

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE COUNCIL
HELD ON 6 JULY 2020 FROM 7.30 PM TO 10.35 PM**

Members Present

Councillors: Malcolm Richards (Mayor), Keith Baker (Deputy Mayor), Parry Bath, Rachel Bishop-Firth, Laura Blumenthal, Chris Bowring, Shirley Boyt, Prue Bray, Rachel Burgess, Jenny Cheng, UllaKarin Clark, Stephen Conway, Gary Cowan, Andy Croy, Richard Dolinski, Carl Doran, Lindsay Ferris, Michael Firmager, Paul Fishwick, Jim Frewin, Maria Gee, Guy Grandison, Charlotte Haitham Taylor, John Halsall, David Hare, Emma Hobbs, Graham Howe, Clive Jones, Pauline Jorgensen, John Kaiser, Sarah Kerr, Dianne King, Abdul Loyes, Tahir Maher, Charles Margetts, Adrian Mather, Ken Miall, Andrew Mickleburgh, Stuart Munro, Gregor Murray, Barrie Patman, Daniel Sargeant, Imogen Shepherd-DuBey, Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey, Caroline Smith, Chris Smith, Wayne Smith, Bill Soane, Alison Swaddle, Simon Weeks and Oliver Whittle

19. MINUTE SILENCE

The Council held a minute's silence to honour the memory of the three victims of the terrorist attack in Forbury Gardens, Reading, on 20 June 2020.

20. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Pauline Helliard-Symons and Angus Ross.

21. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council, held on 16 June 2020, were confirmed as a correct record and would be signed by the Mayor at a later date, subject to:

Minute 3: Point of Order - the final sentence of the first paragraph being amended to read: "He stated that block voting and proxy voting contravened this Rule."

Minute 4: Election of the Mayor for the Municipal Year 2020/21 Continued – "Home First Wokingham" to be amended to read "Home Start Wokingham".

22. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Pauline Jorgensen declared a Personal and Prejudicial Interest in Item 31.1, Motion on the Expansion of Heathrow Airport, on the grounds that she was an employee of an airline that used the airport. Councillor Jorgensen withdrew from the meeting for the duration of this item.

Councillor Gary Cowan declared a Personal Interest in Item 31.1, Motion on the expansion of Heathrow Airport, on the grounds that he was formerly an employee of British Airways.

Councillor Maria Gee declared a Personal Interest in Item 31.4, Motion on the Council Tax Protocol, on the grounds that she was a Trustee of the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Councillor Jenny Cheng declared a Personal Interest in Item 31.4, Motion on the Council Tax Protocol, on the grounds that she was a Trustee of the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Councillor Andy Croy declared a Personal Interest in Item 31.4, Motion on the Council Tax Protocol, on the grounds that his mother was a volunteer at the Citizens Advice Bureau and acted as the organisation's campaign manager.

23. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor gave a brief summary of his activities in recent weeks.

24. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

24.1 Ann Dally asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question:

As Councillors may be aware, robust evidence is emerging that the use of bailiffs to collect CT arrears produces less revenue than other methods, such as signposting residents to local debt advice organisations. Has the Council been in contact with other Local Authorities for example Basingstoke and Deane, and Rushmoor, who have signed the LGA/CA CTP in order to understand their experiences and how they have benefited from this?

Answer

The Income service communicates regularly with other Local Authorities to discuss working practices. Each Local Authority adopts its own strategies and principles when it comes to collection of Council Tax arrears. However, there are 'best practice' synergies in respect of recovery action such as:

- Deferring payment plans;
- Close working relationships with voluntary and charitable sectors;
- Reviewing customers affordability to instalment plans;
- Working with the vulnerable and/or those in financial difficulty to ensure affordability;
- Debt advice agencies used where it is seen that customers have multiple debts, it is a positive that these are independent of the Council;
- Being honest and transparent about the next steps in debt recovery, customer centred approaches.

These practices will hold Wokingham Borough Council in good stead as we come out of Covid.

I can confirm we have robust processes and procedures based on meeting Council Tax legislation. Wokingham Borough Council works with those in arrears to agree affordable and sustainable repayment plans, taking into account personal circumstances. The notices sent out about Council Tax are in plain English and they clearly explain the collection process. We encourage customers to seek debt advice if they are experiencing financial difficulty.

Over the last year, the Service Manager has introduced 'surgery' days (every two months or so) where customers can come and talk to staff from Wokingham Borough Council and the Wokingham Citizens Advice Bureau to prevent unnecessary action – it is about reducing customers' stress and anxiety in relation to their Council Tax liability and in some cases acting earlier on in the recovery process to reduce or even mitigate additional recovery costs.

We only use Enforcement Agents as a last resort and, again, they are governed by legislation as well as our own internal arrangements which they adhere to. Where residents who are in receipt of Council Tax Reduction fail to act on notices sent and where

other methods of collection cannot be taken, such as applying deductions from earnings or state benefit, it is necessary for us to use Enforcement Agents in these cases. If information subsequently comes to light to show that a resident is vulnerable or in financial difficulty, the Enforcement Agent will always take this into consideration when managing the case. Protection for vulnerable residents is built into the law on enforcement of debt.

What we do need to consider is that the less we collect in taxes the bigger impact it will have on our local services and budgets.

Supplementary Question

I am pleased to hear that you are keen to reduce customer stress and anxiety and are aware of the importance of early action. Are the Council aware of the link between indebtedness and poor mental health? If so, what action do they intend to take to address this?

Supplementary Answer

Yes, we are. Any time that we feel there is an issue regarding mental health, or a history of mental health issues, that is taken fully into consideration.

24.2 Peter Must asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

In its Report to Council the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee says, with regard to a Borough-wide Parking Management Action Plan, that it had asked that the Executive Member for Highways and Transport engage with the Town and Parish Councils with regards to the developing plan, and the consultation be re-opened to both newly elected and existing Members. These actions were actually agreed by the Committee at its meeting on 17 June 2019. Can the Executive Member for Highways and Transport say what has been done since then to progress the preparation of a draft Action Plan with a view to it being submitted to the Executive and then put out for public consultation?

Answer

The Executive Member for Highways and Transport asked officers to engage with the Town and Parish Councils with regards to the developing Parking Management Plan and re-opened consultation to both newly elected and existing Members, as requested by the Scrutiny Committee, between June 2019 and December 2019.

The process of reviewing submissions commenced in February 2020, but was delayed by the impact of COVID-19 in March 2020. The review of consultation responses has recommenced and work to revise the Action Plan is expected to be completed by the end of July 2020, for consideration by the Executive Member.

Supplementary Question

In response to the draft Local Plan we, the Wokingham Society, could not find any reference to the Parking Management Action Plan and recommend that there should be such a reference. I wonder if you, as Executive Member, could have a look at that. It is important that the Parking Strategy should be mentioned in the Local Plan so that developers are aware of what the context is.

Supplementary Answer

Yes, I will be pleased to do that.

24.3 Mike Smith asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

I note from the published agenda for the full meeting on the 6th July 2020 that there are a very large number of agenda items, some of which have not been addressed despite being on the agenda since September 2019. In particular there are some ten Member questions of which eight, submitted by Conservative members of Council, seem to have little useful purpose and will consume time unnecessarily, and which will probably result in none of the later agenda items such as Motions being debated.

