



WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

An Extraordinary Meeting of the **COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** will be held Virtually on **MONDAY 27 JULY 2020 AT 7.00 PM**



Susan Parsonage
Chief Executive
Published on 17 July 2020

The role of Overview and Scrutiny is to provide independent “critical friend” challenge and to work with the Council’s Executive and other public service providers for the benefit of the public. The Committee considers submissions from a range of sources and reaches conclusions based on the weight of evidence – not on party political grounds.

This meeting may be filmed for inclusion on the Council’s website.

Note: The Council has made arrangements under the Coronavirus Act 2020 to hold the meeting virtually via Team Meetings, the meeting can be watched live at the following link: <https://youtu.be/C5X4HdhZBQw>

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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 COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillors

Guy Grandison (Chairman)	Oliver Whittle (Vice-Chairman)	Keith Baker
Shirley Boyt	Paul Fishwick	Graham Howe
Clive Jones	Abdul Loyes	

Substitutes

Andy Croy	Carl Doran	Pauline Helliard-Symons
Emma Hobbs	Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey	Caroline Smith

ITEM NO.	WARD	SUBJECT	PAGE NO.
13.		APOLOGIES To receive any apologies for absence.	
14.		DECLARATION OF INTEREST To receive any declarations of interest.	
15.		PUBLIC QUESTION TIME To answer any public questions related to items on this agenda. 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 this committee. Subject to meeting certain timescales, questions can relate to general issues concerned with the work of the Committee 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	
16.		MEMBER QUESTION TIME To answer any member questions related to items on this agenda.	
17.	None Specific	BME FORUM UPDATE To receive an update from the Wokingham BME forum	5 - 8
18.	None Specific	COVID-19 RESPONSE - BUSINESS & ECONOMY AND OPERATIONAL HOUSING To consider WBC's initial and ongoing business, economic and operational housing response to the Covid-	9 - 18

19 pandemic

19. None Specific

UPCOMING MEETING WORK PLAN

19 - 20

To consider the items of work to be discussed at the upcoming two Committee meetings, and to confirm a date for the proposed Extraordinary September meeting

Any other items which the Chairman decides are urgent

A Supplementary Agenda will be issued by the Chief Executive if there are any other items to consider under this heading

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TITLE	BME Forum Update
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 27 July 2020
WARD	None Specific
LEAD MEMBER	Parry Batth, Executive Member for Environment & Leisure
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Communities, Insight & Change - Keeley Clements

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

The Wokingham Borough Council BME Forum provides a focal point for people with a black, Asian or minority ethnic (BAME) heritage who live, work and visit the borough to engage with the Council and act as a critical friend about issues that are important to them.

The BME Forum also celebrates diversity within the borough and the contribution our BAME community makes to our quality of life. These celebrations include planning and delivering our annual Black History Month activities.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee note the activities and achievements of the BME Forum and make suggestions on how these could be enhanced to increase its contribution to the quality of life within the borough.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

Wokingham Borough Council BME Forum was established in 2002.

Its primary purpose is to influence the policies, practices and services of the Council to ensure that the aspirations and the needs of the BAME communities in the borough are appropriately met, and to exchange information between Wokingham Borough Council and BAME communities and amongst the BAME communities themselves.

Although the forum is administered by the Council, it is community lead in terms of its priorities and activities.

The BME Forum meets four times a year and is open to everyone. These meetings are an opportunity to provide information and discuss issues about the services of the Council and how they are supporting our BAME residents.

The BME Forum Chair is elected every four years. A Wokingham Borough Council representative is appointed as the deputy chair.

Background

For nearly twenty years the Wokingham BME Forum has been successful in celebrating diversity within the borough and providing a voice for nearly 30,000 residents with a black or minority ethnic heritage.

Wokingham borough has a population of nearly 170,000 people. Within our population approximately 84% of our residents would describe themselves as white British (142,000 people). The last Census figures indicated that 6.6% of our population has a Asian/Asian British heritage, 3.7% have a white other heritage, 2.1% a 'mixed BAME' heritage, 1.4% a 'Black/African' heritage, 0.9% a 'White Irish' heritage, 0.8% a Chinese heritage, 0.2% a traveller heritage, with a further 0.7% describing themselves as having an 'Other' heritage.

Within its meetings, the Forum has routinely had updates on issues such as educational attainment, health services and the ongoing housing development within the borough. The Forum has also been a place to discuss sensitive issues within the BAME community such as racial abuse, radicalisation and the threat from terrorism.

The Forum also been proactive in delivering a Healthy Lifestyles project which aimed to tackle the higher prevalence of circulatory diseases, such as coronary heart disease (angina and heart attack) and stroke, within the BAME community. This can be prevented by simple changes in lifestyle such as physical activity and a healthier diet. This project was delivered through Health Service funding from the Partnership Development Fund and proved very popular with residents, attracting a strong mix of male and female participants of all ages and ethnic heritages. Due to funding running out, the project ended in 2018.

The funding was used to run various classes/practical sessions in the form of physical fitness classes, swimming, healthy cooking & eating, aqua fit, and sporting activities. These classes were primarily run in Earley, Lower Earley, and Woodley.

