sports supporting the physical and emotional well-being of the Borough's people and communities as is also explicitly recognised in the Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2018 -2021. The strategy is closely aligned with key priority and outcomes; promoting health and wellbeing (general), raising participation and reducing levels of inactivity (targeted), maintain and extend accessibility to Indoor leisure facilities, maintain and extend accessibility to outdoor spaces, fostering enjoyment and sporting excellence (pathways), raising levels of active travel and ensure financial sustainability.

Further developing partnership working with external stakeholders is also key to support the expected outcomes of the strategy, stakeholders range from national, sub regional and local organisations as well as other public, voluntary and private sector partners.

The strategy will also align closely with Sport England's five-year national strategy in May 2016, responding to the Government's Sporting Future strategy and has a stronger focus on reaching those who are least active and helping to deliver the strategy's wider outcomes. Public Health also play a key part with Public Health England providing a strong influence on policy and practice nationally with regard to promoting increased levels of physical activity providing. They also have a strong evidence base of what works and are a key source of data for informing local strategies and priorities of which is detailed in the strategy.

The decision has been taken at this stage by the Executive is to approve a draft strategy for extensive consultation with stakeholders, including the general public. Consultation has the potential to highlight any concerns or issues for all communities and stakeholders of interest or place in the Borough. The strategy will go back in Autumn for final sign off with executive.

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 Strategy has been developed involving officers from a range of internal services including CLT which provided sign off from all directors. The draft strategy will be considered by the Executive on the 26th March and requested to approve as a draft for extensive consultation through April to June 21. A cross-council officer steering group is being established to take the strategy and implementation forward on behalf of the Council and will report through to the Executive Member and the proposed 'Active Wokingham Partnership' on a regular basis.

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

The primary beneficiaries are the general population within and outside of the borough (employees and employers) and external stakeholders including national, sub regional and local organisations as well as other public, voluntary and private sector partners. A key aim of the strategy is to deliver, support and develop physical activity and emotional wellbeing across the borough and to all communities.

Secondary reputational and economic benefits extend to the business community.

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

The key priorities within the strategy are as follows:

1. Promoting health and wellbeing (general)
2. Raising participation and reducing levels of inactivity (targeted)
3. Maintain and extend accessibility to Indoor leisure facilities
4. Maintain and extend accessibility to outdoor spaces
5. Fostering enjoyment and sporting excellence (pathways)
6. Raising level of active travel
7. Ensure financial sustainability

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:	Positive	The strategy will promote equality of opportunity between diverse communities and to enhance their participation, physical activity and wellbeing. The strategy promotes targeted work with all cohorts where participation rates are lower.
Gender:	No impact	It is considered that the strategy will support all genders in its offerings and will not adversely affect any one gender more than another.
Disabilities:	Positive	Provision will be made to meet the needs of all with specific provision for those with disabilities and allowing access to services and programmes within the leisure offerings.
Age:	Positive	The strategy provides an offering for a mixture of age groups and abilities which has very significant health benefits of physical activity that are universal, from the very young to the elderly - helping to raise achievement in schools, enabling self-care for those with long-term conditions and helping to prevent mental and physical illness across all age-groups.
Sexual orientation:	No impact	Potentially access to a wider range of leisure opportunities.
Religion/belief:	No impact	Potentially access to a wider range of leisure opportunities.

Gender re-assignment:	No impact	Potentially access to a wider range of leisure opportunities.
Pregnancy and Maternity:	No impact	Potentially access to a wider range of leisure opportunities.
Marriage and civil partnership:	No impact	Potentially access to a wider range of leisure opportunities.

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.

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TITLE	Arts & Culture Strategy
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 25 March 2021
WARD	None Specific
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Place and Growth
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Regeneration - Charlotte Haitham Taylor

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

The report seeks approval for the Arts & Culture Strategy following consultation on a draft as agreed by the Executive in the spring of last year.

The Council currently does not have a cultural strategy but has an aspiration that the Borough's cultural offer will grow and develop into the future from a strong base of existing activity. The strategy has the potential over time to significantly further enhance the cultural and leisure offers in the Borough to the benefit of the vast majority of residents, improving quality of life and enhancing well-being. The strategy is closely aligned with the principles and priorities of key national agencies such as Arts Council England (ACE) and Public Health England (PHE) and has the potential to leverage external funding. The strategy is potentially a key strand for delivering the Council's Community Vision: 'for Wokingham Borough to be a great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business.' In particular it addresses the linked strategic priority for 'Enriching Lives' but it also contributes to 'Safe, Strong Communities' as well as addressing elements of the Health and Well-being Strategy.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive:

- 1) approves the attached Arts & Culture Strategy;
- 2) notes the appended Action Plan for implementing the Strategy over the coming year;
- 3) endorses the establishment and role of the Arts & Culture Alliance as the key strategic partnership for implementing the Strategy.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the context of a growing population and the Borough's reputation as an excellent place to live with a high quality of life, the quality of the cultural offer can play a significant role in enhancing the Borough's reputation and enriching the lives of residents. Building from a strong base of events and activities (see the indicative annual programme at Appendix 5) the strategy seeks to further develop the cultural offer and extend the many associated social and economic benefits. Of course the existing offer has been and continues to be impacted by the pandemic but as the year progresses and into the future the exciting and wide-ranging programme of events right across the Borough can return and be further developed.

Following approval of the draft strategy by the Executive consultation has taken place with the public, arts & culture organisations and Town & Parish Councils. Whilst the Covid pandemic has significantly restricted the nature of the consultation, especially as regards to face to face interaction with the public, there has been a good and positive overall response.

Effective delivery of the arts & culture strategy will be dependent on the actions and resources of a wide range of agencies, partners and stakeholders, including our residents. A key element of progress since the consultation draft strategy was approved has been the establishment of the 'Arts & Culture Alliance' (in October 2020) as a partnership vehicle involving key stakeholders for taking forward implementation of the strategy. The Alliance includes cross-party political representation as well as a range of key local arts & culture organisations.

The Arts & Culture Alliance has had a key role in developing the initial Action Plan for delivering the strategy. The Action Plan is attached to this report for information and it seeks to ensure that there is progress against each of the high level priorities identified in the strategy. The Action Plan will be a live and iterative document that will be reviewed by the Alliance every 6 months. Ongoing public and stakeholder engagement will be a key priority for the Alliance into the future, as will its own further development as an effective strategic partnership.

Appendices:

1. Arts & Culture Strategy
2. Arts & Culture Strategy: The Arts & Culture Alliance Action Plan
3. Arts & Culture Strategy: Equality Impact Assessment
4. Arts & Culture Strategy: Summary Report - Consultation Responses
5. Indicative Annual Programme of Events

BACKGROUND

The Arts & Culture Strategy is set firmly in the context of national policy and guidance and with the associated priorities of key national agencies: Arts Council England and Public Health England. Over recent years national policies have shifted from a focus on activity to outcomes and particularly the impact on health and well-being of residents and an increasing focus on environmental sustainability.

As recently as 2016 the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) produced and presented to Parliament its 'Culture White Paper', the first for over 50 years. The White Paper was very clear about the benefits of culture and why the Government should invest to support its development:

- The intrinsic value: the enriching value of culture in and of itself;
- The social value: improving educational attainment and helping people to be healthier; and
- The economic value: the growing contribution culture makes to economic growth and job creation.

Arts Council England launched its new ten year strategy 'Let's Create' in January 2020. The new strategy for 2020-30 focuses on individual creative potential and the need for artists, arts organisations, museums and libraries to play an important role in every community, bringing people together, supporting local economies and helping to improve lives. The four key investment principles for the next 10 years will be inclusivity and relevance, dynamism, environmental responsibility and ambition and quality. There is also a specific pledge to boost library spending.

PHE have a strong influence on policy and practice nationally with regard to promoting enhanced well-being and, in parallel, the NHS has a challenging target to make a step-change in the quantum of 'social prescribing' over the next three to four years. They also have a strong evidence base of what works and are a key source of data for informing local strategies and priorities.

BUSINESS CASE

In the context of a growing population and the Borough's reputation as an excellent place to live with a high quality of life, the quality of the cultural offer can play a significant role in enhancing the Borough's reputation and enriching the lives of residents.

Cultural activities are universal in their ability to contribute to well-being and impact on all residents across all age-groups. In addition they can support better outcomes for more vulnerable groups, be this tackling social isolation, improving health and well-being or educational attainment. Unsurprisingly the strategy therefore links to a range of the Council's key priorities and has touch points with a large number of Council services. The Borough does not currently have a cultural strategy and with increasing interest in, and support for, developing the cultural offer and identity of the Borough this is a substantive gap. An up to date approved strategy that aligns with both national imperatives and local priorities is extremely useful in shaping future provision, extending reach to more vulnerable cohorts and communities, co-ordinating and aligning activity across a range of partners and stakeholders and for maximising the impact of collective resources. Set within the context of national policy, the attached strategy sets out an

ambitious vision, key priorities and desired outcomes; supported by the appended more detailed initial action plan to support delivery of the longer-term outcomes.

Consultation on the strategy elicited responses from 5 Town & Parish Councils, 11 arts & cultural organisations and 99 members of the public (via an on-line survey). A summary of the consultation responses is attached at Appendix 4. Whilst the Covid pandemic has significantly restricted the nature of the consultation, especially as regards to face to face interaction with the public, there has been a good and very positive overall response.

Many of the more detailed and specific responses to the consultation will need to be picked up in the ongoing implementation and via the Action Plan. They also highlight the acknowledged and ongoing need for further engagement and collaboration into the future: with arts & cultural organisations; our Town & Parish Councils; and with local residents and communities, including children and young people who were not strongly represented in the feedback to date (this links with one of the key priorities in the strategy).

With regard to the Strategy itself, the consultation responses have directly resulted in the following significant changes to the draft:

1. The Covid pandemic – the draft Strategy was written immediately prior to the pandemic, indeed it's consideration by the Executive was delayed by a month because of the resulting cancellation of the scheduled meeting in March 2020. Feedback was that it was important to reference this context because of its widespread impact directly on the arts & culture sector and residents' lack of opportunity to engage other than virtually. This has been addressed in the re-drafted introductory section of the Strategy.
2. Climate Emergency – there was a desire to ensure that the Strategy made a more explicit connection to the issues of environmental sustainability given the significance of this in the context of the Borough's declaration of a Climate Emergency. How the Arts & Culture Strategy links to environmental issues has therefore been added, along with a commitment to ensure that the aspiration to be carbon neutral is fully factored in to implementation plans and related activities.
3. Cultural Venues – whilst the wealth of local arts and cultural organisations and activities was strongly supported, the absence of 'major' cultural venues or a 'cultural hub' was a feature of responses from both arts & cultural organisations and the general public. Addressing this 'gap' is undoubtedly a major challenge but for an aspirational 10 year strategy it feels appropriate to articulate this need. New and enhanced cultural venues have therefore been included within the desired outcomes for Priority 1 in the Strategy: Enhancing cultural identity and sense of 'place'.

In parallel with the consultation process work has been undertaken to establish the Arts & Cultural Alliance as a partnership vehicle involving key stakeholders for taking forward implementation of the strategy. The Alliance held its first meeting in October 2020 and has subsequently played a pivotal role in the development of the initial Action Plan to progress implementation of the Strategy and this pays testimony to the enthusiasm and commitment of the many cultural organisations in the Borough. The Alliance includes

cross-party political representation as well as a range of key local arts & culture organisations.

The Action Plan is attached to this report for information and it seeks to ensure that there is progress against each of the high level priorities identified in the strategy. The Action Plan will be a live and iterative document that will be reviewed by the Alliance every 6 months. Ongoing public and stakeholder engagement will be a key priority for the Alliance into the future, as will its own further development as an effective strategic partnership.

It is worth noting that the Council has also developed a refreshed Leisure Strategy (also on the agenda for the Executive) and that both strategies play a complementary role in ‘enriching lives’, as well as having connections between them, particularly in relation to the shared use of indoor and outdoor leisure venues and country parks, creating animated spaces and some areas of activity, such as dance, contributing to both.

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	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1) 2021/22	£0	Yes	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£0	Yes	
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£0	Yes	

Other Financial Information

The strategy will be delivered in partnership under the auspices of the Arts & Culture Alliance and for the Council from within existing budgets supported by income generation and external funding.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

Stakeholder and public consultation on the draft strategy and action plan has taken place though was limited to on-line consultation due to the pandemic. The Arts & Culture Alliance has also been established as a vehicle for further engagement on an ongoing basis, including with children and young people, and it has had an active role in the development of the initial Action Plan.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Due regard has been taken to the Public Equality Duty and an Equalities Impact Assessment is attached to this report.

<p>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></p>
<p>Environmental responsibility is one of the Arts Council’s key investment principles as part of its 10 year strategy. The strategy acknowledges the links to the Climate Emergency and the value of arts & culture as a means of exploring and promoting the linked themes and issues. Aspirations for carbon neutrality will be explicitly addressed through the action plan and practical actions linked to delivery.</p>

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

<p>Contact Grant Thornton</p>	<p>Service Place Commissioning</p>
<p>Telephone 0780 166 45350780 166 4535</p>	<p>Email grant.thornton@wokingham.gov.uk</p>



2021-2030

Wokingham Borough Arts & Culture Strategy

February 2021

»» Why Have a Cultural Strategy

This strategy links directly to our community vision established in 2020 with the ambition for Wokingham Borough to be a great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business.

The Strategy was initially drafted immediately prior to the onset of the Covid pandemic and the immense challenges that this has presented to us all and society as a whole. The cultural sector has been particularly hard hit with performances and events cancelled, income decimated and planning for the future compromised. The resulting lack of opportunities to engage in cultural activities has thrown into stark relief how important this is to our health & well-being and to the quality of our lives. As we hopefully emerge from the restrictions and crippling impact of the pandemic later in 2021 this ambitious 10 year strategy can play a part in creating the post-pandemic future we want to see.

Despite current challenges it remains an exciting time for Wokingham Borough. Economically strong with a high quality of life that is recognised nationally as one of the best in the country and well developed plans to further bolster success through investment and regeneration to deliver new housing, infrastructure and thriving town centres.

But we know that quality of life is about much more than just having a job and a house. Our population is growing significantly, becoming more diverse and increasingly wanting convenient local access to high quality and stimulating culture and leisure opportunities. Taking part in creative acts delights and fulfils us, and helps us to relate to the wider world and we all have the potential to develop our creativity further. Culture and exposure to high quality cultural experiences should be a 'must have' for all, regardless of background or personal circumstances.

Connection to place, a sense of identity and being creative are important to us all. Nor are these things a 'nice to have', they are integral to the well-being of our residents, the future of our young people and to support the Borough's continued economic success.

This 10 year strategy is about sustained development of the quality and appeal of the cultural 'offer' across the Borough, to ensure it is both commensurate with our economic strength and as transformational over time as our plans for regeneration: not only maintaining but enhancing quality of life, strengthening communities and growing the Borough's reputation as a great place to live, to visit and to work in.

*Cultural Strategy: To provide clarity the Arts Council's definition of 'culture' is adopted for defining the scope and content of the strategy: In this strategy we use culture to mean all those areas of activity associated with the artforms and organisations that Arts Council England supports: collections, combined arts, dance, libraries, literature, museums, music, theatre and the visual arts.

»» Introduction

As recently as 2016 the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) produced and presented to Parliament its 'Culture White Paper', the first for over 50 years. The White Paper was very clear about the benefits of culture and why the Government should invest to support its development:

1. The intrinsic value: the enriching value of culture in and of itself;
2. The social value: improving educational attainment and helping people to be healthier; and
3. The economic value: the growing contribution culture makes to economic growth and job creation.

The White Paper was intended to be a vision of 'culture in action', rejuvenating our society and national and local economies. The White Paper was based on an extensive evidence base, including the Warwick Commissions report: 'Enriching Britain: culture, creativity and growth' published in 2015. This report presented a powerful argument for a more systemic investment in cultural and creative talent at a national level, 'a powerful cocktail of public good and commercial return'. Significantly, the report emphasised the role of culture in 'place shaping' and the importance of locality, investing in culture but ensuring that this was grounded in and responsive to the distinct character of places and the aspirations of local communities (with the added benefits of enhancing accessibility and growing audiences).

At both national and local level the case for purposeful development of, and investment in, the cultural offer and the creative sector is compelling. Through a Cultural Strategy the Council and the wider cultural sector can better realise the nationally acknowledged benefits of developing the cultural offer here in Wokingham Borough: creating a 'buzz', building identity and reputation whilst benefitting the health and well-being of residents and attracting visitors and investment. Ultimately to make Wokingham Borough a cultural destination of the future. In this regard the Strategy will also link directly with delivery of the Council's strategic priorities of 'Enriching Lives' and 'Safe, Strong Communities'.

'We want to see communities that are more socially cohesive and economically robust, and in which residents experience improved physical and mental well-being as a result of investment in culture.'

'Shaping the next ten years' Draft Strategy 2019 Arts Council England.

Wokingham - 17 Parishes – One Borough

Wokingham's excellent quality of life is grounded in its rich mix of towns and villages (each with its own heritage and character), complemented by beautiful countryside and open spaces and interspersed with high quality business parks that attract talent from all over the world. The number and range of cultural organisations, covering many different genres and activities, across the Borough is also a real strength, providing a wealth of opportunities to both participate in and to experience culture in its many forms. This diversity of place and people is a unique cultural asset that can be embraced and further developed, not only for the benefit of each 'place' and its people but for the Borough as a whole – building and strengthening networks across the cultural sector and audiences to create a greater sense of identity and enhancing the Borough's reputation as a cultural hub.