Indeed, five of these Member questions were on the agenda for the previous meeting but were withdrawn, as they were presumably deemed unimportant then and I doubt much has changed in three weeks.

As a more specific example, Item 27.3, is a question from the Deputy Executive Member for Climate Emergency to the Executive Member for Climate emergency asking "...how can this Council work to continue the huge benefits that the environment has received from lower carbon emissions ..." during lockdown – surely if they both attend their sub-committee meetings and read the various reports and plans prepared for those meetings, there is absolutely no need for such a question at full Council – surely a press release would be better?

So my question is, in the interests of ensuring the Council can efficiently discharge its duty to provide a public democratic process of debate on Motions raised by Members, should Agenda items 27.3 to 27.10 inclusive be moved to the end of the Agenda or better yet, be withdrawn?

Answer

The Council Meeting Agenda has evolved over a very long period and is a little arcane. I would say that it pre-dates me.

It is interesting that the thrust of your question is not consuming time unnecessarily and yet you ask a question which is very similar to 27.2. and does not the asking of the question – similar to 27.2 – in duplicate, have the effect of endangering the debate of any Motions?

I appreciate that you believe that Conservative Members' questions "have little useful purpose" but is that not disenfranchising most of the Members? You will appreciate that that there are five Motions, four of which are Lib Dem Motions, which is two and a half hours of debate for a meeting which should be three hours in total.

"The interests of ensuring the Council can efficiently discharge its duty" surely is an opportunity for members of the public and Councillors to ask questions, to enact whatever business needs enacting and for the Executive and Chairmen of other Committees to update Council on their activities.

Supplementary Question

You have just said that it takes two and a half hours to debate five motions on the Agenda. So, when can time be found for these motions to be debated? Otherwise, they will roll on forever.

Supplementary Answer

That is not a matter for me. As I said, the Agenda pre-dates me. It has evolved over a long time and is a little arcane. We have a Constitution Review Working Group to look at these questions and propose any variations for the Council to determine.

25. PETITIONS

No petitions were submitted.

26. ADDENDUM TO THE CONSTITUTION: PROTOCOL FOR HOLDING VIRTUAL MEETINGS

The Council considered a report from the Constitution Review Working Group (CRWG), set out at Agenda pages 49 to 72, which proposed a Protocol for Holding Virtual Meetings.

The report stated that the proposed Protocol provided guidance for the public on how virtual meetings would be conducted. It also included changes to the rules set out in the Council's Constitution, primarily relating to public participation at Planning Committee meetings and the adoption of different methods of voting.

The principal aim of the Protocol was to facilitate as many of the rules and procedures contained in the Council's Constitution as possible, whilst recognising the limitations and challenges presented by virtual meetings.

Section 6 of the Protocol set out specific rules relating to Member and public participation at Planning Committee meetings. These included proposals for members of the public to be able to provide input into the decision making process through written rather than verbal representations.

CRWG raised concerns about the proposed change to public participation at Planning Committee meetings and felt that verbal representations should continue. The Chairman of the Planning Committee had agreed that the rules around public participation would be reviewed at its meeting in August 2020, with a view to reporting back to the September 2020 Council meeting.

The recommendations in the report were proposed by Chris Smith and seconded by John Halsall.

It was proposed by Lindsay Ferris and seconded by Clive Jones that the proposed recommendations in the report be amended as follows (proposed changes in bold italics):

"The Constitution Review Working Group recommend that Council agree:

- 1) that the Protocol for Holding Virtual Meetings, as attached as Appendix A ***and with the addition of the following wording to Section 6: "To be in force until the Planning Committee decides otherwise at a Special Meeting of the Committee to be held in July"***, including changes to the rules contained in the Council's Constitution will be adopted for all Council meetings that are held virtually; and
- 2) that the Protocol for Holding Virtual Meetings will be confirmed as an addendum to the Constitution until such time as Regulations state that virtual meetings are no longer permissible;
- 3) ~~that it be noted that the Planning Committee intends to review its rules relating to public participation in August with a view to reporting back to Council in September.~~ ***That the Planning Committee discusses at a special meeting the restoration of speaking rights for applicants, objectors, town and parish councils and***

ward members and agrees how this would be managed, with a view to having the changes in place for its August meeting;

- 4) that Rule 4.2.15.3 of the Constitution, relating to the requirement to have a show of hands, be suspended to allow for the various voting methods contained in the Protocol to be utilised, if required, at this meeting.”

Lindsay Ferris stated that there was concern about the current lack of ability for applicants, objectors, Town and Parish Councils and ward Members to speak at the Planning Committee. It was felt that this facility should be restored as quickly as possible as it was an important part of transparency and an indicator of public confidence in an effective democratic process.

Simon Weeks, Chairman of the Planning Committee, stated that the current, interim arrangements would be reviewed at the meeting in August 2020. In the meantime, there was a risk that the proposals in the amendment could disadvantage members of the public who did not have reliable access to or confidence in using video conferencing technology.

Chris Smith stated that he did not accept the proposed amendment.

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

The voting was as follows:

For	Against	Abstained
Rachel Bishop-Firth	Parry Batth	Keith Baker
Shirley Boyt	Laura Blumenthal	Malcolm Richards
Prue Bray	Chris Bowring	
Rachel Burgess	Jenny Cheng	
Stephen Conway	UllaKarin Clark	
Andy Croy	Gary Cowan	
Carl Doran	Richard Dolinski	
Lindsay Ferris	Michael Firmager	
Paul Fishwick	Jim Frewin	
Maria Gee	Guy Grandison	
David Hare	Charlotte Haitham Taylor	
Clive Jones	John Halsall	
Sarah Kerr	Emma Hobbs	
Tahir Maher	Graham Howe	
Adrian Mather	Pauline Jorgensen	
Andrew Mickleburgh	John Kaiser	
Imogen Shepherd-Dubey	Dianne King	
Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey	Abdul Loyes	
	Charles Margetts	
	Ken Miall	
	Stuart Munro	
	Gregor Murray	
	Barrie Patman	
	Daniel Sargeant	
	Chris Smith	

	Bill Soane	
	Alison Swaddle	
	Simon Weeks	
	Oliver Whittle	

The Council then voted on the proposed recommendations in the report.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the Protocol for Holding Virtual Meetings, appended to the report, including changes to the rules contained in the Council's Constitution, be adopted for all Council meetings held virtually;
- 2) the Protocol be confirmed as an Addendum to the Constitution until such time as Regulations state that virtual meetings are no longer permissible;
- 3) it be noted that the Planning Committee intends to review its rules relating to public participation at its meeting in August 2020 with a view to reporting back to the Council in September;
- 4) Rule 4.2.15.3 of the Constitution, relating to the requirement for voting through a show of hands, be suspended to allow for the various methods contained in the Protocol to be utilised, if required, at this meeting.

27. ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES 2019/20

The Council considered the annual reports from the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees, set out at Agenda pages 73 to 90.

Alison Swaddle, Vice-Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, introduced the reports and highlighted the range of issues scrutinised by the Committees during the year. Councillor Swaddle thanked the Officers and Members for their input into the Scrutiny process during the year.

It was proposed by Alison Swaddle and seconded by Guy Grandison that the annual reports from the Overview and Scrutiny Committees for 2019/20 be noted.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the 2019/20 annual reports from the Overview and Scrutiny Committees be noted.