This project has helped many people in our BAME community in gaining confidence undertaking exercise because of the way it connected with them. This has been definitely due to the knowledge of their culture; language and our commitment to reach and make it easier for them to understand this project. The feedback from its participants indicates that people have benefitted greatly and are continuing to benefit from the service provided to them.

Black History Month

In October each year the Forum celebrates Black History Month with a range of events and activities. There are displays in the Council Offices highlighting a particular element of history or achievement within the BAME community, such as BAME historians and authors and the contribution of soldiers from different ethnic heritages to the First World War. The month always closes with the hugely popular Taster and Performance Evening which showcases different artistic performances and foods.

The Council's first celebration of Black history began in 2004 as part of the work of the borough's Cultural Partnership. A few years later the annual celebration became directly

co-ordinated by the BME Forum and included a range of activities such as a Question Time (on the model of BBC question time), the Calypso Tent and “An evening with a leading personality”, which were held at various venues including at the Crescent Resource Centre in Lower Earley. A Caribbean drama written, produced and acted by local Caribbean community was held at Maiden Erlegh School.

A number of summertime Community Cohesion conferences were also organised including one with Police on Community Safety/terrorism and honour killings. A play called “One Extreme To Another” was organised and held at the Woodley Baptist Church.

The Black History Month Mall Gallery Exhibition is now a firm fixture in the Council calendar. Each year it highlights a particular issue that is of importance to the BME Forum. Below is a list of the theme of each exhibition since 2008:

Year	Mall Gallery Exhibition Theme
2008	Nelson Mandela’s 90th Birthday and the Presidential Candidacy of Barack Obama
2009	Black History Month Festivities in Wokingham Borough
2010	Healthy Lifestyles
2011	Life & Culture
2012	Inspiring the Next Generation
2013	BME Forum Healthy Lifestyle Project
2014	Black & Asian Contribution to First World War
2015	Black Authors & Historians
2016	Stories of Independence
2017	Contribution to Cultural Diversity – Carnivals & Festivals
2018	Remembering the Windrush Generation
2019	Contribution of BME Community Groups to Wokingham Borough

The Taster & Performance Evenings, held at Woodley Baptist Church to mark the end of the Black History Month celebrations, is a wonderful showcase of local talent from our BAME communities. The event has a strong family theme with many performances from local children and young people. The event ends each year with a performance by the ever popular AJ’s Calypso Tent.

Analysis of Issues

Aside from being a critical friend for the Council and a showcase for BAME culture within the borough, the BME Forum has provided an important role in being able to discuss sensitive local issues and events that have occurred.

When arrests were made for terrorism activities within the borough, the Local Police Area Commander came to the Forum to explain the work that they were doing and to understand the concerns of the local BAME community. In this it was particularly helpful to understand the support the police were offering to the families directly affected by these arrests.

The Police also engaged directly with the Forum, when an increase in burglaries targeting gold and jewellery within Asian communities, to provide practical information on how this was happening and what local residents could do to secure their homes.

The Council routinely engages with the Forum whenever it is reviewing its cemetery capacity and burial services within the borough to make sure these are still meeting the needs of our diverse range of faiths.

Local voluntary and community groups have attended the Forum to explain their work in supporting issues such as drug and alcohol abuse, strokes, radicalisation, and forced marriages.

A key aim for the BME Forum as it moves forward is how it can engage more with younger residents across the borough. This is to both ensure the continuation of the important role the Forum plays within the borough and to identify issues that the Council may not be aware of, so that the Forum can maintain its positive influence on the activities of the Council.

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)	NA	NA	NA
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	NA	NA	NA
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	NA	NA	NA

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

None

Cross-Council Implications

The BME Forum considers issues across all council services in relation to their impact with the BAME community

Public Sector Equality Duty

The BME Forum directly supports the Council's activities in relation to ethnicity and faith.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2

None

List of Background Papers

None

Contact Mark Redfearn	Service Customer and Localities
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TITLE	Covid-19 Response Update – Business & Economy, Emergency Housing Provision and Operational Housing
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 27 July 2020
WARD	None specific
LEAD OFFICERS	Nigel Bailey - Assistant Director Housing & Place Commissioning

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

The report highlights some of the work underway to support local businesses during the current pandemic and into recovery. It also provides information on actions taken to maintain the council's operational housing service and meet the emergency accommodation needs of those more vulnerable members of our community.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee consider the report

SUMMARY OF REPORT

Part A of the report provides a summary of the council's approach to supporting the economy and local businesses during the current pandemic and as move towards re-opening and recovery.

It summarises work carried out to date to engage with local businesses to understand the immediate and potential future impact of Covid-19, the support and advice provided included grants to businesses, the start of a conversation around how we can build on any positives to support the Borough's climate emergency agenda and our focus on supporting the safe re-opening of our town and village centres.

Whilst the majority of our work to date has been reactive we are now developing a longer term recovery plan for the Borough's economy and businesses which will be informed by our improved links to businesses and business organisations and supported by the new Wokingham Business Taskforce

Part B of the report provides a summary of our approach and actions to date during the pandemic relating to emergency housing provision, rough sleepers and more widely across our operational housing services.