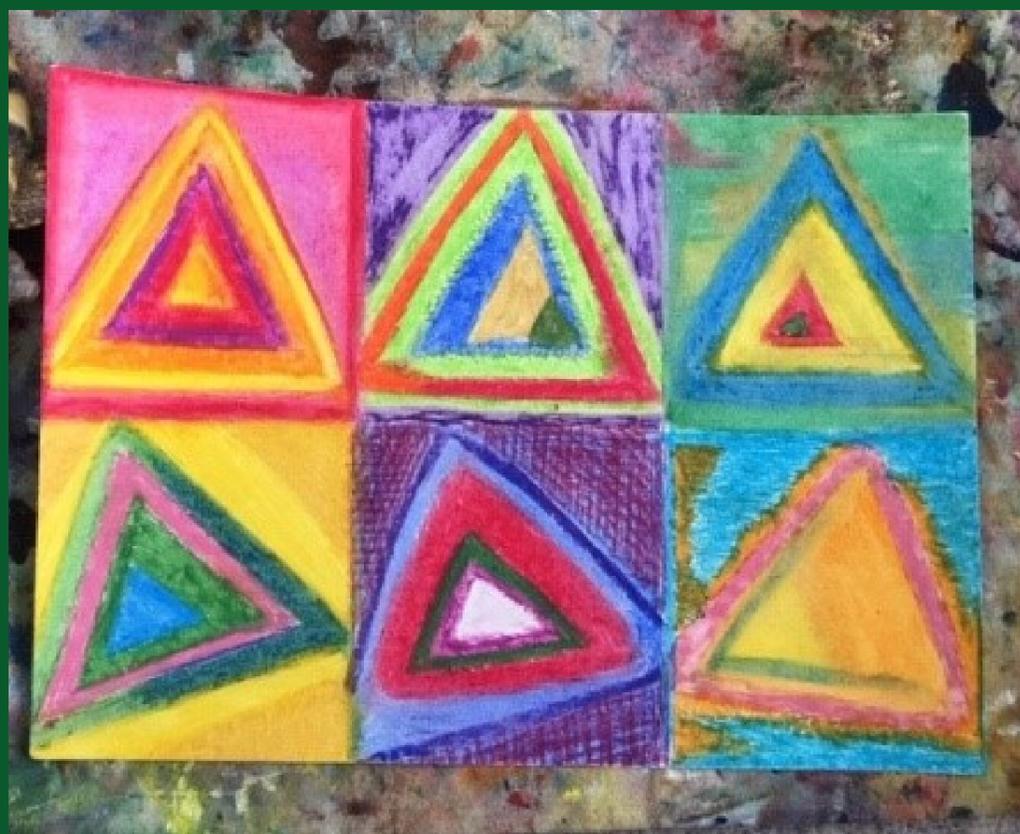
Whilst the dispersed nature of settlements in the Borough presents challenges, not least the resultant lack of obvious major cultural venues, this cultural strategy recognises the great potential offered by the distinctiveness of the 17 parishes and their communities: a network of creative people and places that can be strengthened and a cultural offer that can be enhanced, improving access to high quality cultural experiences right across the Borough.

Nor will this only benefit the Borough's residents, an enhanced reputation as a cultural hub helps attract businesses, including in the fast growing creative industries, supports the recruitment and retention of employees and draws in visitors from further afield to bolster economic success.

The Cultural Strategy is therefore an integral component of broader plans and initiatives for future growth, economic success and an excellent quality of life.

Vision

By 2030 Wokingham Borough will be recognised regionally and nationally as a dynamic cultural hub, a Borough of surprises that delight across all our towns and villages, a Borough where everyone can access or get involved in creating high quality cultural experiences and where creativity is nurtured across all age-groups.



»» Strategy and Priorities

Essentially this strategy identifies key priorities that will enable this vision to be realised and an initial route-map, via a dynamic and evolving Action Plan, of how we plan to get there. The priorities have been informed by consultation with the public, town and parish councils, cultural organisations and the wider business community. Across all these key stakeholders there is a real appetite and energy for making the Borough more of a cultural destination and realising the many benefits that flow from this.

The early consultation has highlighted the following six key priorities:

- 1. Enhancing cultural identity and sense of 'place'.***
- 2. Fostering social interaction and community cohesion.***
- 3. Improving health and well-being.***
- 4. Developing opportunities for children and young people.***
- 5. Supporting economic growth.***
- 6. Maximising partnerships and collaboration.***

Implicit in all of these is the need to significantly enhance the Borough's current cultural offer in order to increase cultural engagement, to ensure that all sectors and stakeholders make a positive contribution and to enable access to cultural opportunities irrespective of background, social or economic circumstances. The extensive current network of cultural organisations in the Borough provides a great platform from which to achieve this step-change.

In addition the consultation on the draft strategy also flagged the significance of connecting the strategy to the Climate Emergency and ambition for the Borough to be carbon neutral. Arts and cultural activities provide great opportunities to both explore and promote themes linked to environmental issues and protecting our planet for future generations. Practical action can also be taken to ensure that cultural activities are as close to carbon neutral as possible and, for example, this is already a key consideration in plans to commission public art linked to the development of the Carnival Hub complex in Wokingham. These themes will be further developed and integrated with the ongoing development of the Action Plan.

»» Cultural Ambitions for 2030

1. Enhance cultural identity and sense of 'place'

- All 17 parishes have a clear cultural footprint and distinct offer that is contributing to the Borough's overall identity and reputation as a dynamic cultural hub.
- High profile cultural events, activities or installations that have a regional and national reputation and profile.
- Cultural enhancement of the public realm, both public art and activities, to create interest and excitement across the Borough.
- Culture and cultural opportunities are integrated into regeneration and renewal plans as part of place-making strategies as the Borough's population grows.
- New and enhanced cultural venues are attracting large numbers of residents and visitors and are financially sustainable.
- The Borough's Town Centres are vibrant and thriving with an extensive, varied and renowned cultural programme across all the main towns.

2. Fostering Social Interaction and Community Cohesion

- An expanded and varied programme of events across the Borough that attracts a wide range of people from different backgrounds and with different interests.
- Cultural organisations know their audiences and make concerted efforts, in partnership with the Council, to reach out and engage with under-represented groups thereby diversifying their audiences and fostering cohesion.
- Cultural activities and programmes break down perceptions and stereotypes and stimulate new ways of thinking.
- The Council's network of libraries and community centres have a popular, thriving and stimulating cultural offer accessed by a wide demographic.
- Communities are actively engaged and involved in developing the Borough's cultural capital and co-producing work that is meaningful to them.

3. Improving Health and Well-being

- 'Cultural Commissioning' and social prescribing of cultural activities by health and social care organisations is an integral part of their activities to improve well-being.
- Cultural organisations, where applicable, fully understand and can evidence and promote their relevance to, and impact on, the health and well-being agenda.
- Links between culture and sports and leisure activities, both indoors and outdoors, are well developed with extensive cross-promotion, joint working, sharing of venues and this is generating mutual benefits for both sectors.
- A lively and regular programme of cultural activities has extended reach and participation rates, reducing social isolation and enhancing emotional and mental well-being.
- Cultural interventions not only improve individual well-being, they also raise awareness of key health issues and increase accessibility and engagement for more vulnerable residents.

»» Cultural Ambitions for 2030

4. Developing Opportunities for Children and Young People

- A focus on those children and young people who might otherwise miss out on great cultural experiences means that every young person can access opportunities whatever their background and can develop their creative potential
- There is a strong cultural offer in early years' settings and libraries catering for young children and their families, supporting the early development of creativity and better attainment in later years
- Schools have embraced culture and creativity within the curriculum with a high proportion of local schools achieving 'Artsmark' accreditation for the quality of their cultural offer to students
- There are a wide range of accessible and exciting cultural activities outside of school settings and during school holidays that are enhancing learning opportunities and fostering creativity.
- Children and young people have a strong 'voice' in determining the nature of the cultural opportunities available to them, both in and out of school settings, and their views have a strong influence in shaping provision, thereby raising engagement and participation.

5. Supporting Economic Growth

- The enhanced cultural reputation of the Borough and major events are bringing in greater number of visitors and boosting spend in the local economy.
- The creative, digital and film industries are thriving in the Borough boosting the overall level and pace of economic growth
- Creative cultural hubs have developed providing spaces for creative start-ups and attracting private-sector investment.
- Reading University and Bracknell & Wokingham College are centres of excellence for cultural learning, providing a pipeline of talent and career pathways into the cultural sector and creative industries.
- The Borough's cultural reputation is supporting inward investment, employment growth and the attraction and retention of skilled workers
- The increased cultural offer locally has supported growth of the night and day time economies helping local centres and businesses thrive.

6. Maximising Partnerships and Collaboration

- There is a more co-ordinated and strategic approach to programming, marketing and promotion of cultural events and activities across the Borough to the benefit of the whole sector and to audiences.
- The use of public assets to host and promote cultural activities is maximised, including those buildings and spaces in Council ownership.
- There are strong and collaborative relationships across tiers of local government with Parish, Town and Borough Councils working collectively to maximise the impact of cultural activities and assets.
- There are strong networks across the growing cultural sector that foster collaboration and innovation, raising quality and increasing engagement.
- With support and investment from the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), collaboration between the public and private sectors is embedded with strong business support for cultural activities and organisations.
- There are close links with major national institutions that are helping to drive up standards, embed innovation and best practice, raise profile and increase funding into the cultural sector and associated initiatives.

»» Developing and Delivering the Strategy

Appropriately 'Partnerships and Collaboration' has emerged from consultation as one of the key priorities for a cultural strategy. The scale of ambition outlined above means that delivery of the strategy can only be achieved with the sustained engagement, support and enthusiasm of a wide range of stakeholders working together. The Council's investment in a new Cultural Development Officer post in April 2020 reflects the importance of establishing capacity to support this collaboration and joint-working.

A key function of this strategy and the initial action plan is to garner ongoing feedback and ideas and, in particular, to continue to gather partner and stakeholder contributions to further develop the action plan over time and to foster involvement and collaboration. The establishment of the Arts & Cultural Alliance in October 2020 as a key partnership vehicle for delivering the strategy is a major step forward and pays testimony to the enthusiasm and commitment of the many cultural organisations in the Borough. The Alliance has played a key role in developing the initial action plan and will continue to be pivotal to the delivery of the strategy into the future.

The action plan will also inform the Council's medium term financial plan setting process and the identification of opportunities for funding from other sources, acknowledging that certainly in the short-term the funding environment remains challenging.



➤➤ Indicative Cultural Events

International Street Concert



Wokingham Children's Book Festival

➤➤ Indicative Cultural Events

Dinton Outdoor Cinema



Woccea

Photo Credit - Title Page from top

Left Bottom - Wokingham International Street Concert - Wokingham Town Council Event,;

Page 4 - picture from online Art Challenge 2020 e.g. by creator Helen Wright;

Page 8 - Wokingham Children's Book Festival - Photographer Stewart Turkington (Authors: Adam and Charlotte Guillain) Wokingham Town Council Event,

Page 9 - Wokingham International Street Concert - (Act: Trenchtown Experience);

Wokingham Children's Book Festival - Photographer Stewart Turkington (Author: Clare Bevan)

Page 10 - Dinton Outdoor Cinema - Photographer Stewart Turkington **Bottom Right** - Woccea App logo



Arts & Culture Strategy: The Cultural Alliance Action Plan, April 2021 – April 2022

Year 1 Action Plan This annual action plan will deliver the themes and priorities of our Arts & Culture Strategy informed through consultation and research. The action plan seeks to deliver the overall strategy aim: to increase opportunities for taking part in and to benefit from arts & culture activities. We recognise that there is a plethora of different cultural events that could be included here but unless they add value to the themes we have not included them here.

Note on the Corona Virus: We recognise that it is possible that not all events will be able to go ahead due to the ongoing pandemic which has seriously impacted the cultural sector as well as disrupting the planning of activities and meaningful engagement. Where possible if events or activities are unable to go ahead due to the Corona Virus, virtual events will replace these. The pandemic has also, if anything, further highlighted the value of arts & culture to mental health and well-being and the Alliance believes there is a real appetite to re-engage once conditions allow. With a vaccine offering hope as the year progresses, the Alliance will strive to ensure a rich and varied cultural offer that offers widespread opportunities for all.

Outcomes

By 2022, by working in partnership, we will have:

- Increased opportunities for residents to enjoy and co-create arts & cultural activity, reaching more people who are not yet taking part;
- Improved people's quality of life and wellbeing through reducing barriers to great arts & cultural experiences;
- Provided support for local arts & culture practitioners and groups to inform, inspire and enable delivery of great arts & culture activities;
- Raised awareness of the wider benefits of arts & culture, particularly their impact on our health and wellbeing.

Our themes:

1. Enhancing cultural identity and sense of 'place'

2. **Fostering social interaction and community cohesion.**
3. **Improving health and well-being.**
4. **Developing opportunities for children and young people.**
5. **Supporting economic growth.**
6. **Maximising partnerships and collaboration.**

Monitoring our progress: The Arts and Culture Development officer will administer six monthly updates with information provided by the Cultural Alliance review group will drive our objectives. A review of the action plan will take place bi-annually, in September to review progress on current targets and then in March to set new targets for the coming year.

1. Enhancing cultural identity and sense of 'place'.

Indicator	Action	Target	Responsible	Target Date	Status
1.1	International Day	To have an international day that celebrates cultural diversity within the Borough. To look at ways that this event can be expanded in future years into Towns and Parishes.	WTC AND WBC	2020/21 tbc	
1.2	Continue to promote the Wocca App to add virtual online events and when possible in real life Arts and Culture events. The augmented reality part of Wocca,	To work with communications and artistic contributors to update the listings for events on a regular basis. Possible support	WBC and cultural contributors across the borough.	Ongoing	

	Wocca Explorers, will encourage people to engage in the unique heritage and landscape of the Borough.	from Kickstart programme.			
1.3	Arts & Culture Asset Mapping, for example Arts venues and community centres.	To work with the Town & Parish Councils and partners to develop a 'map' of cultural assets that reflects the distinctiveness of 'place' and identity across the Borough.	Town & Parish Councils Cultural Alliance	March 2022	
1.4	Multi-cultural dance programme.	To work with the BAME forum and organisations to create a Dance programme.	BAME Organisations, WBC, Towns and Parishes.	Spring 2022	

2. Fostering social interaction and community cohesion.

Indicator	Action	Target	Responsible	Target Date	Status
2.1	Family festival of music/art fun day to celebrate being able to come	To have a festival of the arts, a fun day for families with children. With	WBC, Cultural Alliance.	September 2021	

	together again at Cantley Park.	possible satellite sites across, Earley and Shinfield. A range of celebrations to reflect the demographic and cultural diversity of the borough.			
2.2	Pride Celebration Day	Work in Partnership with Various LGBT community partners to create a Pride Celebration Day. Which Towns and Parishes encouraged to host satellite events. At look at hosting a event in different locations each year.	Partners and WBC	July 2021	
2.3	Wokingham Festival	Wokingham Festival will continue to run in it's usual slot.	Wokingham Festival Partners	August 2021	

3. Improving health and well-being.					
Indicator	Action	Target	Responsible	Target Date	Status
3.1	Work with Communications to reach out to the community to create a light festival across the Borough where residents can create their own display in the windows of their own homes.	Public led light festival.	WBC Comms and CDO.	Spring 2021	
3.2	Virtual dance and leisure video's to support health and well-being. Work internally with communications to boost reach of these video's.	Currently available.	WBC	Beginning of 2021 ongoing	
3.3	Work with 'Project Joy' to ensure a strong arts & culture offer linked to social prescribing and tackling isolation.	Arts & cultural organisations connected to the Joy platform with a programme of activities available.	WBC Cultural Alliance	April 2021 and ongoing.	
3.4	Isolation programme	Work with Adult services within the	WBC	January 2021 and ongoing.	

		council and other organisations to support isolated older people through arts workshops.			
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4. Developing opportunities for children and young people.

Indicator	Action	Target	Responsible	Target Date	Status
4.1	To form partnership with Schools.	Form partnership to with Artwork to support schools to be able to deliver Artmark.	Artworks & WBC.	2021/22	
4.2	To investigate and explore establishing a Cultural Education Partnership (CEP) as a sustainable vehicle for developing the offer for children and young people.	Test appetite for and develop a proposition for establishing a CEP	Cultural Alliance	March 2022	
4.3	Children's art programme. Using	Series of workshops for	Partners and WBC.	Ongoing	

	Library venues where possible.	children covering a range of ages.			
4.4	More opportunities for young people in Arts and Culture.	To investigate and explore establishing more opportunities for young people to gain work experience in the Cultural sector in Wokingham Borough through existing partnerships.	WBC	Ongoing	

5. Supporting economic growth.

Indicator	Action	Target	Responsible	Target Date	Status
5.1	Arrange and plan a new virtual market for Wokingham local businesses similar to the Christmas Virtual market using Peddler.	To support local businesses to continue to have an income.	WBC	Easter 2021	
5.2	Christmas in real life market to include a craft market.	Food and craft stall holders.	WBC	Christmas 2021	

5.3	Public Art piece to be commissioned and fundraised for.	Sub Committee for Carnival hub to make action marketing and fundraising plan.	The Carnival Hub Sub-committee.	Timeline TBC	
5.4	Local author events.	Summer 2021 if possible.	WBC	Summer/Autumn 2021	
5.5	Indoor Cinema	Create a series of screenings.	WBC	Autumn 2021	
5.5	Public Art exhibition	Create a exhibition for the public by local artist's.	WBC / More Arts	Autumn 2021	
5.6	Christmas Market and Ice-skating rink.	To host a Christmas Market and Ice-skating rink.	WBC.	Winter 2021	

6. Maximising partnerships and collaboration.

Indicator	Action	Target	Responsible	Target Date	Status
6.1	Expand the Cultural Alliance.	Expand the Cultural Alliance including diversifying the membership of the Alliance.	Cllr Charlotte Haitham – Taylor	Ongoing across 2021	
6.2	Implement the Arts & Cultural Strategy.	Maintain delivery and support the transition of the Arts Development Strategy.	The Cultural Alliance	Ongoing across 2021	

6.3	Annual review of the Arts Development Strategy priorities, outcomes and activity.	Review and assess the contribution the Arts Development Strategy priorities, outcomes and activity, deliver against the Council's strategic priorities and outcomes.	The Cultural Alliance	February 2022	
6.4	Create more partnerships using green spaces within the Borough to host events.	Review, develop and maintain appropriate strategic partnerships that involve the use of the arts to deliver the Council's strategic priorities and outcomes.	The Cultural Alliance & WBC.	Ongoing as soon as safe to do so.	
6.5	Support Arts Organisations to develop marketing strategies to boost programmes attendance.	Deliver training on social media and other marketing strategies.	WBC	2021/22	

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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:	10.02.21
Service:	Strategy and Commissioning (Place)
Project, policy or service EQIA relates to:	Arts & Culture Strategy
Completed by:	Grant Thornton
Has the EQIA been discussed at services team meeting:	Team Meeting: Date tbc
Signed off by:	Nigel Bailey
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 Council currently does not have a cultural strategy but has an aspiration that the Borough's cultural offer will grow and develop into the future. The strategy has the potential over time to significantly enhance the cultural offer in the Borough to the benefit of the vast majority of residents, improving quality of life and enhancing well-being. Providing access to arts and culture for those who, for a variety of reasons, might otherwise miss out, including our more vulnerable residents, is a key priority. The strategy is closely aligned with the principles and priorities of key national agencies such as Arts Council England (ACE) and Public Health England (PHE) and has the potential to leverage external funding. The 10 year strategy is potentially a key strand for delivering the Council's The strategy is potentially a key strand for delivering the Council's Community Vision: 'for Wokingham Borough to be a great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business.' In particular it addresses the linked

strategic priority for 'Enriching Lives' but it also contributes to 'Safe, Strong Communities' as well as addressing elements of the Health and Well-being Strategy.