28. AUDIT COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20

The Council considered the annual report from the Audit Committee for 2019/20, set out at Agenda pages 91 to 94. The report gave details of the range of issues considered by the Committee during the year.

Bill Soane, Chairman of the Audit Committee, presented the report. Councillor Soane thanked the Officers and Members for their work in support of the Committee during 2019/20.

It was proposed by Bill Soane and seconded by Dianne King that the Audit Committee annual report for 2019/20 be noted.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the annual report from the Audit Committee for 2019/20 be noted.

29. STANDARDS COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20

The Council considered the annual report from the Standards Committee for 2019/20, set out at Agenda pages 95 to 102.

John Halsall, Chairman of the Standards Committee, presented the report which gave details of the work of the Committee and the number and type of Code of Conduct complaints received during the year.

It was proposed by John Halsall and seconded by John Kaiser that the Standards Committee annual report for 2019/20 be noted.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the annual report from the Standards Committee for 2019/20 be noted.

30. WOKINGHAM BOROUGH WELLBEING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT 2019-20

The Council considered the annual report of the Wokingham Borough Wellbeing Board, set out at Agenda pages 103 to 118.

Charles Margetts, Chairman of the Board, presented the report which gave details of the issues considered by the Board in 2019/20.

It was proposed by Charles Margetts and seconded by John Halsall that the annual report of the Wokingham Borough Wellbeing Board for 2019/20 be noted.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Wokingham Borough Wellbeing Board annual report for 2019/20 be noted.

31. REPORTS FROM MEMBERS APPOINTED TO OUTSIDE BODIES

The Council considered reports from Members appointed to Outside Bodies, set out at Agenda pages 119 to 162.

The reports provided a summary of key issues covered by the Outside Bodies during the year.

It was proposed by John Halsall and seconded by John Kaiser that the reports from Members appointed to Outside Bodies be noted.

On being put to the vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the reports from Members appointed to Outside Bodies be noted.

32. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

32.1 Gary Cowan asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

With reference to the proposed Coppid Beech Park and Ride how many buses will be scheduled to travel into Wokingham and how many to Bracknell on a weekly basis?

Answer

Discussions have been undertaken with Reading Buses around the diversion of the Lion 4/X4s into the park and ride site. If all Lion 4/X4s are successfully diverted into the site at pre-COVID-19 frequencies, and assuming a normal week with no bank holidays, this would provide 739 buses, of which 372 would be Reading bound and 367 would be Bracknell bound.

Supplementary Question

Park and Ride has many benefits, but every Park and Ride in Wokingham Borough incurs financial costs which local residents have to pay. When you look at the existing structures, Wokingham, Woodley and Lower Earley receive a very poor service from Park and Ride. Could more effort be made to try to get the Park and Ride routes to come into Wokingham, Woodley and Earley to benefit our residents, not just those in Reading and Bracknell?

Supplementary Answer

I am a bit confused by that point. Earley, Woodley and Winnersh are served by the Park and Ride at Winnersh Triangle, which serves Earley quite well. Also, the Park and Ride near the Thames at Broken Brow serves that end of Woodley well. So, although not in Earley or Woodley they are close by. There are Park and Ride facilities that service both towns and I am always happy to look at suggestions for improvement without spending a lot of ratepayers' money.

32.2 Prue Bray asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

The Liberal Democrats have become increasingly concerned about the fact that due to the time constraints artificially imposed on them, meetings of full Council do not manage to complete all the business that is on the agenda. This has gone on for some time and means that important issues do not get discussed.

In an effort to try to ensure this Council meeting is at least able to reach the Motions, which have been waiting some months to be debated, the Liberal Democrat group is submitting only this one written Member question, saving time but sacrificing our limited opportunities to hold the ruling group to account in the process. At Annual Council the Conservative leader withdrew Conservative questions to get the meeting finished in time. Our question is: what will the Conservatives do at this and future meetings to try to ensure we reach the end of the agenda?

Answer

Thank you for your question, especially as it is now 9.06pm, one and a half hours in.

As you know, the Constitution Review Working Group (CRWG) considers all requests from Members to ensure the Council meeting runs effectively and efficiently. This has included examining the time available for each item at the Council meeting to complete the business of the meeting. The Constitution allows for Council meetings to be extended for

an additional 30 minutes, meaning that the meeting can run for a maximum of three and half hours. In addition, the Council has agreed to introduce an additional meeting in the municipal year recognising the interest that both the public and all Members have in the work of the Council.

In short, it can be a difficult balance to strike – ensuring adequate time for public and Member participation, holding the Executive to account, full Council taking informed key decisions on important items that affect our community, and leaving time for the full debate of Motions. By means of example and not criticism, I note that since your question was submitted, your Leader has submitted an urgent question on a very important subject but this will necessarily take time away that otherwise could have been allocated to the debate on Motions.

Furthermore, there are five Motions, the first four of which are by Lib Dems which in total will take two and a half hours to complete if they were on their own without any other business.

The Conservatives have no control over what other parties seek to include in Council meetings and, therefore, cannot ensure that we reach the end of the agenda.

Supplementary Question

I think you are, perhaps deliberately, missing the point. The fact that we have already had more than one suggestion this evening that, in order to get through the business in the Council meeting we lose our opportunity to ask questions. That it has been suggested that it is a waste of time to debate how residents can be represented democratically at the Planning Committee. And you are objecting to four Motions, not that they were submitted for this meeting but were submitted as long ago as last September and we have not managed to get to them. All that indicates that we have a problem. We are not getting through all the things we need to do as a Council. Will you commit to at least, genuinely, having a cross-party discussion on what we can do to improve this?

Supplementary Answer

Genuinely, I have been trying to do that for the past 13 months.

32.3 Laura Blumenthal asked the Executive Member for Climate Emergency the following question:

Now that we are emerging from lockdown how can this Council work to continue the huge benefits that the environment has received from lower carbon emissions?

Answer

The response to the Covid-19 outbreak has provided evidence that in modern society we can do things differently. Before the start of the pandemic 1.7 million people in the UK regularly worked from home according to the Office for National Statistics. That represents about 2.5% of the UK population. The lockdown caused an instant shift in working habits and methods. An estimated 20 million people now regularly work from home (about 30% of the UK population). In Wokingham, the lockdown resulted in a significant reduction in transport. Workplace commuting went down by 54% during April alone, having direct effects on congestion and consequently on improving air quality and reducing carbon emissions.

As we move into the recovery phase, there is a great opportunity to help shape how we move forward in the medium and long-term. Within the Council, we are working towards

understanding the impacts on the employees from the extended home working experience. We are asking our employees to share their experiences and tell us what they have learnt from the last few months and how we can use this learning to shape the work environment of the future.

There are positive things we have learned about how we work and engage with each other, and we have the opportunity to shape a more flexible approach to the way the Council work and serve our customers. Until now, Officers have been allowed flexible working, as we recognise there are many advantages, such as time and money saved on commuting, and the positive impact on the environment. However, we also know that the right conditions need to be in place for it to succeed. In addition, specific working groups have been tasked with assessing the effects of the lockdown, collecting evidence and providing recommendations that will allow us to take evidence-based decisions relating to our staff and accommodation strategies.

More broadly, the Council has been engaging with businesses to understand their working practices and encourage them to consider these new ways of working in their recovery plans. We are working towards promoting 'Lift-share' schemes through My Journey to support businesses to develop bespoke travel policies as well as encouraging them to increase the uptake of cycling by promoting the Love to Ride scheme.