The decision to be taken by the Executive is to approve a final strategy following a consultation with stakeholders, including the general public, that has taken place since April 2020. The strategy has an explicit priority to foster social interaction and community cohesion. Whilst the detail of events and activities that will be developed is not fully known, arts and culture are recognised as providing a powerful medium for breaking down preconceptions and stereotypes and stimulating new ways of thinking. Annual Action Plans will support the delivery of the strategy on an ongoing basis.

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 etc) have/will be consulted and informed about the project or changes:

The Strategy has been developed initially under the auspices of a cross-party members working group chaired by the Deputy Chief Executive and involving officers from a range of services including communications, localities, leisure and education as well as strategy and commissioning (Place). The draft strategy was considered by the Executive in April 2020 and approved as a consultation draft. In October 2020 the Arts & Culture Alliance was formed as a delivery partnership to take forward implementation of the strategy. The Alliance has representation from a range of stakeholders including arts & cultural organisations, Town & Parish Councils and with cross-party Borough Councillor involvement. Internally all Directorates have had a role in shaping the strategy and all Directors have been consulted.

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

The primary beneficiaries are the general population and local arts and cultural service providers. A key aim of the strategy is to grow both quantitatively and qualitatively the cultural offer in the Borough, growing audiences and extending reach and impact, including on our more vulnerable communities.

Secondary reputational and economic benefits extend to the business community.

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

The key priorities within the strategy are as follows:

1. Enhancing cultural identity and sense of 'place'.
2. Fostering social interaction and community cohesion.
3. Improving health and well-being.
4. Developing opportunities for children and young people.
5. Supporting economic growth.
6. Maximising partnerships and collaboration.

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:	Positive	The strategy will promote equality of opportunity between diverse communities and to enhance their participation in society. Celebrating diversity is an explicit cultural theme.
Gender:	No impact	It is considered that the strategy will provide additional opportunities for engagement and participation in cultural activities and will not adversely affect any one gender more than another.
Disabilities:	Positive	It is likely that specific provision will be made to meet the needs of some segments of the population to enable them to access cultural opportunities, e.g. 'relaxed' performances.
Age:	Positive	The strategy has a particular priority for children and young people with a focus on those children and young people who might otherwise miss out on great cultural experiences so that every young person can access opportunities whatever their background and can develop their creative potential.

		Cultural activities for the older generation can be a means of reducing social isolation and enhancing well-being and the strategy has an aim to increase 'cultural commissioning' to this end. The benefits of an enhanced cultural offer will provide benefits across all age-groups.
Sexual orientation:	No impact	Potentially access to a wider range of arts and cultural opportunities.
Religion/belief:	No impact	Potentially access to a wider range of arts and cultural opportunities.
Gender re-assignment:	No impact	Potentially access to a wider range of arts and cultural opportunities.
Pregnancy and Maternity:	No impact	Potentially access to a wider range of arts and cultural opportunities.
Marriage and civil partnership:	No impact	Potentially access to a wider range of arts and cultural opportunities.

N.B. Whilst detail isn't known at this stage Arts & Culture are widely recognised, across many arts forms, to provide a lens to explore and promote a wide-range of societal issues including equalities, cohesion and social justice.

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 or 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: Nigel Bailey

Date: 11.02.2021

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Arts and Culture Strategy Consultation Summary

Between Autumn 2020 and Winter 2020 we ran a consultation on the Draft Arts and Culture Strategy 2020-2030. A total of 115 responses were received, of which 99 were from residents of the Borough, 5 where from Parish and Town Councils and 11 where from Wokingham based cultural organisations.

The three different surveys asked a variety of questions in order to ascertain the following: whether anything was missing from the Strategy; was there agreement with the objectives set out in the strategy; whether there was anything to add to the objectives; whether the purpose of the document was clear; the desired outcomes of the strategy; and what the most effective methods to achieve these outcomes may be.

Questions asked and summary from Public Survey

- Would you like to be kept informed about arts and culture events in the borough?
- Please tell us where you usually go for arts events and activities?
- If you do not visit venues in Wokingham borough, please tell us why not -- what are we missing in the borough that leads you to leave the borough for your arts and culture?
- What creative venues or events do you value in your local area?
- Where in the borough would you like to see more arts and culture events happening? Select your top three choices.
- What sorts of events would you like to see in these places?
- One of the key priorities in the draft strategy is improving health and wellbeing. Which activities below do you think would improve residents' health and wellbeing? Select your top two choices.
- If you could attend three local arts events happening across a year which would they be? Select your top three choices

A recurring theme within the feedback from the public survey was of respondents referencing that they were keen to have a dedicated cultural venue and that in regards to cultural activities within the Borough they were either not aware of activities at all or found out about them too late. This will be picked up through the Partnership working section of the action plan. As a result of the consultation we now have a whole plethora of information to be used to influence the accompanying action plan.

Here are two examples of how feedback from the consultation and the other information gathered has directly been fed into the action plan:

One of the key priorities in the draft strategy is improving health and wellbeing. Which activities below do you think would improve residents' health and wellbeing? Select your top two choices.

Arts on Prescription for older people who are isolated or experiencing loneliness (43)
47%

Public art, such as the mosaic trail in Wokingham town centre or sculptures in new housing developments (38) 42%

Comedy festival (25) 28%

Couch to 5k arts inspired event (15)17%

Well-being week (14) 15%

Community choir competition (14) 15%

Other (14) 15%

Strictly Come Dancing inspired competition (5) 6%

Local bake-off competition (3) 3%

Britain's Got Talent inspired competition (3) 3%

If you could attend three local arts events happening across a year which would they be? Select your top three choices.

Most popular: Arts exhibition and fairs (37)

2nd most popular: Music concert (29)

Joint 3rd most popular: Literary talks or festivals (25) Play (25)

Please tell us where you usually go for arts events and activities:

Top three answer's:

Reading 36

London 25

Wokingham 15

Questions asked and summary from Town and Parishes

- What do you think of the strategy?
- How does this strategy link to your plans over the next two years/next five years?
- How does this strategy link to your organisation's longer-term goals and mission?
- What do you think is missing?
- What do you think you may be able to contribute? For example: space, funding, other resources, ideas, advocacy, anything else?
- How might your local communities / stakeholders benefit?

It was noted that the responding Parish and Town Councils mentioned the need for a dedicated arts venue.

The committee noted no details within the strategy on how the current lack of performance specific venues within the Borough might be rectified over the next 10 years. With such a strong vision to increase engagement with the Arts and Culture, the need for an increase in quality venues should be expected? Wokingham Town Council

'In particular, the Arts could be improved, by using existing infrastructure to establish possibly Art Galleries' Woodley Town Council

It was felt that the draft strategy needs to now take into account Covid – 19, which is one of the major changes to the updated strategy.

'This draft strategy doesn't feel like it takes any account of the Covid situation, and the impact this has had, and will likely continue to have, on organisations within the arts and culture sphere.' Wokingham Without Parish Council

Lastly there was a recurring theme of asking how the Council's Climate Emergency status would feed into the strategy.

'How will Wokingham Borough Council's Climate Emergency status and the subsequent Carbon Neutrality Action Plan feed into the thinking for Arts and Culture within the Borough?' Wokingham Town Council

Questions asked and summary from Arts and Culture Organisations

- What do you think of the strategy, do you think there is anything missing?
- How does this strategy link to your plans over the next two years/next five years? How does this strategy link to your organisation's longer term goals and mission?
- Does your organisation work specifically to target hard-to-reach groups in the area? If so which groups?
- What do you think you may be able to contribute? For example: space, funding, other resources, ideas, advocacy, anything else?

This feedback covered a wide geographic area and in the main was very specific to the individual art organisations. The Cultural Alliance has a membership that reflects this and will continue and update the Action Plan in order to achieve goals.

'Our charitable purpose is 'To promote the enjoyment of theatre in Wokingham and the surrounding area'. We interpret that as promoting enjoyment both through participation in theatre making as well as being a member of the audience. This is absolutely in line with your strategy. We had planned to spend the next 2 years on major building development, instead we will be working out how to make theatrical performance work in our theatre space in the 'new normal' Covid19 conditions.' Wokingham Theatre

In summary there is much work to be done to achieve the action plan and most feedback has been positive and supportive of the strategy.

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INDICATIVE ARTS AND CULTURE EVENTS Please note all events could be subject to change due to the ongoing pandemic.

VENUE	JANUARY	FEBRUARY	MARCH	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUGUST	SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER
TOWN CENTRE				International Wildlife, Poetry, Book and Theatre Days	International - Dance Day, World Tai Chi Day, Cultural Month	Music Festival 	Euro 2021, Olympics 	Olympics 			Christmas Markets Santa's Grotto Ice Rink TC 	Christmas Markets Santa's Grotto Ice Rink TC 
WOKINGHAM/E LMS FIELD							Wimbledon Live Screen 	Outdoor Cinema 	Arts Trail ARTS TRAIL			Carol Concerts 
WOODLEY								Outdoor Cinema 	Arts Trail ARTS TRAIL			Living Advent Calendar 
TWYFORD									Arts Trail ARTS TRAIL			
OTHER PARISHES												
LEISURE CENTRES												
LODDON VALLEY	Tea Dance Family Festival 	Strictly Dance Family Festival 	Affordable Arts Fair Family Festival 								Christmas Markets Santa's Grotto 	Christmas Markets Santa's Grotto Primary School Carol Concert 
ABORFIELD									Outdoor Cinema 		Maestro Music Festival 	Maestro Music Festival 
PARKS & OPEN SPACES									Outdoor Cinema 			
CANTLEY PARK		Wokingham Half-Marathon 		Business It's a Knockout 	Tai Chi in Park Masterclass Business It's a Knockout 	Tai Chi in Park Masterclass 	Proms in the Park Wimbledon Live Tennis Events Music Festival 	Proms in the Park 	Proms in the Park 		Fireworks 	Santa Run 
SCHOOLS												
LIBRARIES												
ALL	Book Festival 	Book Festival 	Book Festival 			Pride 				Black History Month 		
COUNTRY PARKS	Sculpture Trail 	Sculpture Trail 	Sculpture Trail 	Classic Car Show 			Marvlous Proms in the Park 	Proms in the Park 			Festival of Light 	

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TITLE	Delivering the Housing 1-4-5 +100 Challenge
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 25 March 2021
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Finance and Housing - John Kaiser

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To improve and streamline the approval processes for new housing projects that contribute towards the Council's **Housing 1-4-5 +100 Challenge**.

The Housing 1-4-5 Challenge aims to deliver 1,000 additional homes, led by the Council, over a 4 year period and providing an average 5% overall return to the Council on any investment. The Challenge is a key element of the Council's corporate delivery plan and draft Housing Strategy ensuring that new homes in Borough are of high quality, sustainable and are the **'Right Homes in the Right Places'**

The recent '+100' addition reflects an additional challenge identified as part of the current work around developing a robust new Local Plan. The Council is looking to lead on the development of an additional c100 new homes a year, predominantly on brownfield sites, to help bridge any shortfall in housing numbers against the figure prescribed by Government

The proposed changes will ensure a more flexible and agile approach, enabling the Council and its housing companies to progress schemes more efficiently and be in a better position to take advantage of new opportunities.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive:

- 1) delegate authority to the Deputy Chief Executive, in consultation with the Lead Member for Finance and Housing, approval of the transfer of land or property to the Council's housing companies for the purposes of providing new homes to address agreed local housing need and where appropriate at less than market value in line with The General Housing Consents 2013 or subsequent amendments;
- 2) delegate authority to the Deputy Chief Executive, in consultation with the Lead Member for Finance and Housing, to approve the funding (grant and/or loans) of any new homes provided by the Council through its Housing Revenue Account or its housing companies provided the funding required has been approved as part of the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan and within existing borrowing approvals and the new homes contribute to the Housing 1-4-5 Challenge and address agreed local housing need;

- 3) delegate authority to the Deputy Chief Executive, in consultation with WBC (Holdings) Ltd, to approve the interest rate at which any long term loan is charged to the Council's housing companies for any new housing developments

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Council's Community Vision has as one of its key priorities the need to provide the right homes in the right places. It sets the aim to offer residents quality, affordable, sustainable homes fit for the future.

Housing 1-4-5 +100 Challenge

To support the delivery of this priority the Lead Member for Finance & Housing set what is now known as the Housing 1-4-5 Challenge – to deliver 1,000 Council-led homes over a 4 year period providing an overall 5% return to the council on any required investment. To date 263 new homes have either been completed or are in development with plans for a further 753 under active consideration. By leading on these new homes the Council believes it can set the standard for quality, sustainability and affordability.

The recent '+100' addition reflects an additional challenge identified as part of the current work around developing a robust new Local Plan. The Council is looking to lead on the development of an additional c100 new homes a year, predominantly on brownfield sites, to help bridge any shortfall in housing numbers against the figure prescribed by Government

Overall funding for these projects has been agreed as part of the Council's current MTFP (Medium Term Financial Plan) including the use of ring-fenced Right to Buy receipts and Section 106 affordable housing receipts, other investment in the form of grant funding and long term loan finance.

Proposed changes to approval process

The increased focus on Council-led housing projects and the growing number of projects under active consideration has led to a review of the current approval process and a recognition that it needs to be streamlined. For the council and its housing companies to progress schemes efficiently and effectively and be able to take advantage of opportunities when they appear there needs to be a quicker and more flexible approval process whilst still ensuring schemes are in line with Council priorities and agreed funding streams.

As such it is proposed that the approval of new Council-led housing schemes, including the required funding and related land and property transfers to the Council's housing companies, be delegated to the Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer in consultation with the Lead Member for Finance & Housing.

Any schemes to be approved and progressed under this proposed delegated authority must meet the criteria set out below. Any schemes not meeting these criteria would require approval by Executive.

1. Scheme must meet an agreed housing need as identified by Housing Commissioning and agreed by the Lead Member for Finance & Housing
2. Any housing companies' scheme should be approved by both WBC (Holdings) Ltd and either Loddon Homes Board or Berry Brook Homes Board

3. Consultation on any HRA scheme should be carried out with TLIP (Tenant & Leaseholder Improvement Panel)
4. Scheme should provide an overall 5% return on investment for the Council and its housing companies
5. Grant and loan funding required is available within the current MTFP or HRA and within existing borrowing approvals
6. The scheme is viable within the Business Plans for the housing companies and/or HRA and within existing borrowing approvals
7. Any property or land transfer to the housing companies at less than market value must be in line with The General Housing Consents 2013 (or subsequent amendments)

Proposed changes to financing structure

The Council's two wholly owned housing companies, Loddon Homes and Berry Brook Homes, were set up to provide high quality homes and housing services for their residents and to generate a financial return to the Council that can be invested back into the local community and services.

On most new schemes there will be an element of long term financing with a loan agreed between the Council and its companies and paid back over an agreed period. The interest rate charged to the companies for these long term loans can be a key driver in securing that anticipated financial return from the companies.

It is therefore proposed that the level of interest rate charged by the Council to its housing companies will vary on a scheme by scheme basis. Whilst the intention is to secure a reasonable financial return to the Council over and above the cost of its own borrowing (PWLB rates), the level of interest rate agreed should not impact on the financial viability of the scheme or on their long term business plan of the company.

This report seeks delegated authority to the Deputy Chief Executive, in consultation with WBC (Holdings) Ltd, to agree that long term interest rate on a scheme by scheme basis subject to viability.

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 (Housing Delivery funding stream in MTFP)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Financial Year (21/22)	£29,553,000	N/A	Capital
Financial Year (22/23)	£31,463,000	N/A	Capital
Financial Year (23/24)	£16,522,000	N/A	Capital

Other Financial Information
None

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation
Discussions have taken place with Boards of both Loddon Homes and Berry Brook Homes

Public Sector Equality Duty
Not applicable

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>
In line with Council’s vision and emerging Local Plan all new homes to be built as close to carbon neutral as possible

List of Background Papers
None

Contact Graham Ebers	Service Deputy Chief Executive
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TITLE	Employment Hub
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 25 March 2021
WARD	None Specific
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Place and Growth
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Business and Economic Development - Stuart Munro

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

The pandemic is predicted to have a significant and long-lasting negative impact on the economy. These impacts will include increased unemployment and a challenging jobs market. Wokingham Borough does not have any DWP / Job Centre Plus presence with residents having to travel to Reading or Bracknell to access support. This creates additional barriers and costs especially for those facing greater challenges or the ‘hidden’ unemployed. Accessible local service provision will encourage take-up of services and positive employment and skills outcomes that in turn will improve well-being as well as supporting economic recovery. As a new initiative that will require prioritisation in the context of scarce resources an Executive decision is required.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive:

- 1) approves in principle the establishment of an Employment Hub as outlined in this report;
- 2) delegates final approval of detailed proposals to the Executive Member for Business and Economic Development in consultation with the Deputy Chief Executive and Director, Place and Growth;
- 3) approves a supplementary estimate of £90k to cover the implementation and first year running costs of the Employment Hub and notes a £10k p.a. pressure regarding running costs in future years.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The pandemic is predicted to have a significant and long-lasting negative impact on the economy which most commentators expect to be exacerbated by our leaving the EU, at least in the short / medium term despite a ‘deal’ now being in place. These impacts will include increased unemployment and a challenging jobs market. A smaller economy with employers in survival mode, recently redundant skilled workers and new graduates competing for the same jobs as school leavers will all make rising unemployment inevitable and the need for a coordinated response essential.

Recognising this DWP nationally are significantly increasing their capacity to support people and in particular young people. In this context it is particularly noteworthy that Wokingham Borough has no DWP (Job Centre Plus) facility with residents having to

access services at Bracknell or Reading, creating a significant additional barrier, particularly for the more vulnerable. DWP have confirmed that if we were able to establish a hub that in particular met the needs of young people then they would look to resource with a dedicated Work Coach that could work in partnership with other local services to provide a comprehensive all-age employment support service.

Wokingham Borough has considerable experience of successfully delivering a comparable service through its previous involvement in the Berkshire-wide 'Elevate' project. The proposed employment and training support hub would mirror this model led by Economic Development and NEET Prevention teams and the Optalis Supported Employment Service (SES) with the involvement of a range of partners:

- DWP Job Centre Plus;
- National Careers Service;
- Other local providers (e.g. apprenticeship and training providers such as Prince's Trust and Prevista, FE colleges and local voluntary sector);
- Employer support services.