32.4 Pauline Helliar-Symons asked the Executive Member for Climate Emergency the following question. In her absence, the following written reply was provided:

Many local and national businesses are making significant progress in reducing their carbon footprint. What efforts have WBC made to engage with local and national businesses and learn from their efforts in reducing our own Carbon Footprint?

Answer

As you know, responding effectively to the Climate Emergency is something I am very passionate about. Engagement with businesses and the identification of best practice is indeed a priority for the Council to help identify how we can most effectively reduce the Borough's carbon emissions. This relates to both informing our own actions as an organisation and how we seek to influence the actions of others.

Of particular note, Wokingham Borough Council has already set up a Climate Emergency Advisory Board of experts in this field. This involves both national and local business organisations as well as representatives from the academic and charity sector. Acting as a 'critical friend', the Board sets out to use its members' expertise and experience to provide necessary advice and guidance at the strategic and project levels, bringing to bear knowledge of best practice, emergent technologies and a level of scrutiny on our plans and actions. Within the Borough this is supplemented by engagement with academics at the University of Reading to ensure the Council can learn from expert advice in the fields of Climate Science and Climate Justice. This will broaden understanding of the climate emergency, best practice for carbon dioxide reduction (both policies and practice) and allow the Council to find the most efficient methods of mitigation and adaptation.

In addition, of course, current exceptional circumstances are also providing a platform for extensive business engagement and learning. Whilst not belittling the enormity of the impacts of the Covid-19 epidemic, there has been a silver lining with regard to environmental impacts over the short-term, including reduced carbon emissions and a significant improvement in air quality for example, primarily linked to reductions and changes to business activity. To a degree some of these impacts may be transitory but the Council is keen to learn how far

positive changes might become embedded in new ways of working and an ongoing commitment to 'greening' the economy.

We are currently embarking on an extensive survey of local businesses that will incorporate getting a better understanding of how they are operating and adapting in the face of the Coronavirus pandemic and the likely longer-lasting changes they might implement that will support carbon reduction. We believe this information is vital in helping us work together to provide the best possible advice and support to the local business community as well as plan and deliver our own initiatives and services going forward. Linked to this we are also looking to repurpose and grow the Wokingham Borough Business Group into an effective 'Business Task Force' that can both advise and collaborate on economic recovery and on how we can ensure that this promotes a more sustainable future.

Finally, on a note of cautious optimism, Ernst and Young's recent survey of larger businesses confirms that 57% of those businesses surveyed considered that climate change and sustainable investment will be a renewed priority going forward – this is something we can build on locally.

32.5 Graham Howe asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

During the height of the emergency, it was understandable that normal meetings of the Council and Committees were suspended. In fact, they would not have been permitted within the regulations. During the shutdown a number of things were not done and other functions operated differently to pre-Covid. What has been learnt about doing things differently and what has the Council learnt to improve constitutional decision-making and scrutiny?

Answer

I recognise the importance of constitutional decision making and proper scrutiny. Democracy can only function with transparency and scrutiny. Face to face meetings were suspended nationally during the emergency and regulations permitting an alternative were awaited.

I am pleased to announce that since the Regulations were enacted in early April, allowing Councils to hold virtual committee meetings, several decision-making meetings have already taken place. This has included, for example, two Executive meetings, two Planning Committee meetings, an Audit Committee meeting, and the Annual Council meeting. These meetings were all held virtually and webcast live allowing anyone to view them.

We are, tonight, holding our second virtual full Council meeting which is an additional meeting to consider some of those items which had been due to be discussed at the postponed March meeting. It will also be possible for the public and Members to submit questions to this and other applicable Committee meetings.

Regarding scrutiny, the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee met on 24 June and, together with its sub committees, are carrying out significant scrutiny relating to the Council's response to the Covid-19 emergency as well as the ongoing activities of recovery. This will be a key means of ensuring the Council is well-prepared should there be a second wave of Covid-19.

In the future, all the Council and its other decision-making Committees, will be held in accordance with the Timetable of Meetings which was agreed by Council in January 2020. As stated previously, it is the intention to webcast live all public meetings that are held virtually ensuring that residents can access and participate in the Council's democratic

processes.

Whilst the emergency exists, we shall have to hold meetings virtually or hybrid. Members and Officers have now become used to many of the benefits of virtual meetings and overcome many of the concerns. It is quite possible that the CRWG will consider proposing to Council moving to virtual meetings in some cases even when the emergency has ended.

It is a credit to our officers in Democratic Services, who have sought to overcome the issues involved so that meetings can be held and are continuously seeking to improve the functioning of them. As Members we need to examine what we want out of these meetings and ensure that we put into operation procedures democratically which will facilitate them.

32.6 Michael Firmager asked the Executive Member for Regeneration the following question:

What are your plans for regenerating Wokingham Town Centre after the Coronavirus?

Answer

Making sure our town centres can continue to thrive in a post-Covid world is incredibly important to this Council. This work will be supported by the Business and Economic Recovery Group.

Pre-Covid, Wokingham town centre was already seeing a real increase in popularity and footfall as the regeneration was nearing completion. Residents and visitors were attracted by the great new businesses and facilities such as the Everyman Cinema, the new square at Peach Place and the lovely new park and destination play area at Elms Field.

As with all town centres, the initial lockdown effectively closed all but essential businesses. However, in recent weeks, we have already seen signs of some recovery in Wokingham. People are returning to the town centres as the lockdown relaxes and more businesses open. Whilst it is early days, we know local people want to support their local town.

Strategically, we have been offering support to retailers throughout the restrictions with over £35m of support given out to local businesses since March. This includes business rates relief, the original small business and hospitality and retail sector grants, and the latest discretionary grant, which was focussed on supporting some of the hardest hit small businesses such as market traders who are so important to our town centres. We have also continued to work closely with other important groups such as the Thames Valley LEP, the Federation of Small Businesses and the Chamber of Commerce to look at what wider resources are available to support businesses and make sure they can access them easily.

Focusing on Wokingham town centre, the Council is working very closely with the Town Council and Love Wokingham to identify some of the local businesses main concerns, ideas and thoughts. We feel strongly that if recovery is to be a success, plans need to be developed in partnership with the businesses who also have their part to play in making sure the town is a safe place to shop over the coming months.

A range of actions have been put in place to help our centres recover, including targeted marketing and awareness campaigns to keep people updated about what is on offer in the town centre and how it is being safely managed.

Whilst we know there is still a lot of work to be done, and there are likely to be many changes over the coming months, we believe that the regeneration of Wokingham has created the ideal conditions for the town to continue to be resilient and become the success we know it can

be.

Supplementary Question

The Wokingham regeneration is also delivering new homes. Can you confirm the status of these new homes?

Supplementary Answer

We are delivering in excess of 200 new homes as part of the regeneration project. 22 apartments in Peach Place have already been let to key workers, providing much needed accommodation and adding vibrancy to the town centre.

Now that estate agents have reopened, I am happy to report a really positive level of interest in our houses and apartments above the retail areas in Elms Field, via our estate agent David Cliff. Viewings are under way in line with social distancing protocols and we are starting to receive offers as well.