Officers are currently assessing potential locations in or close to Wokingham Town Centre that will maximise local accessibility across the Borough and developing detailed, costed proposals based on the specification of requirements.

As Government business support schemes come to an end, especially the furloughing of staff (scheme now extended on a tapering basis to September), there are widespread predictions of a further spike in unemployment on top of the increases already seen. There is therefore a degree of urgency to expedite proposals and implementation to ensure support is available in a timely manner to meet increased local need.

BACKGROUND

The pandemic is predicted to have a significant and long-lasting negative impact on the economy which most commentators expect to be exacerbated by our leaving the EU, at least in the short / medium term despite a 'deal' now being in place. These impacts will include increased unemployment and a faster pace of digitalisation and automation leading to a challenging jobs market, particularly for those who need to retrain mid-career. A smaller economy with employers in survival mode, recently redundant skilled workers and new graduates competing for the same jobs as school leavers will all make rising unemployment inevitable and the need for a coordinated response essential. Whilst the impacts on opportunities for young people are likely to be particularly severe it is anticipated that they will be felt across all age-groups.

The Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) analysis of the pandemic's impact on Berkshire's labour market concluded that:

- The employment impacts of Covid 19 have been greater for young people and job entry for them could be significantly affected by future recruitment freezes. A higher than average proportion of young people in Berkshire (7.5%) will enter the labour market in the next 5 years;
- Demand has fallen considerably in sectors such as retail, aviation, hospitality, tourism, admin & support services, arts and entertainment and recreation;
- The full extent of the impact of Covid 19 on the economy in Berkshire is not yet known but there will be long term implications on the availability of entry level and lower skilled jobs;
- Young people, women and low skilled workers will be disproportionately affected.

Recognising the scale of impacts, DWP nationally are significantly increasing their capacity to support people and in particular young people. Arguably the most important action the Council could take to support people through this employability crisis would be to enhance the level of locally available, accessible and individually tailored support. In this context it is particularly noteworthy that Wokingham Borough has no DWP (Job Centre Plus) facility in the Borough with residents having to access services at Bracknell or Reading, creating a significant additional barrier, particularly for the more vulnerable. DWP are particularly keen to establish and strengthen 'youth hubs' and Slough, Bracknell and Reading are all planning to re-open / strengthen their young people hubs in addition to existing Job Centre Plus facilities. DWP have confirmed that if we were able to establish a hub then they would look to resource with a dedicated Work Coach and would, in addition, encourage a separate bid for such a hub to employ an additional support / co-ordinator post. Whilst DWP are particularly focused on meeting the needs of young people, in Wokingham Borough we believe that this could be incorporated within an all age service to meet wider employability support needs in the context of smaller (albeit still significant) numbers in comparison with our neighbouring more deprived authorities.

Previously WBC was a partner in the Berkshire-wide 'Elevate' Project established to tackle youth unemployment and funded by the European Social Fund (ESF). Not only did this demonstrate an underlying and unmet need in the Borough, even in more 'normal' times, it also proved the efficacy of the model and the capability locally to work collaboratively with partners to deliver positive outcomes – indeed WBC was the only authority to meet all of its targets in a programme complicated by the significant burden of ESF rules and bureaucracy. Led by the Economic Development and NEET

Prevention teams and the Optalis Supported Employment Service (SES), Elevate was located in Wokingham library with the involvement of a range of partners:

- DWP Job Centre Plus
- National Careers Service
- Other local providers (Princes Trust and Colleges etc).

The Elevate hub was closed in September 2019 after ESF funding came to an end.

BUSINESS CASE

The Elevate hub, at the time focused on young people with very significant barriers to employment, delivered positive and hugely valued outcomes for local young people even in a period of high employment, especially in Wokingham Borough. Needs and likely demand are already significantly greater as a result of the pandemic with the position anticipated to deteriorate further, especially when the furlough scheme comes to an end. As at the end of December 2020 (the latest available figures at the time of writing) unemployment in Wokingham was as follows, with comparator figures for December 2019:

Claimant count by age - not seasonally adjusted (December 2020)

	Wokingham (Level)	Wokingham (%)	South East (%)	Great Britain (%)
Aged 16+	3,550	3.4	5.2	6.3
Aged 16 To 17	5	0.1	0.2	0.4
Aged 18 To 24	700	6.2	7.6	8.9
Aged 25 To 49	1,910	3.4	5.6	6.8
Aged 50+	930	2.8	4.1	4.9

Claimant count by age - not seasonally adjusted (December 2019)

Age	Wokingham	Wokingham	South East	Great Britain
All categories:	1,085	1.3	2.4	3.6
Age 16+				
Aged 16-17	0	0	*	*
Aged 18-24	170	1.6	*	*
Aged 25-49	660	0.8	*	*
Aged 50+	255	1.3	*	*

Source: ONS Claimant count by sex and age

Note: % is number of claimants as a proportion of resident population of the same age

These figures represent a very substantial increase even before the full employment impacts of the pandemic emerge:

- There has been a 227% overall increase in people claiming unemployment benefits;
- There has been a 312% increase in young people 18 -24 claiming benefits (the hardest hit group);

- The over 50s have seen a 265% increase;
- There has also been a 68% increase in young people 16 -18 who are not in employment education or training (NEET) over the same period.

In addition to these official claimant figures we also know that for Wokingham Borough in particular 'hidden' unemployment is a significant issue with young people supported by parents and older people relying on savings rather than claiming benefits.

To respond to this high level of existing and predicted increasing need it is proposed to establish a local employment and training hub in or close to Wokingham town centre which offers access to a range of services which will help people to overcome barriers and support them to access sustained employment or further education. The hub would seek to incorporate existing local employment services: NEET Prevention (a service that irrespective of this proposal requires to be re-located and fulfils the statutory duty WBC has to ensure young people 16 & 17, and up to 25 for those with SEND, participate in education), Optalis SES, National Careers Service and possibly Wokingham Job Support. It should also be able to accommodate partnership working on an outreach / sessional basis, for example:

- Early Intervention
- Youth Service
- Youth offending service
- Leaving care
- Youth counselling services
- Education and training providers (e.g. Princes Trust, Colleges, Adult learning providers)
- JCP staff
- Business Support

The hub would also offer access to IT so that service users can undertake independent careers research and job hunting activity.

The aim is to create a space in which people can access expert advice and support to help them navigate their way into sustained employment or education and also provide an access point to local employers for advice on employing local people and / or participating in linked initiatives such as the Kickstart programme for young people, the national adult social care recruitment campaign, apprenticeships, supported employment and volunteering or work experience. This would include embracing the Council's own role as an employer with links to relevant services and, in partnership with Optalis SES, as an exemplar for delivering employment outcomes for those with disabilities and young people. Initially based in Wokingham but offering a Borough-wide service, over time as the Employment Hub develops it is anticipated that it will be able to offer a 'hub and spoke' model with outreach to other localities in the Borough.

The Employment Hub would particularly focus on:

- Those with low or limited skills to enable them to compete in a very competitive labour market;
- Young people to meet DWP funding requirements whilst offering an all age service;
- Retraining older people to get back into work;

- Recruiting into the caring professions that support the well-being of our residents, for example care worker training to meet the workforce needs of our care homes across the Borough.
- Opportunities in growth sectors or where there is employer demand, for example the green economy or film production;
- Short training opportunities for high demand employment sectors such as the CSCS card (required for work on construction sites), safe lifting (for work in the care sector) and food Hygiene etc.;
- Jobs matching service to meet local employer needs.

Options are currently being explored based on the following accommodation requirements:

- Town centre location with good access to public transport open five days per week;
- Accessible to people with mobility issues;
- Publicly available computers to support people to job hunt independently and to deliver training and digital skills;
- Welcoming reception area;
- Space for at least 4 permanent members of staff and dedicated interview spaces ideally with a confidential area;
- Space for other employment support agencies to work from the centre on a sessional basis;
- Accommodating the staff team and other agencies will require a minimum of 6 desks;
- Space for a range of information related to employment training and education e.g. college prospectus' traineeship and employer information, careers information.
- Space to deliver training and employer facing workshops / meetings.

It is estimated that floorspace of approximately 150 m2 could accommodate these needs if appropriately configured.

Work is currently underway to identify suitable premises and this work will be expedited to ensure timely delivery along with more detailed proposals and costs.

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)			
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£90k	£90k	£80k Capital £10k Revenue
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£10k	£10k	Revenue

Other Financial Information
<p>Costs are likely to be building / location specific and until suitable premises are identified cannot be fully determined. Based on experience with accommodating the Elevate project it is anticipated that capital costs of refurbishment and fit-out to meet the requirements for an employment hub would be in the region of £80,000 with annual premises running costs of approximately £10,000 p.a.</p> <p>Unemployment has significant social and economic costs to the public purse both direct and indirect. Whilst the majority of these relate to benefits and health that are not the responsibility of the local authority we do know that unemployment also causes stress on individuals and families that can result in increased demands for Council services, although this is difficult to quantify.</p> <p>Whilst funding the establishment and running costs of the Employment Support Hub directly will fall on the Council, it will benefit from partner contributions in terms of the services offered and associated staff resources.</p>

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation
A public and client facing communications plan will be developed alongside project implementation to promote availability of the service and take-up.

Public Sector Equality Duty
The project will focus on those disadvantaged in the labour market and is therefore likely to positively impact on those with protected characteristics. It is proposed that an equalities assessment is undertaken once a location for the employment hub has been identified so that accessibility issues can be fully addressed.

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>
Insofar as local access to employment support services will obviate the need to travel further afield then some positive impact on emissions will accrue. There is scope to link the employment support hub to the promotion of employment opportunities in the ‘green economy’ as a growth sector.

List of Background Papers
None

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TITLE	Home to School Transport Policy (5-16years) and Travel Assistance Policy (16 years + with SEND) Consultation and Home to School Transport Appeals Process Update
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Executive on Thursday, 25 March 2021
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Children's Services - Carol Cammiss
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Children's Services - UllaKarin Clark

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

The purpose of this report is to:

1. Provide Members with an overview of the key outcomes from the public consultation on the proposed new Home to School Transport (5-16 years) and Travel Assistance policy (16 years +).
2. Seek agreement to amend the current Home to School Transport Appeals Process to ensure it is compliant with the national regulations.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive:

- 1) note the content of this report following the public consultation on the proposed drafts of the HST and Travel Assistance policies (a further report will be presented at a later Executive with recommendations for changes to the existing policies);
- 2) agree the amended arrangements for Home to School Transport Appeals, to ensure that WBC is compliant with national requirements (following the Ombudsman direction).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Context.

In May 2020, a review of Wokingham's current HST and Travel Assistance policies was carried out. The review indicated that there were opportunities to update Wokingham Borough's Home School Transport policy and Travel Assistance policy and that this would improve outcomes for children and young people in Wokingham, particularly those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

A Cross-party engagement exercise of elected Members and key stakeholders including representatives from the Parent Carer Forum (SEND Voices Wokingham) was undertaken, additionally review of practice and policies in other local authorities was carried out.

Over the course of Summer 2020 two revised **draft** policies were written outlining potential updates and strengthening to the existing policies.

Following the process set out above, there is a legal requirement to undertake a formal public consultation on the proposed (revised) areas of the policies. The consultation was undertaken between 18th September and 6th November 2020 and sought views from current service users (a legal requirement), professionals working across different services for children, young people and families in Wokingham, plus all Wokingham residents.

In very general terms, the majority of respondents disagreed that the Council should exercise its options to cease elements of discretionary transport provision. However, respondents also made several suggestions around opportunities to strengthen arrangements for independent travel.

Home to School Transport Appeals Process.

This report also makes the recommendation to adapt the current Home to School Transport Appeals process.

The changes recommended are:

Move from the current model of Two Panels (**One at Stage 1 and again at Stage 2**)

The recommendation is: To move to a single Senior Officer response at **Stage 1** and a Member Panel at **Stage 2**.

This will ensure that WBC is compliant following a ruling by the Local Government Ombudsman in 2020.

BACKGROUND

Initial engagement with a cross-party representative group of elected Members and Senior Council Officers provided a clear direction for this work and specifically what revised policies for Home to School Transport and Travel Assistance should look to address.

Members asked officers to consider the potential for clarifying the policy wording and eligibility criteria; to explore opportunities for strengthening Wokingham's approach to independent travel; and to ensure that the Council's provision of its' Home to School and Home to College transport arrangements were in line with the legal responsibilities and statutory duties, and that they should be financially viable and sustainable. These considerations helped to inform the wording of the consultation draft policies and shaped the questions for the public consultation document.

As a Council we want to make sure we continue to deliver our statutory responsibilities for home to school transport so that we continue to meet the travel needs of children and young people, enabling them to access their place of education in a timely travel time and safely.

The Council is aware of their legal duties in this area and acknowledge that without suitable arrangement some of the borough's children and young people would be unable to access their school or college, especially those who have significant additional needs, or those deemed extremely vulnerable who attend highly specialist provision outside of the Borough.

Policy Review

Historically there has been increased pressure on the Home to School Transport budget, and because of additional statutory burden following the introduction of the Children and Families Act 2014 a subsequent and significant additional demand on Home to transport requirements.

The policy review forms one part of a broader programme of work to address wider systems issues for example: SEND sufficiency of placements, Inclusion agenda in mainstream provision and some technical route optimising to ensure all transport links are more effective and efficient.

Consultation

If any proposed changes are being considered to the published policy for Home to School Transport, the Council has a statutory duty to consult with parents and carers', young people and providers in respect of any such proposals.

In line with the statutory duty a consultation process was undertaken between 18th September and 6th November 2020. This consultation was undertaken in addition to the initial engagement with Elected Members. The Corporate Communications Team assisted in both the development and delivery of, the consultation and it was promoted to all parents and carers via school community emails, social media, consultation briefings/meetings and via community groups. In line with our legal

requirement, we also widely promoted the consultation to existing users of the service, and the parent and carers' of children with SEND.

Consultation Respondents

We had a total of **76 respondents** to the consultation, **89%** of these were parents of school age children.

77% of respondents reported that their child/children had transport/travel assistance currently provided by the council.

36% of respondents have transport/travel assistance currently provided by a parent or carer.

In addition, to the above a further response was received by SEND Voices Wokingham (Statutory Parent and Carer Forum), and a formal response was submitted from the Liberal Democrat Group.

Summary of Themes/Questions/Responses

The table below shows the themes on which the questions were based, these are the four areas where there is some small discretionary aspect to the overall Home to School Transport legal requirements and the Travel Assistance legal requirements.

Theme	Summary of questions asked	Summary of responses
Discretionary transport for children under the age of 5	The council has the option to cease to provide free HST to an infant or primary school for children under the age of five, where a child is deemed as eligible once they turn 5 years of age – to what extent do you Agree or Disagree with this approach?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 64% of respondents disagreed with ceasing to provide discretionary transport to under 5s who are deemed as eligible once they turn 5. • 66% of respondents said they agreed that the Council should provide discretionary transport to under 5s deemed eligible for transport at the age of 5.
Discretionary transport for a child turning 8 years	Wokingham has the option to cease to provide HST at the end of the term in which a child turns 8 years old, where the child has been eligible due to living more than 2 miles (but less than 3 miles from their nearest school). To what extent do you Agree or Disagree with this Approach?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 81% disagreed with this approach. • 78% said they agreed that the Council should continue to provide HST to the end of the academic year in which a child turns 8, where the child has been eligible due to living more than 2 miles but less than 3 miles from their nearest school.
Continuing provision for young people aged 17-18 who	The Council could continue to provide home to school/college travel assistance for young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 72% Agreed provision should continue under these circumstances; • 75% Disagreed that the Council

meet criteria under existing policies	ages 17-18 who meet the eligibility criteria under our existing policies. To what extent do you agree with this approach?	take up the option to cease to provide ordinarily home to school/college travel assistance for young people ages 17-18 (whilst promoting the Student Fare Card Scheme, 16-17 Saver and Disabled Person's Bus Pass Scheme to all post 16 students).
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Next Steps

Based on all the feedback and the Councils legal responsibilities we will produce a final recommendation on policy changes with implications and benefits of each proposed policy change for both the Home to School Transport Policy and the Travel Assistance Policy to later Executive for decision.

Home to School Transport Appeals

During 2020 there were a number of complaints raised with the Local Government Ombudsman regarding the process of Appeals adopted by Wokingham Borough Council.

In effect, the Policy at the time prohibited appellants from accessing a Stage 2 hearing if they disagreed with the outcome of any Stage 1 (with the exception of if it was felt a process issue had been contravened). The Local Government Ombudsman ruled that this frustrated the ability of parents and carers to appropriately challenge decisions of the Council in respect of Home to School Transport.

Immediate adaptation was made to remove the elements of the policy to make it legally compliant, however this has an impact on process and capacity requirements to manage appeals.

We are proposing to amend the Appeals arrangements to move from:

- Officer panel at Stage 1 and Stage 2 Member led panel to
- Senior Officer response at Stage 1 and Member led panel at Stage 2

This will increase the ability for closer scrutiny of actions taken that have led to appeals and allow for more expedient responses. It is envisioned that this will also reduce the capacity demand on colleagues within Democratic Services.

Recommendations

Agree the amended arrangements for Home To School Transport Appeals (as detailed above), to ensure that WBC is compliant (following Ombudsman direction).

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)	N/A for this report		
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	N/A for this report		
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	N/A for this report		

Other Financial Information

As this report focuses on the outcomes from public consultation on proposed new HST and Travel Assistance Policies, there are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

The policies have been developed with input from stakeholders across Council Departments and services, in order to accommodate the interdependencies between these proposed new policies, and other council policies and services, and assess the impact of the new policies on a range of council services and processes.

Public Sector Equality Duty

An Equality Impact Assessment is being developed in parallel with the Home to School Travel policy for children aged 5-16, and Travel Assistance Policy for young people aged 16+ with SEND. This is being done to ensure that as the policies take shape, they develop with appropriate regard to the public sector Equality Duty.

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*

There is no impact on the climate emergency at this stage, however it should be noted that having improved arrangements for Home to School Transport should result in reduced transport emissions and therefore contribute to the Borough achieving carbon neutral status by 2030.