Across the park, David Wilson Homes have reopened their site following the lockdown and are continuing to build out. They have continued to market the scheme and have also had a good level of interest which is continuing to pick up since the restrictions have been eased. We are also planning to build a further 55 apartments in the town, as part of Carnival Pool Phase 2. The planning consent has been agreed and construction will start soon. The contract will be tendered later this year.

32.7 Daniel Sargeant asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Were we able to use the lockdown productively in improving our roads?

Answer

The lockdown enabled us to bring forward 17 difficult resurfacing schemes for delivery in April/May and June 2020, including some of the busiest sites the Borough such as the Showcase Roundabout, the Pound Lane Roundabout on the A4, the Finchampstead Road roundabout (outside the Ford Garage) and Molly Millars Lane. Initially these schemes had been scheduled to start in August 2020 and by bringing them forward we were able to take advantage of the much reduced levels of traffic and minimise the disruption to our residents.

In addition, we also managed to save some money as we were able to undertake more of the work during the daytime which is cheaper. Alongside these schemes we also started work on our annual surface treatment programmes. We completed all of the planned surface dressing programme on 9th June 2020. The Micro Asphalt programme is still ongoing and we are on course to have most of it completed by the end of June subject to weather conditions.

32.8 Dianne King asked the Executive Member for Regeneration the following question:

What are we doing to help the Towns and Villages recover from the emergency?

Answer

As set out in my earlier response to Councillor Firmager, a huge amount of work is going on in our local centres to help them recover from the impact of Covid-19. We are making sure local businesses are able to access the support they need, whether that is the £34m of financial grants we have already given out, access to the latest advice and information

or the retailer support packs we have been distributing to help them reopen as we move forward; there is lots on offer. We are also looking at a range of wider support for our centres such as temporary changes to the way spaces are managed and laid out. We have made a lot of those changes already but will continue to keep this under review and offer more marketing support.

Whilst the initial focus is on reopening the largest shopping areas at Wokingham town centre, Woodley and Twyford safely, the lessons learnt in making these centres safe spaces for shoppers and workers, as well as the materials generated and the information shared will be just as important for other areas such as our smaller villages and centres.

Over the coming period we will continue to work closely with all our towns and parishes, as well as local groups, business associations and communities, to help support them not only in recovering from the impact of Covid-19, but also in continuing to deliver on our shared long term vision for making Wokingham Borough a great place to live, learn, work and grow as well as a great place to do business.

32.9 Jenny Cheng asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question:

As the Wokingham Borough Council representative on the Royal Berkshire Hospital for the last two years I would welcome your views on how we worked together during the emergency and how we can build on this relationship in the future.

Answer

We continue to work operationally closely with Royal Berkshire Hospital (RBH) colleagues on a daily basis, seven days a week, facilitating discharges within the framework of the Hospital Discharge Requirements issued by Government in March this year. This has resulted in quicker discharges to ensure there is plenty of capacity in the hospital. The working relationship between all system partners (health and social care) is positive and solution focussed. We have a weekly system meeting attended by the three Berkshire West local authorities, RBH, Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust and the Clinical Commissioning Group. The purpose of the meeting is to ensure partners are fully briefed on matters of mutual interest, including capacity constraints and challenges which organisations are facing and to agree how to work together to support them.

The system is currently working together to further develop hospital discharge pathways to ensure that we learn the lessons and embed the positives from our response to Covid-19 into normal business and that everyone continues to comply with statutory requirements and, most importantly, that patients are discharged safely. Healthwatch are supporting us with this work by obtaining views from patients about what matters most to them when being discharged from hospital.

On a more strategic level we are fully engaged in the development of the Berkshire West ICP Urgent and Emergency Care Strategy which has been identified as a key ICP priority for 2020/21. This aims to deliver improved outcomes for patients, relieve pressure on all our services and create a more sustainable sector going forwards.

32.10 Abdul Loyes asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question:

Please could you update the Council on the situation in care homes?

Answer

We fully appreciate that the whole care home sector has been under immense pressure and the exceptional job that care homes and the health and social care system have done to meet the current challenge. It would not have been possible to respond in the way we have without the full support of our partners, especially those in care homes. We would like to thank all care home staff for the immense effort they have put in to keep people supported.

Locally, we established a protocol and Task Force with health and social care colleagues. This means infection control teams. This process works proactively with our care homes to prevent the spread of Covid-19, assess and support their readiness to take and manage positive cases and ensure they receive all the support they need. It also supports all the Council's safeguarding functions.

It is worth noting that, as of Friday 26 June and, indeed as of today, all care homes within the Borough are Covid-19 free. It is important to acknowledge, however, that suspected and confirmed cases of Covid-19 will continue to emerge. The staffing situation in care homes is reported as stable. Symptomatic staff continue to be able to access testing via WBC and asymptomatic staff can access testing via the national portal. Care homes have utilised the additional bank of staff provided by WBC, but use of this has tailed off as the position has stabilised. The Task Force continues to work with care home managers around advice and guidance on how to deal with Covid-19.

Many older people's homes have been able to access all system testing. Homes are reporting that they feel well supported and are ready for the ongoing challenges.

The Adult Social Care team has been working with local care homes. This has included:

- An improved funding deal for care homes WBC contracts with;
- Prepayments and support with cash flow and the ability to apply for temporary funding;
- Help with PPE (over 390,000 pieces of PPE have been provided);
- Regular advice and guidance, including financial sustainability and infection control;
- 400 phone calls to support care homes;
- Testing for staff with symptoms (250 staff tested);
- Offer of access to staff;
- Spiritual and emotional support via the community hub.

32.11 Shirley Boyt asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:

I note from Councillor Miall's report on the Wokingham Sport Sponsorship that this fund helps to provide equipment, kit and travel expenses for youngsters who are exceptional at a particular sport. As a member of the Arts and Culture Working Group I would like to ask whether the Council will consider a similar fund for young people who are exceptionally talented in the Arts.

Answer

As a member of the Arts and Culture Working Group you will know that I am hugely committed to promoting and developing cultural activities across the Borough, including the widespread involvement and engagement with young people. With regards to funding in a similar manner to the Sport Sponsorship Fund, I think that it is perhaps less straightforward to be able to define exceptional talent in an environment that isn't driven in the same way by competition with very clear performance parameters. I am also aware that there may be other funding sources available, for example I know that Berkshire

Maestros offer fee discounts and have a 'Sponsor a Child' fund for those struggling with affordability of lessons or instruments.

As you know the local authority is facing significant financial constraints in these challenging times and this provides a very difficult context within which to commit to new areas of expenditure. However, I am more than happy to explore further how we can collectively support talented young people in the cultural sector through the Arts and Culture Working Group and in taking forward the draft Arts and Culture Strategy.

Supplementary Question

There are a good many other ways for young and talented sportspeople to get funding, e.g. the Sports Lottery Fund and various other sources. For young people who are talented in the Arts there are options via the Royal Ballet School or the Guildhall School of Music. I know the cost of musical instruments and travel, etc. and I would implore the Council to consider giving equality to the Arts.

Supplementary Answer

I totally agree with that and, through the Arts and Culture Working Group, we will sit down and work together to find new sources of funding for these young people.

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

It has been identified that there are two sets of figures for Covid-19, one called Pillar 1, which covers NHS/Hospital figures, this represents about 10% of the overall tests and has been well known and available. However there is a second set of figures, known as Pillar 2, which represents about 90% of the total testing done in the UK (done by companies and at various sites across the UK). This figure has often not been made available to local Councils and others, where it has, it has been often late. This is extremely concerning. In Leicester for example Pillar 1 indicated around 28 cases, but Pillar 2 identified 944. Hence the lockdown now occurring there.

At the last O&SC Management meeting (June 24), I asked how many Wokingham Borough residents had had Covid-19 and was advised this was on the website and the figure was 430. I also asked the number of deaths associated with Covid-19 and the figure given was I believe 130. Can you advise whether this figure is only the Pillar 1 figure, or whether it includes, or omits the Pillar 2 figures and has WBC been advised of the Pillar 2 figures during the time testing has been taking place by these bodies?

This is an extremely worrying issue and needs to be understood, and what is more residents of Wokingham Borough need to be made clear what the position is in our Borough.

Answer

As everyone knows, testing was not widespread at the beginning of the pandemic, but is now widely available to everyone who needs it.

Pillar 1 and 2 gives us the information about WBC positive cases through antibody testing. Pillar 1 is swab testing carried out by Public Health England (PHE) and NHS labs. These are primarily hospital patients and key workers. Some of our care homes were tested in these labs. Pillar 2 is swab testing done by commercial labs on behalf of the Government. This is testing for the wider population through the NHS or Gov.uk websites. This includes our care homes who were tested using the on line portal. Pillar 2 testing started later than

Pillar 1 and has been gradually increasing.

Up to the 2nd July, 2,947,392 tests have been done in Pillar 1 (36%) and 5,130,686 tests done in Pillar 2 (64%).

Up to the 1st July WBC has been reporting just Pillar 1 data, with 485 cases reported. There have been no Pillar 1 cases in Wokingham since the 14th June.

Pillar 2 data was made available to Local Authorities and the general public on Friday of last week. Somehow, it made its way into the Daily Mail before then. PHE are now able to combine the data sets with a new methodology that enables them to remove duplicates and provide accurate data. The confirmed cases for Wokingham Borough are:

- Pillar 1 total cases: 458 (previously reported by WBC);
- Pillar 2 total cases: 126 cases;
- Total cases in Wokingham Borough is now 584.

As a comparison:

- The infection rate in Wokingham Borough is: 348 per 100,000;
- The infection rate average in England is: 436 per 100,000.

As a result of the new Pillar 2 data being available, it has emerged that the number of cases in Wokingham Borough did increase with one case in the week June 15 to June 21 and five cases in the week June 22 to June 28. This has increased the weekly rate from 0.6 to 3.

In relation to death data, this has not changed. This is reported by the ONS.

Up to 17th May there were 130 Covid-19 related deaths.

Up to 19th June there were 147 Covid-19 related deaths in Wokingham.

Supplementary Question

There was a press release on Friday which, I think, effectively answered my question tonight, which was submitted on Tuesday. The public need to be aware that there is a significant variance in certain parts of the country with regard to the number of cases reported to the council. Throughout, we have been given Pillar 1 data, but now we are finding that Pillar 2, which is the greater size and is now coming on stream. Was that information kept back or was it released as a result of pressure in the public domain for the past week?

Supplementary Answer

I agree with you fully. It is deeply frustrating to me and the Officers that this information just lands on us without warning. It was kept back, basically, because it was not ready, is what we are being told. We think that this is wrong. We think that this is very poor. If councils are being asked to plan for Covid-19 and the reaction locally, they should have accurate, honest and timely information. So, not only can they plan but they can also brief the public about the real situation.

33. MINUTES OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS AND WARD MATTERS

33.1 Stephen Conway asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question:

Can you assure me and the residents of Twyford and its surrounding villages that money for the new Twyford library will remain in this year's Capital Programme?

Answer

There have been no changes with regards to the allocation of money for the Twyford library. It is relatively small beer, I have to say that, but it is. We are looking at some of the larger projects at the moment which may not occur.

33.2 Richard Dolinski asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

In 2012 residents of my ward were promised that the restoration of the Bailey bridge across the River Loddon was to be done. Potentially this would have created a greenway linking Woodley to Twyford. The benefits are all too apparent and support the aspirations of the Council to promote alternative methods of travel to reduce congestion and improve our environment.

The cost in 2012 had been identified at £200,000. Funding was made available in the form of a £140,000 grant and the rest from developers' contributions. At the time this was widely reported in the media. Can you please tell Loddon Ward residents what happened to this money and guarantee now that the Bailey bridge will be finally restored?

Answer

Sadly, I can do neither of those today. I do promise to respond to both of these points in the future. I need to do a bit more research on the question. I am sorry, but I have not had sufficient time to bottom out the question.

33.3 Paul Fishwick asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

In relation to a ward question from my fellow Councillor Prue Bray on 19 September 2019, relating to Winnersh Triangle railway station, you said: "...so I have suggested to Highways that they bid for some money to improve Winnersh Triangle because its access is not good enough. I am happy to meet with you to see what we can do together to move this forwards."

In your response to a resident question, from Mike Smith, relating to Earley railway station at the annual meeting of the Council, held on 16 June 2020, you said: "We are looking at the moment at providing disabled access to Winnersh Triangle".

What are these plans and, while we are pleased that you are looking at accessibility for Winnersh Triangle station, why have you not contacted the ward Councillors as you promised?

Answer

I was waiting for Prue to contact me and don't think that she has. I have asked Officers to look into this and have not received the conclusions from that investigation. If you email me I will be happy to answer.

33.4 Barrie Patman asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

Can you confirm if the changes to the AWE Burghfield Emergency Planning Zone (EPZ)

have had any effect on my ward?

Answer

We first heard of the changes to the EPZ shortly before Xmas 2019, having been previously assured that there would be no changes. We have also been assured by the Atomic Energy Authority that the changes to the EPZ were purely technical and were not the result of anything happening in Burghfield. So, if we take them at their word, then it should have no effect on anybody in the Shinfield ward. I am not sure that this is true.

All the residents of the affected area and beyond have been advised of the emergency procedures. I think that we will have to see the extent to which it affects them, if at all. For the moment, we are assured that it is purely a technical arrangement process as a consequence of being a member of the EU.

33.5 Sarah Kerr asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:

Under the Council's policy for ongoing maintenance of Council-owned trees, woods and copses, the first part of the policy states that "the Council will aim to ensure that each Council owned woodland or wooded area will have an up-to-date management plan in place, which will be reviewed on a regular basis". This policy is in line with the Occupier's Liability Acts 1957 and 1984. During public question time at the annual Council meeting, on 16 June 2020, a member of the Friends of Fox Hill group requested a copy of the management plan for the woodland known as Fox Hill. The management plan has still not been provided. Can you confirm whether a management plan for this woodland actually exists? If so, please provide me with a copy. If not, please let me know when it will be available.

Answer

I think that I did intimate that the plan did not exist in my answer. I will liaise with Officers and provide an answer for you.

33.6 Guy Grandison asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Residents have raised concerns about traffic in Beech Lane, including ignoring speed limits and an increasing number of HGVs which are causing significant vibrations in properties near to the speed bumps that were installed 30+ years ago by a different Council. What can the Council do to mitigate this and enforce the speed limit?