List of Background Papers

- Appendix 1: Proposed Home to School Transport Policy for statutory school age children (draft submitted for formal public consultation)
- Appendix 2: Proposed Travel Assistance policy for young people 16+ with SEND (draft submitted for formal consultation)

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**Home to School Travel
Assistance Policy
for children resident in
Wokingham aged 5 to 16;
Including young people with
Special Educational Needs and
Disabilities**

Academic year 2022/23

Version 1.0

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1 Principles

It is the responsibility of parents to ensure that their children regularly attend school. This includes making any necessary travel arrangements, except where there is a duty on the local authority to do so.

This policy sets out Wokingham Borough Council's responsibilities and commitment to meeting the home to school travel assistance needs of eligible children and young people (including those with special educational needs and disabilities) who are resident in Wokingham Borough and of compulsory school age (5- 16).

Arrangements for young people of sixth form age and above are set out in a separate policy. Parents are referred to the Post 16 travel assistance policy which can be found at [www... LINK TO BE ADDED BEFORE PUBLICATION](#)

The Council is keen to promote children and young people's independence, social, and life skills essential for their preparation for adulthood. This goal underpins our home to school travel assistance policy because, where possible, children and young people, including those with special educational needs and/or disability, will be encouraged and supported to travel independently.

This approach takes forward our Community Vision and helps us to deliver on our Strategic Priorities:

- Enriching Lives
- Safe, Strong Communities
- A Clean and Green Borough
- Right Homes, Right Places
- Keeping the Borough Moving
- Changing the way we work for you.

THIS POLICY SUPERCEDES ALL PREVIOUS POLICIES

Parents are legally responsible to ensure their child's attendance at school. However, for a small number of children who are classed as eligible children, as defined in Schedule 35B Education Act 1996, Wokingham Borough Council has a duty to ensure that suitable travel assistance is provided, where necessary, to facilitate their attendance at school. Parents remain responsible for ensuring that their children attend school regularly. However, a parent will have a defense in law against a prosecution by a local authority for their child's non-attendance at school where the local authority has a duty to provide travel assistance in relation to the child and has failed in that duty to children classed as eligible children.

2. The Council's Statutory Responsibilities

The Council has the responsibility to:

- Promote the use of sustainable travel and transport.
- Provide suitable travel assistance for eligible children.
- The Council also has discretion to make transport arrangements, to subsidise travel costs, and to make appropriate charges, for young people who do not meet the criteria set out in the Act.

2.1 The duty to promote the use of sustainable travel and transport

The Council has a general duty to promote the use of sustainable travel and transport. This duty applies to children of compulsory school age who travel to receive education or training within the area - journeys to and from institutions where education or training is delivered.¹

The Education Act 1996 defines sustainable modes of travel as those that the local authority considers may improve the physical well-being of those who use them, the environmental well-being, and a combination of the two. This may include walking and cycling, as well as other modes of travel.

¹ Section 508A of the 1996 Education Act.

2.2 The duty to provide suitable travel assistance for eligible children

The Council has a duty under the Education Act 1996 (section 508B) to ensure that suitable travel assistance is provided, for eligible children, to facilitate their attendance at school.²

'Eligible children' are defined in schedule 35 B of the Education Act 1996 as those children of compulsory school age (5 -16) for whom free travel assistance will be required. The criteria are set out below.

² Sections 508B and 508C of the 1996 Education Act.

2.2.1. Statutory Walking Distances

Statutory Walking Distances

The Council has a duty to provide free travel assistance for pupils whose homes are outside the statutory walking distance to the *nearest suitable school*:

- More than 2 miles (if below the age of 8); or
- More than 3 miles (if aged 8 to 16)

2.2.2 Extended Rights

A child is also eligible for free home to school travel if they are eligible for free school meals or if a parent with whom they live receives maximum Working Tax Credit and:

- they are aged 8 to 10 years, attend their nearest suitable school and it is more than 2 miles from their home; or
- they are aged 11 to 16 years, and attend one of their three nearest suitable schools which is between 2 and 6 miles from their home; or

- they are aged 11 to 16 years, attend a school that is between 2 and 15 miles from their home that their parents have chosen on the grounds of their religion or belief and, having regard to that religion or belief, there is no suitable school nearer to their home.

The introduction of Universal Credit has not changed the way eligibility for extended rights to home to school transport is determined. It will remain the case that children will be eligible for extended rights if they meet the criteria set out above.

2.2.3 Definitions

'Home' is defined as the place where the child is usually resident. Where parents are separated or divorced, entitlement is assessed from the home where the child spends the majority of their time. Where a child spends equal amounts of school days with each parent, travelling from two addresses to school, entitlement will be assessed from both addresses. Evidence may be required.

Distances will be measured from where the home meets the public street, e.g. the front gate, to the nearest gate or point of access to the school premises and by the shortest route along which a child, accompanied as necessary, may walk safely. As such, the route measured may include footpaths, bridleways, and other pathways, as well as recognised roads.

Distances for Extended rights are measured in the same way. The upper limits for extended rights transport are measured via the shortest road route.

'A suitable school' is defined in the Act as the **nearest qualifying school** with places available that provides education appropriate to the age, ability and aptitude of the child, and any special educational needs and/or disability that the child may have.

Qualifying school means the nearest available and suitable school, or a designated area school for admissions purposes.

'Nearest' is determined by straight line distance;

'Available' means a place at this school would have been available to be allocated, had this school been stated as a higher preference than the one allocated.

The local authority is entitled to determine which schools are 'suitable'. This will normally include all Community, Voluntary Controlled and Voluntary Aided Schools, and Academies, unless a child has a statement of special needs which specifies a requirement for a specialist setting. This includes schools in other local authority areas but does not include independent (fee-paying) schools, except in the case of approved independent special schools for children with special education needs, where this is named in the Education and Health Care Plan.

In Wokingham parents are entitled to express a preference for a place in up to 4 schools.

Places are allocated after consultation with the various schools.

Where parents have made an application for a place at their designated school but the local authority has been unable to meet this or any of their preferences, the local authority will allocate the most accessible school with available places. In such cases the school will be treated as a qualifying school for transport assistance, unless this is unnecessary because the school is within safe walking distance.

If a parent/carer does not name the designated area school in their original application this may affect their eligibility for travel assistance.

For children resident in areas that have more than one designated school, any of the designated schools will be considered to be a qualifying school for transport assistance, even if it is not the nearest one. However, this will not apply where one of the designated

schools was available and lies within safe walking distance of home, since providing transport assistance in those circumstances would not be compatible with the efficient use of public resources.

The relevant educational setting in relation to an eligible child will be either a qualifying school or the place, other than a school, where they are receiving education.

2.2.4 Which schools qualify under this policy?

Qualifying schools are:

- community, foundation or voluntary schools;
- community or foundation special schools;
- non-maintained special schools including residential (where deemed appropriate);
- pupil referral units; or
- Academies, including free schools and University Technical Colleges (UTC).

For pupils with special educational needs an independent school can also be a qualifying school where this is named on the child's Education, Health and Care Plan (EHC Plan), or where it is the nearest of two or more schools named.

Where a child is enrolled at more than one school their eligibility for travel assistance will be assessed on a case by case basis.

Parental Preference

In most cases parents are responsible for making arrangements for their child to get to school. When choosing which schools to apply for, parents should consider how their child will access that school, as there is no guarantee that your child will be eligible for home to school travel assistance. If there is a school with places available which could meet the needs of your child, and is closer to your home than the school or schools listed in your application and/or which offer your child a place, the placement will be classed as Parental Preference, and you are unlikely to qualify for travel assistance.

The Local Authority will provide transport where it is necessary to do so in order for a child to attend a local school, as set out in law and explained in this policy. Whilst it is a requirement that parental preference is respected wherever possible in allocating school places, this requirement does not extend to the provision of transport. Where parents select alternative schools to their designated or nearest schools, they accept responsibility for making their own transport arrangements for their children. Information about transport is published in the School Admissions Guides for parents. If transport costs are a significant factor in choosing schools, and it is not clear whether they would qualify for transport assistance to a particular school, further advice can be provided.

2.2.5 Unsafe walking route

The Council has a duty to provide travel assistance for children who cannot be expected to walk to the nearest suitable school where there is 'no safe walking route under the relevant statutory walking distance' even if accompanied by an adult. Safe walking route means a route which is safe for the child to walk accompanied if necessary (appropriate to their age and nature of the route).

Routes are assessed to be safe using nationally recognized road safety guidelines. The Council must consider a range of risks, including rivers, ditches, traffic speed, fields of vision for the pedestrian and motorist, and whether the route would be considered safe if the child were accompanied by their parent/carer/guardian. Working arrangements and child care issues will not normally be considered to be reasons why a child cannot be accompanied.

2.2.6. Eligibility and Accompaniment

a) Transport only for the compulsory part of the school day

The duty to provide travel assistance to eligible children does not extend beyond the compulsory part (i.e. the start and finish) of the school day.

The Council is not required to provide travel assistance to facilitate a child's part-time attendance; a child's trial placement; the child's attendance at extra-curricular activities, including breakfast clubs and after school activities or to attend medical appointments.

There is no duty to provide free transport if suitable alternative arrangements are provided by another body or organization, e.g. the school.

b) Timing of assessment of eligibility.

At the point when eligibility to home to school travel assistance is considered, the prospect of being able to secure a place in an alternative (usually nearer) school must be a real one. This will usually be at the point the Admissions application was made, and not necessarily at the time that the Travel Assistance application was made.

A smaller number of cases will need to be considered during the school year e.g. as a result of families moving to a new area within the borough.

Where granted, travel assistance will normally apply for the whole of the school year of entry, unless there are significant changes, such as the family moving house or the child changing school. Any entitlement to transport is subject to reassessment thereafter on an annual basis.

If a pupil ceases to be eligible any change to provision made by the Council will be considered in the context of the potential impact on the child to avoid disruption.

Changes to transport or school admissions policies that affect entitlement to free travel for future entry years to schools will not be applied retrospectively to the entitlement of existing pupils.

c) Accompaniment

In deciding whether a child is eligible for travel assistance for reasons of special educational need, disability or mobility, or unsafe route eligibility, the Council has a responsibility to consider whether the child could reasonably be expected to walk if accompanied by an adult.

The general expectation is that a child will be accompanied by a responsible adult, usually a parent, carer or guardian, where necessary, unless it is not reasonable to expect the parent/carer/guardian to do so. Working arrangements and child care issues will not normally be considered to be reasons why a child cannot be accompanied.

The Council promotes equality of opportunity for disabled parents. Where a parent's disability prevents them from accompanying their child along a walking route that would otherwise be considered unsafe without adult supervision, a reasonable adjustment might be to provide free home to school travel assistance for the child in question.

3. Arrangements and eligibility for those with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and/or a disability or mobility problems (including temporary medical conditions):

3.1 Provision for pupils with Special Educational Needs or disabilities

The Council has a duty to provide travel assistance for pupils with SEN or disabilities who are registered at their nearest qualifying school which is **within** the statutory walking distance from their home, where the child cannot reasonably be expected to walk to school because of their mobility problems or because of associated health and safety issues related to their special educational needs or disability.

In order to be able to assess whether a child with special educational needs, a disability or mobility problems can reasonably be expected to walk to school, we will ask a parent (or other person requesting free travel for the child) to provide information about the child. Eligibility is needs based - there is no automatic entitlement to travel assistance just because a young person has a Special Educational Need or Disability, even where an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) has been issued. Applications will be considered on a case by case basis, and regularly reviewed, taking into account the child's special educational needs and/or disability, mobility or medical needs, as well as any exceptional circumstances.

Professionals supporting an application for travel should provide evidence in support of why, in their professional opinion, it is not reasonable to expect the child to be able to walk to school, even if accompanied. Fresh relevant supporting professional evidence may be required at each review.

The Council has responsibility to ensure children's needs are addressed, and this includes providing travel assistance which facilitates the best opportunity for developing independence.

3.2 Short Term medical conditions

Consideration will be given by the Council to provide home to school travel assistance for pupils with temporary medical conditions.

If a child suffers from a temporary physical or medical condition that means they are unable to walk to school or travel in their usual manner, then travel assistance may be provided. Applications for transport on this basis must be supported by appropriate evidence from the medical profession. This may include, but is not restricted to, a letter from the child's consultant or other medical professional involved in the child's medical welfare.

If the child attends a school outside their designated area, parents will normally be required to pay the usual costs of transport as a contribution towards the Council's costs. Transport provided on this basis will be reviewed every half term and may require submission of further evidence on completion of a review.

4. What kinds of travel assistance might be made under the Home to School Travel Policy?

The type of travel assistance offered will be for the Council to decide, taking into account the needs of the young person and the nature of the journey to be undertaken.

The assistance offered might include, but is not limited to:

- A parent consenting to use their car in return for payment of a mileage allowance
- A walking escort or responsible adult to escort the young person on public transport
- Free passes for children on public transport,
- Provision of a seat on a dedicated school bus or minibus, or
- a seat in a taxi, usually shared with one or more other pupils, where a pupil's needs require more personalised arrangements.

Transport is arranged during the summer months for the start of the academic year. Parents are notified of the transport arrangements prior to the start of term.

Applications received during the academic year will be dealt with as quickly as possible with transport arrangements being confirmed within ten working days wherever possible.

The Council will determine the means of travel assistance to be provided, to ensure the most efficient use of resources compatible with meeting children's travel needs.

4.1. What are 'suitable' travel arrangements?

For travel assistance to be suitable, it must be safe and reasonably stress free, to enable the child to arrive at school ready for a day of study.

It would not normally require that a child makes several changes on public transport resulting in unreasonably long journey times.

Government Guidance advises that 'best practice' is that a child of primary school age should not travel for more than 45 minutes each way, and secondary school age - a maximum of 75 minutes - including any walking time.

It is desirable that journeys to special /specialist settings for children with complex needs should be shorter, but it is recognised that this may not be possible, especially where a child's special educational needs can only be addressed in an out-of-borough placement.

4.2 Mileage Allowance: A mileage allowance may be offered to parents/carers/guardians who are entitled to free home to school travel assistance, where this offers best value for money and the parents/carers/guardians agree to this.

4.3 Pick-up points

Eligibility for travel assistance is assessed based on the pupil's registered home address, but any transport provided may not necessarily be door to school gate. Local Authorities are able to use reasonable pick-up and drop-off points in appropriate cases. This may be a bus stop or other place where young people can safely wait for their vehicle. The Council aims to ensure there are appropriate pick-up points within reasonable distance from schools and centres of population. Pupils can be required to walk to and from a central pick up and/or drop off point. This will usually be within one mile walking distance from the child's home, and total walking distance will be within the relevant statutory mile walking distances according to age and ability.

4.4 Supporting the development of self-reliant travelers

The Council has responsibility to ensure that children's needs are addressed This includes providing travel assistance which facilitates the best opportunity for developing

independence. Where it is safe, appropriate and reasonable to do so, pupils with special educational needs will be expected to walk, accompanied as necessary by a responsible adult, to and from a common pick up point near their home. Training in Independent Travelling skills may also be offered.

5. Residential Schools

Where children with EHC Plans require a residential placement following assessment, travel assistance may be offered as follows:

- Weekly borders: travel assistance between home and school once each direction each week.
- Termly boarders: Travel assistance between home and school at the beginning and end of each term and half term.
- 52-week placements: travel assistance between home and school for eight visits throughout the year.

Travel assistance will not normally be provided to and from respite placements.

6. Travel Assistance for those not eligible for Free Home to School Transport under this policy

6.1 Children below statutory school age

There is no statutory duty to provide travel assistance for those under the age of 5. The Council may exercise its discretionary power and provide home to school travel assistance on an individual basis.

6.2 Farepaying options for non-eligible children

If a pupil does not qualify for free transport provision under this policy, a surplus seat may be purchased on an existing contract vehicle where a seat is available, subject to certain conditions. If the seat is required at any time in the future by an entitled pupil then the parents of the farepaying child will need to make alternative arrangements. In these circumstances a refund of fare for the unused portion of the year will be payable. Farepaying seats are not normally made available if there is public transport operating over the same or very similar route.

7. Exceptional circumstances, change of circumstances and other assistance

The following are examples of exceptional circumstances and changes of circumstances. The Council will always consider a request to exercise its discretion in a particular case to provide free home to school travel assistance.

a) Change of address

Parents/carers/guardians must inform the Council in writing of any change of address as soon as possible, as eligibility for travel assistance will need to be re-considered.

In exceptional cases, pupils may remain at their current school with travel assistance provided, if a school move is at a crucial time in their studies and it is not in their interests to change schools. Each case will be considered on an individual basis.

b) Pupils living in temporary accommodation

If a pupil is of statutory school age and the family are placed in temporary accommodation by the Council, consideration will be given to the provision of education travel assistance for a limited period. This period will be determined by taking the individual circumstances into account (e.g. reasons for the displacement, age of the child(ren), likely timescales, parent/carer/guardian's circumstances, etc).

c) Change of child's needs

From time to time a child's needs can change during the year. If the current travel assistance is no longer meeting the child's needs, parents should in the first place contact the Travel Assistance team to discuss the change in needs, and any reasonable adjustments that may be required. In some cases, further evidence or advice from professionals involved with the child may be required.

d) Changing Schools

Where a parent decides to change their child's school after they have started, the child's eligibility for travel assistance will have to be reconsidered. This may include the need to make a completely new application.

e) Transport to a Pupil Referral Unit or other education provider

Although the Council offers transport assistance, it is still the responsibility of parent/carers/guardians in all circumstances to ensure their children get to school. This includes attendance at a Pupil Referral Unit and any other places where education may be provided.

Parents/carers/guardians should be aware that there is no automatic transport entitlement to and from the Pupil Referral Unit or similar education provider at any other time. This also applies to pupil exclusions.

Even where transport is provided, parent/carers/guardians still have a responsibility for the behaviour of the child and will need to play a part in the process.

Transport to a Pupil Referral Unit and to other places where education may be provided will only be provided in accordance with the child's general entitlement.

Any requests for exceptional assistance will need to be supported by documentary evidence from the Pupil Referral Unit e.g. Medical Certificate or a Court Order.

Transport may be withdrawn from pupils who regularly fail to attend the PRU – responsibility for attendance will then pass to parent/carers/guardians.

f) Pupils Excluded From School

A pupil permanently excluded from a school will be provided with assistance to his or her new school provided it is both the nearest suitable school, as agreed by the Council and is outside the statutory walking distance from home.

g) Temporary Attendance at Alternative Provision

Where a pupil is registered at a school but is attending a place other than that school as a result of temporary exclusion, eligibility for home to school travel will apply to the other place for the temporary period.

h) Elective Home Education (EHE)

Where parents have made the choice to educate their child at home, no assistance will be available from the Council in connection with any transport need arising.

Where the Council arranges for a pupil to have education other than in school, the Council will provide transport subject to normal eligibility rules on home to school travel assistance.

i) Transport Provided In Error

Where free transport has been provided in error, or, where there have been material changes to the route to school, provision will be withdrawn. However, transport will continue until the end of the term in which the error was notified, in order to allow parents/carers/guardians to make alternative arrangements.

8. Behaviour on School Transport

Parents, schools, pupils, transport contractors and the Council, working in partnership, all share responsibility for ensuring that acceptable behaviour is maintained to ensure safe and stress free school transport for all.

In particular we expect all young people to:

- Be ready for their transport in good time,
- Behave in a safe and responsible way whilst travelling,
- Follow all instructions from the driver (or Passenger Assistant where one is provided) especially in an emergency,
- Wear seatbelts or appropriate safety harnesses at all times whilst on the vehicle, where these are provided.

Bullying, including the use of hate speech, will not be tolerated, and will be reported to parents and school/college. We will not tolerate abuse of any sort, whether from a young person or from their parents and carers.

Children and young people with special educational needs are still expected to behave in a safe and appropriate manner whilst on transport. The Council will work with schools, parents, and the child to help manage behaviours to ensure the ongoing safety and comfort of all passengers including drivers and any passenger assistants.

Should a pupil misbehave whilst being transported to or from school, the provision of transport may be withdrawn either for a period of time or permanently. Normally a warning letter will be sent to parents/carers/guardians prior to transport being withdrawn. However, in the event that any incident is considered serious enough, following an investigation by the Transport team, the withdrawal of transport may be immediate. In this instance the responsibility for ensuring attendance at school will remain with the parent/carer/guardian of the child.

9. How to apply

Starting school and transferring to secondary school

Pupils without an EHC plan

Application Forms are available online at:

<https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/schools-and-education/school-information-and-services/school-and-college-transport/>

When to Apply

Parents and carers who wish to apply for travel assistance should do so as soon as the offer of a school place has been accepted. For parents and carers who file an appeal against a placement, the application should be made as soon as possible after the appeal outcome is known.

Those wishing to be considered for travel assistance under the extended rights criteria should include evidence of income and/or entitlement to free school meals with their application.

In year transfers or newcomers to the area

Applications for Wokingham Borough schools are considered half-a-term in advance of the school place being required. Parents and carers should apply for travel assistance as soon as they have a school place confirmed.

Pupils with an EHC plan

Parents will still have to complete an application form, but they should include evidence of additional needs, including why they believe it is unreasonable for them to accompany their child to school, where this is appropriate.

Completed application forms should be sent to Schooltransport@wokingham.gov.uk together with any additional evidence to support the application.

10. Complaints and Appeals

What is the difference between an appeal and a complaint?

Complaints arise when you are unhappy about something, for example, you may feel you have not been dealt with properly or in a professional manner, that information given to you was incorrect or that there has been an unacceptable delay. For these sorts of issues, please follow the Complaints Procedure.

With an appeal, you may be perfectly happy with the way that you have been treated but feel that the wrong decision has been made and would like it re-examined. For these issues, please follow the Appeals Procedure.

10.1 COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Complaints about the provision of travel assistance will be investigated in accordance with the Council's Complaints Policy. This does not apply to complaints about a refusal to grant transport, which will be dealt with through the Transport Appeals procedure

The complaints policy can be found at:

<https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/contact-us/complaints-and-compliments/>.

10.2 Appeals procedure

Parents/guardians/carers or a young person are entitled to challenge the decision of the Council to refuse to provide assistance with transport as set out in this policy or when the parents/guardians/carers or young person consider that the travel assistance, offered by the Council, is unsuitable.

A decision may be challenged on the following grounds:

- eligibility
- distance measurement; and/or
- safety of the route
- suitability of transport arrangements offered

Stage 1 – Review of decision

You have 20 working days from the receipt of the transport decision to make a request for a review of the original decision.

The request should detail why the decision should be reviewed and give personal and/or family circumstances, which you believe should be considered during the appeal process.

How to make a Stage 1 appeal

You should make your appeal in writing, either by letter or email.

Please provide us with the following information:

- Confirmation that you are the legal parent or guardian of the child
- the date you received our transport notification
- Child's first name and family name
- Child's date of birth
- Your full name and address
- Your email address
- Your phone/mobile number
- Reasons for the appeal (i.e. eligibility, distance, route safety or transport assistance) and your reasons for challenging the Council's decision
- Any additional evidence you wish to present to support your request for travel assistance.

and then email your appeal request to:

**Corporate Transport Unit, Wokingham Borough Council, Shute End,
Wokingham, RG40 1BN or email to Schooltransport@wokingham.gov.uk**

A Senior Officer from the Council will review the original decision and will send you a letter, detailing the outcome of the review within 20 working days of the receipt of the written request.

This will set out the following information:

- the nature of the decision reached

- how the review was concluded
- information about other departments and/or agencies consulted as part of the process
- what factors were considered
- the rationale for the decision reached
- Information about escalation to Stage 2, if appropriate.

Stage 2 Appeal

If you are unhappy with the decision made at Stage 1, you will have 20 working days from the receipt of the Council's decision to make a request to escalate the matter to Stage 2 appeal.

How to make a Stage 2 Appeal

Please send your written request to:

Corporate Transport Unit, Wokingham Borough Council, Shute End, Wokingham, RG40 1BN or email to Schooltransport@wokingham.gov.uk

Your stage 2 appeal will be heard by an independent appeal panel which will be convened to consider the appeal within 40 working days.

No member of the appeal panel will have been involved in the original decision to decline travel assistance. This panel will consider verbal and written representations from parent/guardian/young person, involved in the request.

You may request to attend the hearing to present your case in person if you wish.

The Senior Officer involved in the review of the decision at Stage 1 may also be invited to attend.

You will receive a letter, detailing the outcome of the appeal hearing, which will set out the following information:

- the nature of the decision reached
- how the review was concluded
- information about other departments and/or agencies consulted as part of the process
- what factors were considered
- the rationale for the decision reached
- information about escalation to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) if appropriate

Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

You have a right of complaint to the LGO if you feel that there was a failure on the part of the Authority to comply with procedural rules or there was an irregularity in the way the appeal was handled.

The LGO can be contacted at:

Local Government Ombudsman
PO Box 4771
Coventry
CV4 0EH

Helpline: 0300 061 0614.

www.lgo.org.uk

11. Key Contact Numbers

EDUCATION TRANSPORT:

TO BE ADDED BEFORE PUBLICATION

Or:

**THE SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS TEAM
(SEN)**

TO BE ADDED BEFORE PUBLICATION

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Travel Assistance Policy for
Post - 16 Young People
With SEND

Academic Year 2022/23

Version 1.0

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Introduction

This policy covers travel assistance to help young people with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND), who may have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and who are over statutory school age to access appropriate education and training.

This assistance is available to all young people who satisfy the eligibility criteria aged 16 to 18 entering further education, and to continuing learners aged 19 to 25 with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

This document is Wokingham Borough Council's Transport Policy Statement which the statutory guidance issued in 2014 (as updated in January 2019) for Post 16 transport to education and training requires every local authority to publish each year. We are required to identify what travel assistance is available to support young people aged 16 - 18 and learners aged 19 -25 with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities, who access school or further education institutions. The legislation and guidance for Travel Assistance to education is different for those of 16 - 18 and those over the age of 19. As a result, and for clarity, the two age groups have been separated in this policy.

There is no automatic entitlement to free home to school or college transport once a young person is over compulsory school age. However, in support of the Raising of the Participation Age (RPA) and Preparation for Adulthood (PfA) the Council offers a discretionary service to young people meeting the agreed eligibility criteria. This ensures that the Council supports and encourages young people to continue with their education and training where this is appropriate and suitable to their needs. This will enable young people to acquire the knowledge, skills and experience necessary for their personal development, to support preparation for adulthood, and wherever possible progression into employment or Higher Education.

This policy applies to all students participating in the scheme and supersedes all previous transport arrangements and entitlements.

The Travel Assistance Policy Statement will be reviewed annually. This version covers the academic year from 1 September 2020 to 31 August 2021.

General Principles

This policy is based on the following principles:

Independence and wellbeing

Our commitment is to support and prepare every young person for adulthood, including those young people with Special Educational needs or disability through the development and promotion of individual independence, facilitating opportunities for social inclusion as well as supporting the physical well-being for all young people. Travel assistance, and the form this takes, is a key contributor to achieving these goals.

Sustainability

The council will favour environmentally sustainable forms of travel, including walking, cycling and the use of public transport. The council will also promote those options which make the most effective use of public resources.

To support a young person's needs and assisting them to develop greater independence for adulthood, a range of travel options will be explored when deciding what form of travel assistance will be offered. All pupils should be encouraged to follow a healthy lifestyle including walking a reasonable distance to college/sixth form, where possible.

Section 1: Travel Assistance Offered by External Organisations

The Council seeks to support all Post 16 students to continue with their education and training by negotiating preferential rates of travel with some rail and bus operators. Through running this scheme and providing information about the Bursary funding available to support student access to education through their Post 16 education provider (FE Colleges and school 6th Forms), the Council considers it has met its statutory duties with regard to the majority of students.

Concessionary fares schemes available

For public transport routes, the Council negotiates favourable terms (in conjunction with the other 5 Berkshire Unitary Authorities) with local transport providers. This ensures that students can buy passes at agreed rates, including those for travel to establishments outside the Borough and/or the County. These include, rail passes throughout the County and beyond, travel on Reading Buses and Courtney Buses, as well as access to a wide range of dedicated school and college routes within the borough and peripheral areas.

The parent/young person should check for themselves the cost of season tickets and compare the rates that the Council can obtain before selecting the best value for their own travel arrangements.

If, having purchased an annual ticket for transport it is then decided that your child no longer wishes to attend this setting, refunds will be available on the following basis:

- Notification received by the Corporate Transport Unit in writing prior to the end of the Autumn Term – refund of 2 terms
- Notification received by the Corporate Transport Unit in writing prior to the end of the Spring Term – refund of 1 term

Bursaries available from your Education Provider

Students should contact their school, sixth form college, or further education college to find out about financial and other support available, for example help with Childcare or other costs. Alternatively contact the Learner Support Helpline on 0800 121 8989.

Below is a summary of some of the main financial support available.

The 16-19 Bursary Fund

The 16-19 Bursary Fund, administered by individual education providers, is available to support any young person who faces genuine financial barriers to participation in education, including transport costs. All education providers must make available a copy of their 16-19 Bursary Fund Policy. Applications should be made directly to the education provider.

For further information on the 16-19 Bursary Fund visit: www.gov.uk/1619-bursary-fund
Key Local providers and contact details are listed in Appendix B or on the Council Local Offer website.

There are two types of 16-19 bursary available.

Vulnerable Student Bursary

Those in most need are eligible for a vulnerable student bursary of up to £1,200 per year. To qualify, the young person must meet at least one of the following criteria:

- The young person is in or recently left local authority care
- The young person gets Income Support (or Universal Credit in place of Income Support) in their name
- The young person is disabled and gets both Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) (or Universal Credit in place of ESA), and either Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independent Payment (PIP) in their name

To receive the maximum bursary the programme of study must last for 30 weeks or more. If the programme is shorter than 30 weeks, the young person may receive less.

Discretionary Bursary

The young person could be eligible for a discretionary bursary if they do not qualify for the vulnerable student bursary. Education providers may, at their discretion, distribute any remaining funds to a young person in ways that best fit the needs and circumstances of the young person. This is targeted at young people facing financial barriers to participation, including transport costs.

Residential Support Scheme

The Residential Support Scheme is for young persons aged 16-18. If the programme of study being followed is not available locally and is more than 15 miles from the home, or more than two hours return journey away, the young person can apply for help with the cost of term-time accommodation.

How much assistance the young person receives will depend on household income and where the education provider is based.

For further information on the Residential Support Scheme, including eligibility criteria, visit

www.gov.uk/residential-support-scheme

Residential Bursary Fund

Young persons aged 16-18 may be able to get a bursary towards the cost of accommodation from some specialist residential colleges. This is different from the Residential Support Scheme.

Most of these colleges are 'Specialist Residential Centres' for subjects like agriculture, art and design or horticulture. Each has its own eligibility criteria, often including parental income. To apply for assistance you should contact the college directly.

Discretionary Learner Support

If the young person is aged 19 or over, on a further education course and facing financial hardship, they could get Discretionary Learner Support (DLS). This is similar to the 16-19 Bursary Fund.

The young person must apply directly to their learning provider (e.g. your college) for DLS. How much the young person receives will depend on their circumstances. The money can help with learning costs, including transport.

For more information visit www.gov.uk/discretionary-learner-support

Local providers and contact details are listed in Appendix B or on the Wokingham Borough Council Local Offer website.

Care to Learn

You can get Care to Learn if all of the following apply to you:

- you're a parent under 20 at the start of your course
- you're the main carer for your child
- you live in England
- you're either a British citizen or have a legal right to live and study in England
- your course qualifies
- your childcare provider qualifies

Care to Learn is only available for publicly funded courses in England. This includes courses that take place in:

- schools
- sixth-forms in schools
- sixth-form colleges
- other colleges and learning providers, including Foundation Learning
- your community at Children's Centres

Your learning provider can tell you if your course is eligible.

Care to Learn will pay towards your childcare costs

To qualify, your childcare provider must be registered with Ofsted.

They can be a:

- childminder
- preschool playgroup
- day nursery
- out of school club

You cannot get Care to Learn if:

- you're an apprentice who gets a salary
- you're doing a higher education course at university

You can find more information at:

<https://studentbursary.education.gov.uk/w/webpage/student-bursary>

or email: caretolearn@studentbursary.education.gov.uk

Other support and advice

Special educational needs and disability information advice and support service (SENDIASS)

give help, support and information to children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities up to the age of 25.

- Call: [0118 908 8233](tel:01189088233)
- Email: sendiass@wokingham.gov.uk

Section 2: Travel Assistance for Sixth Form (years 12, 13 - ages 16-18) including young people with SEND

2.1 Statutory duty and definitions

There is no legal requirement for local authorities to provide travel assistance beyond the completion of Year 11. The Council will only consider providing support and assistance with transport costs in exceptional circumstances. Therefore, parents and carers should ensure that they are aware of the cost of transport and take this into account when making choices for their young person's Post 16 education.

Cases will be decided on an individual case and the Authority will consider any supporting evidence provided as part of a request together with a completed transport application form. If eligible, transport will only be provided to the nearest suitable education and /or training provider for learners, and is subject to funding in relation to the published eligibility criteria outlined below.

Assistance with transport will not be provided if it is deemed that suitable provision is available at a closer learning provider as measured from the home address.**

**The nearest suitable learning provider is defined as the closest school or college to the home address able to meet the young person's educational needs. If parents choose to send their young person to a school or college which is not the nearest suitable, assistance with transport will not be provided by the Council. These distances are measured by the nearest available walking route, and verified by the Council, or its agents, by appropriate means which might include the use of computer generated mapping systems. The Council views these distances as an exact measure and they cannot be considered as marginal. The measurements are taken from the curtilage (the front edge of a property) of the home to the main entrance of the learning provider.

Travel assistance will not be provided under this section to those who have left education and are returning after the age of 19. Those re-starting education after their 19th birthday will be assessed as adults.

Those who are eligible for travel assistance, whether from home or from a pick-up point, will be charged a fee each academic year as a contribution towards their travel arrangements.

This charge will be reduced for those who meet low income criteria. Eligibility for free school meals will continue to be the primary means of determining low income. Evidence of low income will be required; this will usually be a letter from HMRC or the Benefits Agency.

Travel assistance arrangements will only be provided upon receipt of payment of the relevant charge or on receipt of evidence of low income.

2.2 Eligibility Criteria

A young person may be eligible for travel assistance under the Sixth Form duty if all the following statements apply to them:

- a) The young person is a resident within the Wokingham Unitary Authority area and is over 16 and under the age of 19 years of age or, if they are over 19, are continuing with a course that they started before their 19th Birthday
- b) They have a special educational need or disability, which may be identified in an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP), or other exceptional circumstances which impacts on their ability to use public transport arrangements, and fall into **one** of these categories:

- (i) Have an offer of a place at a local Post 16 provider which the Local Authority agree can make the appropriate educational/training provision and are not able to travel independently or safely.
 - (ii) Be able to demonstrate a need for additional time in education to complete education and training at their current educational establishment and are not able to travel independently or safely.
 - (iii) Have entitlement based on the criteria as a Low Income Family
- c) Show that their learning provider is the nearest provider that can meet the majority of their needs and that the provision requested is not available at an establishment closer to home.
- d) Their study programme is full-time – equivalent to minimum of 12 hours per week, usually across at least 3 days per week for the duration of the course
- e) Their chosen study programme takes place at one of the following:
- A school (including Academies).
 - A further education institution.
 - An Authority maintained or assisted institution providing higher or further education.
 - An establishment funded directly by the YPLS (e.g. Independent Specialist Providers) for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
 - A learning provider that is funded by the Local Authority which leads to a positive outcome (this could include colleges, charities and private learning providers).

A young person can apply for council travel assistance in addition to the options provided by other organisations, but any support received from other sources will be taken into account when assessing what form of travel assistance is most appropriate.

2.3 Exclusions

A young person will not be eligible for travel assistance if any of the following statements apply:

- a) Their chosen study programme takes place at a privately-funded organisation and is not supported by the Local Authority;
- b) The young person is employed and starting or continuing an apprenticeship.
- c) The young person's study programme is at Level 4 or higher, including a foundation degree. Education levels are explained on the government website.
- d) The required travel charge is not paid.

2.4 Assessing Applications for Travel Assistance

The Council will decide whether a young person is eligible for travel assistance or not. They are also responsible for deciding what form of travel assistance should be offered based on individual needs, promoting independence, encouraging social inclusion and efficient use of resources.

The following will be considered when deciding which form of travel assistance to offer:

- Whether the young person has a physical or medical disability that rules out the use of suitable public transport - for example students who require specialist seating, harness, head restraints or other specialist facilities.

- If the young person is currently in receipt of travel assistance support from other sources, e.g. mobility allowance, direct payment and awards under the 16-19 bursary fund.

Priority will be given to young people who have no other forms of transport or travel assistance available to them.

Existing sources of support must be identified at the point of application. These will be taken into account when making a decision about the level and type of travel assistance that may be provided.

A decision may be taken that additional travel assistance will not be provided.

2.5 Payment

If you are assessed as eligible under the Council's policy, a charge of £745 per year towards the cost of transport will be applied.