Answer

I have also received emails from residents in Beech Lane in relation to the speed bumps. It is a difficult problem. In the past we have done surveys down Beech Lane and anyone who lives near to the speed bumps doesn't like them because they create a lot of noise. People who did not live near to the speed bumps liked them because they slowed the traffic down. It is a difficult problem to solve. I will be happy to ask Officers to look into it.

Just to clarify, the speed humps were installed by the District or County Council following a request from Earley Town Council when the Lib Dems were in control.

33.7 Gregor Murray asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Can you provide an update on the Wokingham town centre road closure that took place on Friday (market day) and whether or not it was a success?

Answer

I have not seen the actual performance report, so I can only go on what I have heard. I received an email from cyclists recently, saying that they were delighted with it and it really helped their ability to cycle through the town. I believe that the view from some of the motorists is mixed, possibly because we were shutting it for two days and, on the days it was open, people had gotten used to it. On the days it was closed they had already driven into town. It is definitely something that we should work on to see how we can do something that helps the traders (which the closure does) but also helps the pedestrians and cyclists and keeps the motorists happy. An interesting balancing act.

33.8 Rachel Shepherd-Dubey asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Where is the Winnersh Park and Ride to be relocated while the double decking is under construction?

Answer

I do not know, but you have reminded me of something that I could have shared with your colleague (Paul Fishwick). One part of the plan for the Winnersh Park and Ride is to install a lift. That may help with accessibility to the station. I have asked to see plans to see if we can do that. That may be one solution. I am happy to email you about the relocation site.

33.9 Emma Hobbs asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

How is the new street cleansing contract coming along?

Answer

This contract is operated by Volkors who are our Highways contractor, having moved from the previous contractor. It is being tried out in a couple of areas in Earley and may have been tried out in other parts of the Borough. I know about the Earley works around schools. I have received some positive feedback and have seen excellent pictures showing the quality of their cleansing. I hope that they can keep it up and clean the rest of the Borough to the same standard.

33.10 Jim Frewin asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

You should be congratulated for bringing forward a number of highway resurfacing projects during the lockdown. Some of the work in my ward is excellent but there are a couple of cases where the quality is questionable. Fairmead Road is already developing potholes after just a few weeks of being resurfaced and residents of Elizabeth Rout Close tell me that they have a new water feature, which they describe as a small lake every time it rains, which has never happened before.

Will you visit these sites with me and provide reassurance for the residents who have raised these issues that we do monitor quality and value for money?

Answer

Yes I will be happy to visit if you invite me. Certainly, I believe that the highway repairs are warranted for a couple of years. So, if there is an issue it should be fixed at no cost to the taxpayer. Most repairs are good but faulty repairs should be fixed.

33.11 Imogen Shepherd-Dubey asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

I have residents in my ward who are unable to access Wokingham Town Centre because of the removal of the Blue Badge parking bays. The bays have been removed from Broad Street and Rose Street. The bay in Peach Street is largely used by lorries for unloading. The closure of Denmark Street removed most of the remaining bays. It is difficult for disabled people who cannot walk very far to use Wokingham town centre at the moment. Was there an Equality Impact Assessment and what measures are being put in place so that these people can still use Wokingham town centre?

Answer

Yes, there was an Equality Impact Assessment. I have received an email from Officers about the location of the alternative parking spaces, but I cannot locate it at the moment. I will update you as part of my Executive Member update.

33.12 Bill Soane asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Colemansmoor Road in Woodley is a bus route and, since the opening of the pathways through to Dinton Pastures which is also the new cycleway, there has been a considerable increase in parking which causes congestion. When the buses are coming down the road it only allows single way traffic. It is also creating problems for residents. I have a list of residents who have signed a petition asking that something be done to restrict parking along that section of Colemansmoor Road. Is there anything that can be done?

Answer

I am happy to ask Officers to look into this for you.

33.13 Gary Cowan asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Can the Executive Member send me the email on disabled parking in Wokingham town centre, mentioned earlier?

Answer

I will be happy to forward the email.

33.14 Parry Batth asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

In my ward, Falcon Avenue is a long road with a nasty bend in the middle. There are only two street lights, one at either end. There are some elderly people living in the middle section who find it difficult in the dark, particularly on winter nights.

I did ask the Executive Member about this some time ago. Officers have looked at the situation but nothing has happened. Please can you ask the Officers to look at providing a street light in the middle section of Falcon Avenue?

Answer

I am happy to offer my support. Hopefully, there will be light at the end of the tunnel.

34. STATEMENTS BY THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL, EXECUTIVE MEMBERS AND DEPUTY EXECUTIVE MEMBERS

John Halsall – Leader of the Council

The senseless stabbings in the Forbury Gardens, Reading underline the fragility of life. One of the victims was a very popular Holt schoolteacher, James Furlong. It is difficult to find words to console in such dreadful circumstances. It is impossible to understand the motive for such actions. Thanks God for our emergency services.

James was a wonderfully talented and inspirational Head of History, Government and Politics at the Holt School in Wokingham. He was a very kind and gentle man. He had a real sense of duty and cared for every one of his students. He truly inspired everyone he taught with his passion for the subject and his dedication. He was determined that our students would develop awareness of global issues and, in doing so, would become active citizens and have a voice.

It is also very sad that James Box died suddenly last Monday evening. He represented Westcott Ward on Wokingham Town Council. My heart goes out to his wife and children.

I thank God that we have been spared the worst of the virus and it now seems to be at bay. Thanks also to you for helping your neighbours and heeding Government advice. Thanks to the Officers and volunteers who have been so dedicated, flexible and hard working. We are very lucky to live in such a great community. However, the coronavirus is still with us. It has the capability to kill whilst there is no vaccine. So, please resist the temptation to believe that it is over. Stay distant from one another and stay at home as much as possible.

The Borough Council is honing its outbreak plans which include prevention, effective tracking and tracing and outbreak management plans. We will be continuing with our measures to protect the vulnerable from coronavirus and, at the same time, progressing our recovery without creating the need for extra resources, conscious of the need to balance the Budget. Staff have shown their flexibility and willingness to work within this envelope. I ask all Members to be cognisant of this, not to create non-essential demand and to work through Executive Members. Using our resources wisely will save lives.

Your Council is dedicated to providing the best services and support we can give to our residents. Within the Borough, we are anti-racist, promote equality and celebrate diversity. We can and will do better on each. Stay alert and stay safe.

John Kaiser – Executive Member for Finance and Housing

Financially, councils across the UK have been badly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. In fact, some councils would be considered to be in the unenviable position of declaring bankruptcy, or very close to it. Fortunately, Wokingham Borough Council is not in that position, even as the lowest funded unitary authority. Years of careful management by Conservative administrations means that our reserves are better than most, being rated the 10th highest unitary authority in the country. That said, most of the councillors here would also be aware that we have incurred expenditure and loss of income that already exceed the Government funding received so far to the tune of £6m, which will need to be funded by our reserves. This is, of course, an estimate and the impact could be worse.

We are still assessing the likely cost of the pandemic and, even with the Government support, the Council will have to call upon its reserves to a sustainable degree. How sustainable will depend on the outcome which no one can predict with any accuracy at the moment. The increasing weekly cost and the Borough taking on additional responsibilities such as track and trace, the policing of social distancing and ensuring that businesses follow Government guidelines, all make it even more difficult.