There will be a discount of 50% for young people who are eligible for free school meals.

The payment can also be made in 10 monthly instalments.

Payment will be taken by Direct Debit from your Bank Account. The Direct Debit mandate is attached to the application form, and must be completed before the application can be processed. If you do not have a bank account you should contact the Corporate Transport Unit to discuss how payment can be made.

2.6 Low Income Entitlement

The Education and Inspections Act 2006 defines low income as those eligible for free school meals or whose parents/carers are in receipt of the maximum level of Working Tax Credit.

In April 2018, the criteria used to determine which pupils are eligible for free school meals were updated to reflect the introduction of Universal Credit and the phasing out of other income-based benefits. Working Tax Credit will gradually be phased out as recipients are transferred to Universal Credit. However, until such time as all recipients have transferred, receipt of maximum Working Tax Credit can still be used to determine low income.

The law makes provision for young people of the families on low income to receive transport assistance, subject to the payment of the appropriate contribution, in the following circumstances:

- Applicants will be required to provide relevant documents to prove their eligibility to assistance with transport.
- Once eligibility on income grounds has been confirmed the young person will be considered eligible (on these grounds) for the school year for which the assessment has been made. However, if other circumstances change, for example they move house, then eligibility will be re-assessed. It is parent's responsibility to inform the Transport Team of any change of circumstances.
- Income assessments will be carried out on an annual basis.

Those students who are over 19 years and receive benefits in their own rights will be assessed as an individual on the grounds of low income.

Further information about eligibility for free school meals can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/apply-free-school-meals>

2.7 Refund Process

If you no longer require travel assistance from the Council you may be able to apply for a refund of part of the parental contribution. You must tell the Corporate Transport Unit in writing what date you want your travel assistance provision to stop. Refunds will be calculated based on the length of time you were in receipt of the provision, using the date of ceasing transport or the date the cancellation was requested in writing, whichever was the later.

A refund of the full term's charge will only be considered if cancellation of provision is received in the office prior to the start of a term.

No refund will be made if you withdraw during the summer term.

The following table shows how refunds will be calculated for part of a term.

Length of time in receipt of provision/from beginning of term	Refund Due
Up to 4 weeks	75%
4 to 8 weeks	50%
Over 8 weeks	0%

Section 3

Travel Assistance for young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), between 19 and 25.

This section clarifies the Council policy regarding travel assistance for students with SEND who are starting a new educational course after their 19th Birthday.

Eligibility for Post 19 SEND travel assistance

When a student with an Education, Health and Care Plan who is above the age of 19 and below the age of 25 years, starts a new course of education, an assessment is made (reflecting the Council's obligations under both the Care Act 2014 and the Education Act 1996, s 508F,) to determine whether it is necessary for the council (rather than the student/family) to make their travel arrangements.

In the most exceptional cases, students with learning difficulties or disabilities may be eligible for travel assistance where there is no other way for them to access their educational placement.

Each case will be considered under this policy and travel assistance will only be considered if the following criteria are satisfied:

1. The student is normally resident within the Wokingham Unitary Authority area.
2. The student is attending a full time educational course (12 hours per week or more over at least 3 days per week) at the nearest suitable or most accessible college to their home. If a similar suitable course is offered by a FE provider nearer to their home the student will not be eligible for assistance.
3. The placement must be supported and named in their EHCP
4. The course must be at Level 3 or below. Those commencing a course at Level 4 or above, including Foundation Degree and Degree, would normally be expected to utilise Student Loans, grants and other student benefits to facilitate their transport requirements.
5. The course will start on or after the student's 19th Birthday, and may continue no later than the academic year in which the young person reaches 25 years old.
6. The young person together with their family or carers have actively and positively engaged with supporting the young person towards being able to travel independently, where appropriate.

The Council will take into account the following factors when assessing whether travel assistance is necessary including:

1. The young person's age, ability, aptitudes and SEND, including the length and complexity of the journey.
2. Quality of education or training and locations and times of provision
3. What other arrangements you have considered or tried and why they are not suitable.
4. Whether the student is unable to travel to their placement by public transport, either unaccompanied or accompanied by a responsible adult. Specific and up to date evidence of this from relevant health and/or appropriate educational professionals supporting the student will be required.
5. Whether there is a family member/carers who is able to transport or accompany the student. If the decision has been taken not to accompany the young person please provide details of why this would not be a reasonable arrangement to make.

6. What other efforts have been made to financially support the young person to access education, e.g. grants, bursaries and other benefits and allowances.
7. Whether the student is in receipt of higher rate mobility component of the Personal Independence Payment or Disability Living Allowance, the purpose of which is to assist those who have mobility problems, with severe difficulty walking or who need help getting around outside. We would expect this benefit to be fully utilised to meet their transport needs and this includes transport to their educational or training placement; if there are any factors limiting its use you should provide details of them.
8. Where there is a 'Motability' vehicle available to the student, if a decision has been made not to use the 'Motability' vehicle to support the student to reach their education placement, we would normally expect the carer/student to make their own appropriate alternative arrangements, or provide details as to why that is not possible/reasonable.
9. Any other exceptional circumstances that you consider need to be taken into account, together with any recent supporting evidence that you provide.

Please note that we would not generally consider work or childcare commitments as an exceptional reason for travel assistance to be provided.

Based on the assessment, if the student has alternative means to support transport to educational provision the Council is unlikely to provide travel assistance.

However, if the assessment identifies that a student does not have any other way of getting to the educational provision the Council will continue to provide travel assistance.

Any travel assistance awarded to a young person over 19, starting a new course of study will be provided free of charge.

Students undertaking a work based learning programme such as an apprenticeship should apply for Access to Work funding to support their transport needs.

<https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work>

Section 4: All age groups

4.1. Limitations for travel assistance

1. Where transport is provided, the journey will be limited to the start and end of the standard college/sixth form day. This may mean that the young person will need to arrive earlier than their first lesson, or to wait at the end of their timetabled day for other young people.
2. Where a young person's timetable does not fit with the times of other pupils attending the same provision, a mileage reimbursement will be offered for all or part of the travel provision.
3. The Council does not provide travel assistance for:
 - a. Work experience or work placements,
 - b. Medical appointments or other off-site visits
 - c. Transfer between sites or campuses during the college/school day
 - d. Before or after college/school activities and clubs
 - e. Return of a young person home early if they have been taken ill, or are unable to stay at college/school to the end of the day

Responsibility for transport in these situations will remain with the parents/ carers or the college/school to arrange.

4. Reimbursements for travel expenses incurred prior to the date of application will not be considered.

4.2 Young people attending residential schools

For those young people with special educational needs and disabilities who attend residential colleges on a termly basis and are eligible for travel assistance, the council will support:

- one journey at the start of each term; and
- one journey at the end of each term

The council will usually offer a mileage reimbursement of direct payment for the young person to travel in a parent or carer's vehicle. There may however be exceptional cases where specialist transport or other travel patterns may be considered.

4.3 Multiple home addresses

When assessing a young person's application, the Council will use the young persons 'main residence' for assessment purposes. The "main residence" is the address at which the young person spends most school nights. Where a young person has two home addresses then entitlement will be assessed from their 'main residence' only. Where parents are separated or divorced, entitlement is assessed from the home where the young person spends the majority of their time. Where a young person spends equal amounts of school/college days with each parent, travelling from two addresses to school/college, entitlement will be assessed from both addresses. Evidence may be required.

4.4 Review of eligibility

If a young person is assessed as not eligible for travel assistance, the Council will not be obliged to re-assess the individual for the remainder of that academic year, unless the place of residence or education changes, except where an appeal is lodged in line with the Appeals procedure.

All travel assistance offered is subject to annual review, in line with Education Funding Agency Guideline and it is at the discretion of the Council.

4.5 Duration of provision

All post 16 students need to re-apply for travel assistance each year, even where they are on a continuing or multiple year course. Provision of travel assistance in a previous year is no guarantee of entitlement to ongoing provision.

Travel assistance arrangements will stay in place for the academic year in which they were assessed as eligible, unless the award was specifically for a shorter period or there are significant changes, e.g. change of home address.

Where specialist transport is provided, whilst the form of travel assistance will not change, sometimes during the year collection/drop off times and/or the route on which the young person travels may change. We will endeavour to keep change to a minimum, but where a change is required we will aim to inform you with as much notice as possible.

If the young person changes college, (including college site), course, or home address, or their needs change, you will need to re-apply for travel assistance. Alterations will not be made to your current provision until the re-assessment has been completed.

4.6 Forms of Travel Assistance offered

Where the travel assistance is offered by the Council, it may take one of the following forms:

- Independent Travel Training to help the young person learn to travel independently including by public transport. This is usually a 10 to 12 week programme of one to one assistance and support which is tailored to the young person's needs.
- Mileage reimbursements or direct payment for young people, or their parents or carers, to arrange their own transport, or use a combination of options including topping up bursary payments;
- A seat on a dedicated school bus or minibus where this is appropriate;
- Specialist Transport for those young people in exceptional circumstances with the greatest need and where there is no other transport or travel option available to them. This may be from a collection point or from near home.

In some cases we have also provided Travel Buddies and Walking Assistants, and we will continue to do so where this form of assistance is deemed appropriate.

You should be aware that we do not provide Passenger Assistants for young people over the age of 16. If the young person is unable to travel without supervision and they are not attending a school or college on dedicated transport shared with younger pupils, for whom a PA is provided, you will be offered a mileage reimbursement or direct payment, and will be expected to make suitable arrangements for the supervision of the young person.

4.7 Independent Travel Training

In order to better support young people to travel independently, the Council may offer Independent Travel Training in their travel assistance offer. The training will support the young person to learn the necessary

skills to allow them to effectively deal with and resolve a range of scenarios that they might encounter when travelling on public transport.

A trainer will travel and work with the young person on a 1:1 basis to ensure that the skills taught are understood and put in to practice independently. Training may include:

- Timetables (including time management).
- Orientation.
- Road Safety.
- Accessibility (access to transport, exits and purchasing tickets).
- Communication.
- Personal Safety (including what-if scenarios).
- Travel planning and preparation.

Where the Corporate Transport Unit identify that a young person may have the potential to be supported to travel independently through a travel training programme, a formal assessment will be undertaken to help create a personalised travel plan and identify what training would be required. Training programmes last on average 12 weeks, and the young person will only complete the training once the trainer and the young person, together with their family/carer agree that they have gained the necessary skills to travel on public transport on their own.

Once a young person is deemed capable of independent travel no further travel assistance will be offered except in exceptional circumstances.

4.8 Mileage reimbursements

This option may be of particular interest to you if:

- the young person has very complex needs and you wanted to make your own travel arrangements;
- you wanted to combine the council's contribution with your personal finances, and other benefits or bursaries to provide the young person with bespoke travel assistance to meet their needs and fit in with your family circumstances;
- The young person is attending a course, all or part of which is outside the normal school day

If you were offered this form of travel assistance, it would be your responsibility to ensure that your travel arrangements enable the young person:

- to travel safely;
- to attend college regularly and on time;
- to be effectively educated once they arrive at college.

Attendance levels will be monitored and money will be reclaimed for non-attendance at college.

4.9 Specialist Transport

Wherever possible specialist transport is planned to collect several young people from agreed collection points into the same college/sixth form. Where appropriate, vehicles may also collect young people attending different educational establishments, for an effective use of resources.

You should be aware that as young people join or leave the college/sixth form your pick-up and drop-off times may change. We will try to keep these changes to a minimum, and to give you as much notice as possible of any changes.

We do not provide Passenger Assistants as standard on Post 16 transport although some routes to sixth form placements may have a Passenger Assistant where the route also carries younger children.

All staff, including the driver will be DBS checked and appropriately trained. Transport will be provided by a qualified, registered transport provider, working to contractual standards set by the Council.

4.10 Collection Points

The Council uses collection points to support the development of independence and preparation for adulthood in our young people. The use of Collection Points also assists the Council to keep journey times for young people to a minimum whilst also minimising timing changes.

The Council will aim to use an approved location near local points of interest as a collection point. This may include libraries, health centres, public Bus Stops, shops, or outside nearby schools. Collection points will be individually assessed for suitability to ensure they are safe and appropriate locations for the collection of 1 or more passengers.

If the young person's travel assistance offer requires them to walk to a collection point, then it is expected that an adult will accompany them where necessary. Collection points will be a reasonable distance from the young person's home address. We will aim to use collection points that are no more than ½ mile from the home and it is expected that most collection points will be significantly closer. The distance and location of the collection points for each young person will be individually assessed on a case by case basis.

If a young person is accessing a collection point a parent/carer will be responsible for ensuring that the young person gets safely to and from the collection point at the appropriate time. The parent/carer will also be responsible for them when they are waiting for transport, and when they leave the transport at the end of the day.

4.11 No-one at home/collection point

If you are not at home or at the collection point to meet your young person, the driver will wait three minutes after the scheduled set-down time and then continue the journey to drop off other passengers. The transport provider will then attempt to drop your young person off for a 2nd time after completing the remainder of the route. If there is still no-one available to receive the young person, then they will be taken to a place of safety, and you will be expected to collect them as soon as possible.

You will be responsible for the cost of any extra travel involved and supervision provided. If such incidents occur frequently Wokingham Borough Council may suspend provision of transport and you will be responsible for travel arrangements to ensure that your young person attends school or college.

4.12 Emergency Contact details

Before transport can be provided, parents/carers need to provide email addresses and contact telephone numbers, including an alternative number in the event of the operator or Council being unable to contact the parent/carer. In the event of late running, or an emergency involving your child, the CTU or the operator will contact the latest number available on our records. It is therefore very important that you notify the CTU if you change your mobile contact number.

4.13 Withdrawal of Travel Assistance for non-attendance

Travel Assistance is awarded to support a young person to attend a place of education. If a young person persistently fails to attend, other than for ill health, or extenuating circumstances, the Authority reserves the right to withdraw the travel assistance provided. You may need to reapply for travel assistance if the young person later decides to attend again.

4.14 Withdrawal of Travel Assistance on Health and Safety Grounds

The Council has a responsibility to ensure the health and safety of all children and young people for whom travel assistance is provided. We also have an obligation to ensure the health and safety of drivers and passenger assistants.

Children and young people with special educational needs are still expected to behave in a safe and appropriate manner whilst on transport. The Council will work with schools, parents and the young person to help manage behaviours to ensure the ongoing safety and comfort of all passengers including drivers and any passenger assistants.

In particular we expect all young people to:

- Be ready for their transport in good time;
- Behave in a safe and responsible way whilst travelling;
- Follow all instructions from the driver (or Passenger Assistant where one is provided) especially in an emergency;
- Wear seatbelts or appropriate safety harnesses at all times whilst on the vehicle.

Bullying, including the use of hate speech, will not be tolerated and will be reported to parents and school/college. We will not tolerate abuse of any sort, whether from a young person or from their parents and carers.

If a young person behaves in a manner that places the health and safety of those on board a vehicle at serious risk, or presents an adverse risk to themselves, this may result in travel assistance being suspended or withdrawn with immediate effect.

The parent will be informed of any incident that has occurred involving their young person. The Council will work to find an alternative way for the young person to get to school safely but, during this process, the parent of the young person will be responsible for making suitable arrangements to get the young person to school.

Section 5: Applications, Complaints and Appeals

5.1 How to Apply for Travel Assistance

Complete an Application Form

If a young person believes they may be entitled to travel support they should obtain and complete a Home to School/College Travel Assistance Form from the link below. It is the same application form for both Sixth form and Post 19 applications. Please ensure that the age of the young person and their year group in September of the coming academic year are clear in the application.

<https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/schools-and-education/school-information-and-services/school-and-college-transport/>

You can submit your completed application form either by email or post using the following addresses:
Please send completed applications to: Corporate Transport Unit, Wokingham Borough Council, Shute End, Wokingham, RG40 1BN or email to Schooltransport@wokingham.gov.uk

You can also find more information about the Councils SEND Local Offer at the following address:

<https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/local-offer-for-0-25-year-olds-with-additional-needs/>

If you are unable to access the web page please contact [exact contact details to be confirmed before publication] to discuss the options.

5.2 Notification of decision

The Corporate Transport Unit will assess your application for Travel Assistance. The team aims to let you know the outcome of their assessment within 10 days of the date they receive your application. Where additional information is required from other professional or the Local Authority has yet to confirm a placement decision, then the assessment process may take longer. You will be kept informed of any delays.

5.3 Appeals and Complaints

What is the difference between an appeal and a complaint?

Complaints arise when you are unhappy about something, for example, you may feel you have not been dealt with properly or in a professional manner, that information given to you was incorrect or that there has been an unacceptable delay. For these sorts of issues, please follow the Complaints Procedure.

With an appeal, you may be perfectly happy with the way that you have been treated but feel that the wrong decision has been made and would like it re-examined. For these issues, please follow the Appeals Procedure.

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Complaints about the provision of travel assistance will be investigated in accordance with the Council's Complaints Policy. This does not apply to complaints about a refusal to grant transport, which will be dealt with through the Transport Appeals procedure

The complaints policy can be found at:

<https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/contact-us/complaints-and-compliments/>.

Appeal procedures

Parents/guardians/carers or a young person are entitled to challenge the decision of the Council to refuse to provide assistance with transport as set out in this policy or

when the parents/guardians/carers or young person consider that the travel assistance, offered by the Council, is unsuitable.

A decision may be challenged on the following grounds:

- eligibility
- distance measurement; and/or
- safety of the route
- suitability of transport arrangements offered

Stage 1 – Review of decision

You have 20 working days from the receipt of the transport decision to make a request for a review of the original decision.

The request should detail why the decision should be reviewed and give personal and/or family circumstances, which you believe should be considered during the appeal process.

How to make a Stage 1 appeal

You should make your appeal in writing, either by letter or email.

Please provide us with the following information:

- Confirmation that you are the legal parent or guardian of the child
- the date you received our transport notification
- Child's first name and family name
- Child's date of birth
- Your full name and address

- Your email address
- Your phone/mobile number
- Reasons for the appeal (i.e. eligibility, distance, route safety or transport assistance) and your reasons for challenging the Council's decision
- Any additional evidence you wish to present to support your request for travel assistance.

and then email your request to:

Corporate Transport Unit, Wokingham Borough Council, Shute End, Wokingham, RG40 1BN
 or email to Schooltransport@wokingham.gov.uk

A Senior Officer from the Council will review the original decision and will send you a letter, detailing the outcome of the review within 20 working days of the receipt of the written request.

This will set out the following information:

- the nature of the decision reached
- how the review was concluded
- information about other departments and/or agencies consulted as part of the process
- what factors were considered
- the rationale for the decision reached
- Information about escalation to Stage 2, if appropriate.

Stage 2 Appeal

If you are unhappy with the decision made at Stage 1, you will have 20 working days from the receipt of the Council's decision to make a request to escalate the matter to Stage 2 appeal.

How to make a Stage 2 Appeal

Please send your written request to:

Corporate Transport Unit, Wokingham Borough Council, Shute End, Wokingham, RG40 1BN or
 email to Schooltransport@wokingham.gov.uk

You will be expected to consider and offer evidence about:

- Details of how the young person currently travels around outside of college/sixth form
- Examples of incidents/concerns as a result of the Council's original decision
- Current Medical evidence from a consultant supporting the young person
- What efforts have been made by family and friends to support the young person with his/her travel assistance and attendance at college/sixth form
- Evidence that the alternative travel options have been explored, along with evidence why they are not suitable

Your stage 2 appeal will be heard by an independent appeal panel which will be convened to consider the appeal within 40 working days.

No member of the appeal panel will have been involved in the original decision to decline travel assistance. You may request to attend the hearing to present your case in person if you wish. The panel will consider representations from parent/guardian/young person, involved in the request.

The Senior Officer involved in the review of the decision at Stage 1 may also be invited to attend.

You will receive a letter, detailing the outcome of the appeal hearing, which will set out the following information:

- the nature of the decision reached
- how the review was concluded
- information about other departments and/or agencies consulted as part of the process
- what factors were considered
- the rationale for the decision reached
- information about escalation to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) if appropriate

Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

You have a right of complaint to the LGO if you feel that there was a failure on the part of the Authority to comply with procedural rules or there was an irregularity in the way the appeal was handled.

The LGO can be contacted at:

Local Government Ombudsman

PO Box 4771

Coventry

CV4 0EH

Helpline: 0300 061 0614.

www.lgo.org.uk

APPENDIX A

Eligible Learning and Training Providers

Your study programme or training must take place through a publicly-funded provider. This includes:

- A publicly-funded school or academy (including a free school or University Technical College (UTC));
- A publicly-funded further education institution, including further education college and sixth form college;
- A local authority maintained or assisted institution providing further or higher education;
- An independent specialist provider for learners with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities
- A learning provider that is funded by a local authority to deliver accredited programmes of learning which lead to positive outcomes (this could include colleges, charities and private learning providers)

What is NOT eligible:

- Training provided by a commercial trainer i.e. training for which the student or their employer pays directly
- Placements at independent or private fee-paying schools and colleges (unless adopted in the EHCP)
- Placements at any provider who does not provide accredited programmes of learning.

You can find more details at the Wokingham Local Offer

Go to <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/local-offer-for-0-25-year-olds-with-additional-needs/>

APPENDIX B

Useful Contacts

Providers with Post-16 Provision, who will supply information on 16-19 Bursary and Discretionary Learner Support (DLS) applications:

KEY SCHOOL AND COLLEGE CONTACT DETAILS TO BE ADDED HERE BEFORE PUBLICATION

Corporate Transport Unit, Wokingham Borough Council, Shute End, Wokingham, RG40 1BN
or email to Schooltransport@wokingham.gov.uk
Office hours 8.30 to 5, Monday to Friday, including school holidays

Outside these hours please contact the service provider direct.

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TITLE	Wokingham School Admissions Arrangements 2022/23
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 25 March 2021
WARD	None specific
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Children's Services - Carol Cammiss
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Children's Services - UllaKarin Clark

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

The decision is a statutory requirement under the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 It is a key decision because it affects all Wokingham residents. The benefit to Wokingham residents is that children can be admitted to Wokingham schools in an ordered way, in accordance with statutory requirements.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive determines that the Wokingham Borough School Admissions arrangements for the 2022/23 School Year should be unchanged from those in force for the 2021/22 School Year.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Wokingham Borough Council (the Council) has statutory responsibilities for admissions to mainstream publicly funded schools (Academies, Free Schools and Maintained Schools) in the Wokingham Borough area.

The council is the admissions authority for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools in its area. Academies, Free Schools and Voluntary Aided Schools are admissions authorities in their own right. Admissions authorities set the admissions arrangements (including the oversubscription criteria) and are responsible for managing appeals and mid-year applications for places.

The council also co-ordinates the admission of children into a relevant age group (i.e. the age groups to which pupils are normally admitted to schools) for all publicly funded schools in its area. This is normally for entry to the Reception Year, Year 3 (for Junior schools) and Year 7 (for transfer to secondary school). There is no requirement for admissions to other age groups to be co-ordinated. However, the council co-ordinates admissions to other age groups for community and voluntary controlled schools and for other Academy, Free and Voluntary Aided schools that have opted into this service.

Admissions arrangements and the co-ordination scheme must determined by February 28th in the determination year (2021), the year before children are admitted to schools (2022). There is no requirement to consult, where the arrangements have been unchanged, for up to seven years. Even though no changes are proposed, the formal determination is the responsibility of the Council's Executive, because of the borough wide significance of the admissions arrangements.

No substantive changes to the 2021/22 admissions arrangements are considered necessary this year. These in turn were carried forward from the 2019/20 year (when consultation was carried out). This reflects both the number of own admissions authority schools in the borough and that the DfE have made no changes to the statutory guidance since 2014. All bar two secondary schools, all new primary schools and twelve long-standing primary schools are now own admissions authority schools.

There are no additional financial implications through adopting these arrangements and no significant risks have been identified. While changes could be made to the recommended arrangements, they would be at risk of being struck out a later stage by the Schools Adjudicator, because they have not been consulted on.

Once arrangements have been determined, the council must:

- notify a prescribed list of bodies
- publish a copy of the determined arrangements on its website
- publish information about how objections to the arrangements can be made to the Schools Adjudicator.
- send a copy of the determined arrangements to the Secretary of State for Education, by 15th March 2021.

Objections to the determined arrangements can be made to the Schools Adjudicator until 15th May 2021.

The arrangements will be published in the parents' guides to primary and secondary admission in September 2021.

BACKGROUND

As noted in the Executive Summary the council has a statutory duty to determine admissions arrangements for community and voluntary controlled schools and to co-ordinate admission to relevant year groups (to Reception, Year 3 and Year 7 classes) for all publicly funded schools in the Borough. The statutory duties are set out in the statutory School Admissions Code, based on the The School Admissions (Admission Arrangements and Co-ordination of Admission Arrangements) (England) Regulations 2012 and the underlying School Standards and Framework Act 1998 and Education Act 1996.

The schools that the Council determines admissions arrangements for are:

Secondary

The Bulmershe School
The Emmbrook School

Primary

Aldryngton Primary School	
Bearwood Primary School	
Colleton Primary School	
Emmbrook Infant School	Shinfield Infant and Nursery School
Emmbrook Junior School	Shinfield St Mary's CE Junior School
Farley Hill Primary School	South Lake Primary School
Gorse Ride Infant School	St Pauls CE Junior School
Gorse Ride Junior School	The Colleton Primary School
Hawkedon Primary School	The Hawthorns Primary School
Highwood Primary School	Walter Infant School
Hillside Primary School	
Lambs Lane Primary School	Whiteknights Primary School
Loddon Primary School	Willow Bank Infant School
Radstock Primary School	Willow Bank Junior School
Rivermead Primary School	
Robert Piggott CE Infants School,(The	Winnersh Primary School
Robert Piggott CE Junior School,(The)	Woodley CE Primary School

Note: CE is Church of England

A number of these schools are in the process of converting to Academy status. They would be expected to inherit arrangements set by the local authority, if they convert after the determination date.

The "own admissions authority" schools are:

Secondary

Maiden Erlegh School
The Holt School
The Piggott School (*all through school*)
Oakbank
The Forest School
Waingels College
Bohunt School Wokingham
St Crispin's School

Primary

Academy / Free Schools

Beechwood Primary School
Crazies Hill CE Primary School
Earley St Peter's CE Primary School
Ewendons Primary School
Floreat Montague Park Primary School
Hatch Ride Primary School
Keep Hatch Primary School
Nine Mile Ride Primary School
Oaklands Infant School
Oaklands Junior School
Polehampton CoE Infant School
Polehampton CE Junior School
Saint Sebastians CE Primary School
Sonning CE Primary School
St Nicholas CE Primary, Hurst
St Teresa's Catholic Academy
The Coombes CE Primary School
Wescott Infant School
Westende Junior School
Wheatfield Primary School
Windmill Primary School

Voluntary Aided Schools

All Saints CE Primary School
Finchampstead CE Primary School
Grazeley Parochial CE Primary School
St Dominic Savio Catholic Primary School

As established above the admission arrangements for community and voluntary controlled schools, along with the co-ordination scheme for all publicly funded schools in the borough must be determined by 28th February 2021. After determination, a number of bodies must be informed, and the arrangements must be published on the council's website, along with a notice setting how objections can be made to the Schools Adjudicator. The bodies that must be informed after determination are:

- all other admission authorities within the relevant area (except that primary schools need not consult secondary schools);
- whichever of the governing body and the local authority who are not the admission authority;
- in the case of schools designated with a religious character, the body or person representing the religion or religious denomination
- all governing bodies for community and voluntary controlled schools in the relevant area.

Once determined the Council can only make changes to the adopted arrangements in very limited circumstances. These include to correct a mistake or to ensure that arrangements are compliant with statutory requirements. Otherwise, changes can only be made by the Schools Adjudicator, either in response to an objection or following an application by this council because of a major change in circumstances.

Objections can be made until 15th May 2021. The early date is to make it likely that objections can be considered before the composite prospectus (also known as the primary and secondary guides) is prepared, in time for its statutory publication date on 12th September 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)	£0	Yes	
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£0	Yes	
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£0	Yes	

Other Financial Information

None

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

No consultation is required

Public Sector Equality Duty

Due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty has been taken. No equalities assessment has been undertaken because no change to policy is proposed.

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

None

List of Background Papers

2021/22 School Admissions arrangements (published on the Council's website)
The School Admissions Code 2014 (Statutory School Admissions Code)

Contact Piers Brunning

Service Learning Achievement and Partnerships

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TITLE	Covid Winter Grant Scheme Supplementary Estimate
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 25 March 2021
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Children's Services - Carol Cammiss
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Children's Services - UllaKarin Clark

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

This report seeks a Supplementary Estimate of up to £100,000 to continue to support vulnerable families and individuals who are struggling to meet the costs of food and utilities over the Winter months due to the Covid pandemic, supplementing the funds provided through the DWP Covid Winter Grant. The DWP Grant allocated to WBC is £281K. The supplementary estimate, if fully spent, will bring total spend on supporting families and individuals over the Winter months to £381K.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive:

- 1) approves a Supplementary Estimate of up to £100,000 to allow vulnerable families and individuals who are struggling with the cost of food and utilities to continue to be supported once the Covid Winter Grant funds of £281K are exhausted;
- 2) note that this will bring total spend on supporting families and individuals most in need in the Borough to £381K and will allow families and individuals to receive support up to the closing date of the scheme on 16th April 2021.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The DWP Covid Winter Grant Fund programme has, since 14th December 2020, provided support to vulnerable families and individuals in Wokingham who have struggled to meet the costs of food, fuel and associated items over the Winter months during a time of heightened stress and uncertainty due to the Covid pandemic.

An original grant of £208,703 was provided to Wokingham Borough Council with a scheduled programme end date of 31st March. The DWP has recently extended the end date to 16th April, providing an additional grant fund of £72,555, giving a combined fund of £281,258.

At the writing of this report, the £281K grant was forecast to be fully spent during week beginning 15th March. Applications for support are still being received and assessed, and there is a risk of families and individuals being left in unmet need. Based on current forecasts, it is estimated that up to an additional £100K will be needed to meet demand up to the close of the grant on 16th April, bringing total spend to £381K.

It is therefore recommended that a supplementary estimate of up to £100K is approved to continue to ensure that the most vulnerable residents in the Borough, who are struggling due to the pandemic, receive the support they need during this most difficult time, demonstrating the commitment of the Council to care and support residents through the most difficult Winter months.

BACKGROUND

On 8th November 2020, the Government announced a £170m Covid Winter Grant Scheme to be made available to County Councils and Unitary Authorities across England to support those most in need with the cost of food, energy, water bills and other associated costs over the winter months.

The grant was originally intended to cover the period 1st December 2020 to 31st March 2021.

£208,703 was originally allocated to Wokingham Borough Council.

In late February 2021, following the announcement of the Government's Covid-19 Response Roadmap, the Covid Winter Grant Scheme was extended to 16th April 2021, and an additional fund of £72,555 was allocated to Wokingham from a national £55m top-up fund.

The total fund allocated to Wokingham Borough Council is £281K.

Authorities have been delegated authority to distribute the grant due to their access to local intelligence about those in most need, with awards based on the following framework:

- At least 80% of the total funding is ring-fenced to support households with children, with up to 20% of the total funding to support other households experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, poverty due to the pandemic. This may include households not currently in receipt of Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) welfare benefits.
- At least 80% of the total funding is ring-fenced to provide support with food, energy and water bills for household purposes (including drinking, washing, cooking, central heating, and sanitary purposes) and sewerage, or other essentials. Within this condition there is flexibility about the proportion of support allocated to food and to bills.
- Up to 20% of the total funding can be used to provide support with other essentials clearly linked to the scheme conditions (including sanitary products, warm clothing, soap, blankets, boiler service/repair, purchase of equipment including fridges, freezers, ovens etc.), in recognition that a range of costs may arise which directly affect a household's ability to afford or access food, energy and water.
- The scheme is not intended to cover payment of rent or other housing costs because these are not directly related to food or utility bills and other benefits and support is available to cover these costs. Nor is it intended to be used for the provision of general advice on managing debt and/or financial hardship.

At a meeting of the Executive on 2nd December 2020 it was agreed that the grant would be distributed as follows:

1. Each of the 2,166 children and young people in receipt of means-tested free school meals to receive food vouchers during the Christmas and February half term holidays to ensure that families have access to sufficient food during breaks from school. The food vouchers would be issued in the amount of £15 per child per holiday week. Total cost approximately £100,000.

2. Children who have left care (Care Leavers) to receive funds to ensure that they have adequate access to food and utilities over the winter months. Total cost approximately £5,000.
3. The remaining funds to be distributed via referral of families and individuals in need through the Community Response Front Door operated by the Citizen's Advice Bureau. (Total funds available approximately £104,000).

At the same meeting, the Leader of the Council demonstrated the commitment of the Council to ensure that families and individuals receive the support they need through the most difficult Winter months of the Covid pandemic, stating that "should it be necessary, we will find more funding, via a properly accounted supplementary estimate, to support those most in need".

BUSINESS CASE

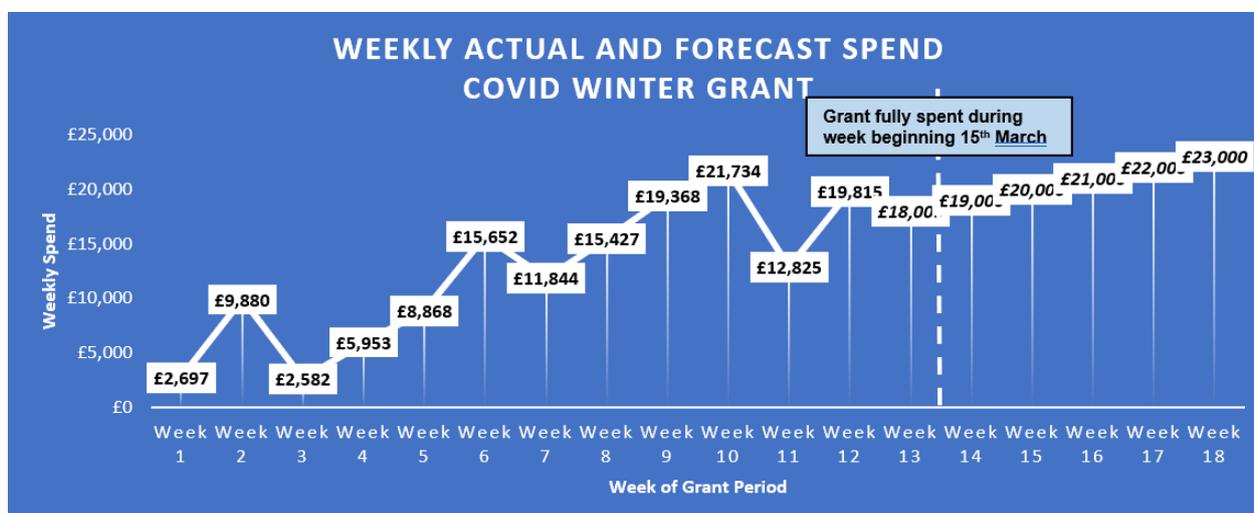
To date:

- Approximately 2200 children and young people have received FSM Vouchers to cover the Christmas 2020 and February half term 2021 holidays (£15 per child per holiday week)
- 75 Care Leavers have received support with the cost of food and groceries
- 287 families and individuals have been supported to meet the cost of food and utilities.

The chart below shows actual and forecast weekly spend through the element of the grant support where clients apply to and are assessed by the Citizens Advice One Front Door. Payments (mainly in the form of food and utility vouchers) are then processed by the WBC Covid Winter Grant team.

It is forecast that the grant will be fully exhausted during week beginning 15th March 2021.

Based on demand trends and existing applications being processed, it is estimated that up to an additional £100K will be needed to support families and individuals in need through to the 16th April grant closing date, bringing total spend to £381K.



It is therefore requested that a Supplementary Estimate of up to £100K is approved to supplement the £281K grant funds bringing total spend to £381K so that families in need can continue to be supported until the 16th April, demonstrating the Council's commitment to proactively supporting and caring for vulnerable families who are struggling as a result of the pandemic.

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)	£50K	No (£50K)	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£50K	No (£50K)	Revenue
Following Financial Year (Year 3)			

Other Financial Information
None

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation
This funding will support continuation of an existing scheme. No additional consultation is necessary.

Public Sector Equality Duty
Provision of support to those eligible for means tested Free School Meals has provided assurance of equality of access in accordance with pre-determined criteria. Similarly, Care Leavers are known to be a vulnerable group in need of support due to their specific circumstances. The process for distribution of the remainder of the fund has been subject to an Equalities Assessment to ensure that support is accessible to all who need it.

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>
This decision will have no impact on the climate emergency project. It is an emergency winter hardship fund provided specifically to support families and individuals who are struggling to make ends meet due to the Covid-19 crisis.

List of Background Papers
None

Contact Viki Elliot-King	Service Social Care and Early Help
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