Interestingly, our reserves prior to the pandemic stood at less than one month's Council Tax. Even as I stated, our reserves are considered as prudent and more than adequate for councils of our size and level of responsibility. It would not take long with the current level of cost to use up these resources. One stark statistic is that the Council was responsible for the care of some 1,800 people. This has ballooned to 5,000 people.

The Council is currently working on a recovery plan as we come out of lockdown, which will mean assessing the situation. The recovery plan will also look to rebuild our reserves over a number of years to ensure that the Council is financially sound, prepared to meet the challenges of increasing demand and cost going forwards. On the matter of reserves, they are like a fire extinguisher. You use them when your house is on fire and, I can tell you, our house is currently burning. These are tough, sad and emotional times. It is the residents' money and, along with Government grants received, it is there to support the community, which has been done in a controlled and accountable way. We have used the money to support residents in their time of need.

Working as a team, we will pull through this. All the things the Parish, Town and Borough Councils have done to support the residents and the actions of the voluntary sector have helped to minimise the impact on the most vulnerable in our community. The fight continues and we are not out of the woods yet.

Charles Margetts – Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services

I wanted to pick up on a couple of points raised earlier. We talked about the Pillar 2 test tracing results being released last Friday. I want to reiterate to Members how unhappy we are to be continuously blind-sided by Public Health England. We have raised these comments firmly with our local MPs and complained strongly about this. If they want us to take responsibility for managing Covid-19 locally, we have to have the correct information. Otherwise, I just wanted to briefly refer Members to the Council-wide Track and Trace management plan which was released in public last week. The plan is 114 pages and covers every outcome that may happen when we get further Covid-19 cases in the community and how they will be managed. If anyone has concerns, questions or comments, please email me directly.

Pauline Jorgensen – Executive Member for Highways and Transport

I wanted to answer the question I was asked earlier. I have found the email from Officers relating to disabled parking bays in Wokingham. In Broad Street one disabled parking bay was removed due to Covid-19 and we are looking at whether we can tweak the measures to re-provide that space. In Rose Street there were three spaces removed but there are sufficient Blue Badge parking spaces in the car park adjacent to Rose Street. In addition, the Rose Street spaces associated with the Methodist Church, which is currently closed for services, are available. In Peach Street, no bays were removed and all three bays are available. In Denmark Street, no bays were removed and all four are available. In addition, Blue Badge holders are able to park on single and double yellow lines for up to three hours provided they do not obstruct the flow of traffic. For example, there is space for four disabled vehicles on yellow lines in Rose Street.

35. CONTINUATION OF THE MEETING

During the discussion of Agenda item 29, at 10.08pm, in accordance with Procedure Rule 4.2.12 (m), the Council considered a Motion to continue the meeting beyond 10.30pm for a maximum of 30 minutes to enable further business to be transacted, specifically the

Motions set out in Agenda item 31. The Motion was proposed by Andy Croy and seconded by Prue Bray.

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

The voting was as follows:

For	Against	Abstain
Rachel Bishop-Firth	Keith Baker	Malcolm Richards
Shirley Boyt	Parry Batth	
Prue Bray	Laura Blumenthal	
Rachel Burgess	Chris Bowring	
Stephen Conway	Jenny Cheng	
Gary Cowan	UllaKarin Clark	
Andy Croy	Michael Firmager	
Richard Dolinski	Guy Grandison	
Carl Doran	Charlotte Haitham Taylor	
Lindsay Ferris	John Halsall	
Paul Fishwick	Emma Hobbs	
Jim Frewin	Graham Howe	
Maria Gee	Pauline Jorgensen	
David Hare	John Kaiser	
Clive Jones	Dianne King	
Sarah Kerr	Abdul Loyes	
Tahir Maher	Charles Margetts	
Adrian Mather	Ken Miall	
Andrew Mickleburgh	Stuart Munro	
Imogen Shepherd-Dubey	Gregor Murray	
Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey	Barrie Patman	
Caroline Smith	Daniel Sargeant	
	Chris Smith	
	Wayne Smith	
	Bill Soane	
	Alison Swaddle	
	Simon Weeks	
	Oliver Whittle	

The Motion was declared by the Mayor to be lost.

Note: Pauline Jorgensen and Alison Swaddle sought clarification as to whether it was acceptable for Members to make comments in addition to stating their voting preference. The Mayor confirmed that the Constitution did not prohibit brief comments from Members.

36. STATEMENT FROM COUNCIL OWNED COMPANIES

Due to time constraints, this item was not considered.

37. MOTIONS

37.1 Resumption of Motion 421 previously submitted by Ian Pittock

The Mayor reminded Members that this Motion had been proposed and seconded at the

meeting on September 29 2019. After 12 minutes of debate, the Motion had been adjourned as proposed by Andy Croy. In addition it had been agreed that a recorded vote would be taken on the Motion when debate resumed.

As the proposer of the adjournment, Andy Croy restarted the debate and stated that the proposed third runway at Heathrow Airport would fuel economic growth and also fuel demand for new housing development in the Borough. Consequently, he urged Members to support the Motion.

It was proposed by Gregor Murray and seconded by Laura Blumenthal that the Motion be amended as follows (proposed changes in bold italics):

“This Council does not support the expansion of Heathrow ***any airport unless it can be proven to be carbon neutral.***”

Lindsay Ferris queried whether the amendment was acceptable, as it appeared to negate the original Motion. The Mayor stated that the amendment was acceptable as it did not negate the original Motion.

Gregor Murray stated that 97 airports around the world had achieved carbon neutrality and the council should not oppose the expansion of Heathrow if it could be achieved in an environmentally sustainable manner.

Paul Fishwick (seconder for the original Motion) stated that the proposed amendment was acceptable.

In line with the Council’s earlier decision, a recorded vote on the substantive Motion took place. The voting was as follows:

For	Against	Abstain
Keith Baker	Shirley Boyt	Sarah Kerr
Parry Batth	Rachel Burgess	Adrian Mather
Rachel Bishop-Firth	Andy Croy	Malcolm Richards
Laura Blumenthal	Carl Doran	
Chris Bowring		
Prue Bray		
Jenny Cheng		
UllaKarin Clark		
Stephen Conway		
Richard Dolinski		
Lindsay Ferris		
Michael Firmager		
Paul Fishwick		
Jim Frewin		
Maria Gee		
Guy Grandison		
Charlotte Haitham Taylor		
John Halsall		
David Hare		
Emma Hobbs		
Graham Howe		

Clive Jones		
John Kaiser		
Dianne King		
Abdul Loyes		
Tahir Maher		
Charles Margetts		
Ken Miall		
Andrew Mickleburgh		
Stuart Munro		
Gregor Murray		
Barrie Patman		
Daniel Sargeant		
Imogen Shepherd-Dubey		
Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey		
Caroline Smith		
Chris Smith		
Wayne Smith		
Bill Soane		
Alison Swaddle		
Simon Weeks		
Oliver Whittle		

RESOLVED: That this Council does not support the expansion of any airport unless it can be proven to be carbon neutral.

37.2 Motion 428 submitted by Sarah Kerr

Due to time constraints, this Motion was not considered.

37.3 Motion 429 submitted by Rachel Bishop-Firth

Due to time constraints, this Motion was not considered.

37.4 Motion 430 submitted by Rachel Burgess

Due to time constraints, this Motion was not considered.

37.5 Motion 431 submitted by Pauline Helliard-Symons

Due to time constraints, this Motion was not considered.