In both areas this represents a snapshot of the current position as work in both areas is on-going and in particular with our businesses where the full impact of the pandemic has, in many cases, yet to be felt.

PART A – BUSINESS & ECONOMY

During the pandemic and as we move towards the recovery phase we have been working closely with a range of organisations and individual businesses to understand their needs and provide advice and support where possible.

As part of the Council's overall recovery work we have set up a specific workstream to cover Business & Economy and a summary of that workstream is set out on the diagram below.

BUSINESS & ECONOMY RENEWAL WORKSTREAM

To understand how Covid-19 has impacted on local businesses and key sectors of Wokingham's economy. To work with other partners and agencies to ensure local businesses have the best possible support and advice they need during the pandemic and subsequent recovery. To implement active and practical measures where appropriate. To encourage and support businesses to build on any positives relating to changes in working practices that may contribute to the climate emergency agenda.

BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE:

Understanding the impact of the pandemic on our local businesses, what their key concerns are and what support, if any, they are aware of and have taken advantage of. Understanding confidence levels of local businesses in their future recovery and identifying where any additional support or advice may need to be targeted.

ADVICE & SUPPORT:

Ensuring local businesses feel supported by Wokingham Borough Council and that we create a positive business-friendly environment for recovery. Working with partners and neighbouring authorities to promote and provide a comprehensive range of information, guidance, support and advice both for general use and tailored to individual business.

BUSINESS GRANTS:

Promoting and targeting any available business grants administered through the Council to eligible local businesses. Ensuring the application, assessment and payment processes are as simple, fair and efficient as possible.

BUILD ON THE POSITIVES:

Understanding how the working practices of our local businesses may have changed and identifying where we can help them build on those potential positive changes to support the climate emergency agenda.

ACTIVE & PRACTICAL MEASURES:

Identifying any affordable and practical measures we could take to support renewal. Using any available funding to implement those measures delivering best value for money.

RE-OPEN OUR TOWN & VILLAGE CENTRES:

Working with partners and local businesses to support the safe re-opening of the retail & hospitality sectors with focus on Wokingham town centre, Woodley and Twyford.

COMMUNICATION: Supporting all strands of the renewal workstream

1. Business Intelligence, advice and support

In order to support our businesses effectively we recognised it was crucial to understand their concerns and issues and develop more effective links and partnerships at all levels. We have been working closely with the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Economic Partnership (LEP) as well as economic development colleagues in our neighbouring Berkshire authorities.

As well as information being produced at a national and regional level we have carried out our own Business Health Check survey which, whilst response was relatively low, has provided some useful business intelligence and helped us provide additional advice and support to over 80 local businesses.

National Context

With much of the national information there is a time lag however some key recent findings include;

- The latest HM Treasury average of independent forecasts (June) suggest that there will be a 9.2% economic contraction in 2020 followed by 6.5% growth in 2021.
- The monthly average of forecasts also predicts that the ILO (International Labour Organisation) defined unemployment rate will reach 7.9% in 2020, reducing to 6.6% in 2021.
- As at 28 June in the UK, there had been 9.3 million employments furloughed made by 1.1 million employers, with a total value of claims of 25.5 billion
- The Bank of England's latest survey of chief financial officers from small, medium-sized and large companies found that on average, they expect an 11% decrease in employment by the end of 2020, up from 10% a month ago.
- In the June Decision Maker Panel survey, businesses expected their sales in 2020 Q2 to be 38% lower than they would otherwise have been because of Covid-19, employment to be 8% lower and investment to be 38% lower.
- The latest ONS Coronavirus Business Impact Survey (01-14 June) reported that 80% of responding businesses had been trading for more than the last two weeks
- The same survey reported that 6% had started trading again within the last two weeks after a pause in trading.
- And that of businesses who were continuing to trade, 6% of the workforce had returned from furlough in the last two weeks, while 2% had returned from remote working to the normal workplace.
- Those sectors showing market capitalisation gains include Pharmaceuticals, Cloud computing, E-Commerce, Communications, On-line gaming & IT
- Those sectors showing losses include:
 - Where social distancing makes biggest impact: airlines, brewers, casinos, catering companies, theme parks
 - Heavy industrials hit by lower demand, worker safety, and supply chain disruption: manufacturers from car makers to chemicals groups
 - Energy companies: excess supply is the problem – oil
 - Banks, life insurers, asset managers: profits are sensitive to interest rates (which have plummeted) and market capitalisation of banks has declined

The Office of National Statistics (ONS) are surveying business across the UK in 'waves', each covering approximately 3 weeks of the Coronavirus Lockdown impact on Businesses. The last, Wave 6 was published on 18th June. Response numbers have been increasing up until the recent survey where numbers have plateaued. Key findings include:

- Unlike the Wokingham Business Healthcheck Survey respondents, there was a relatively low level of response from retail, hospitality and entertainment sectors. Highest responses were from the professional, science & tech, health care & social work and transportation & storage sectors.
- 30.6% of all respondents stated that they have increased or started use of online services to help communication with customers. This figure is 38% in Wokingham Borough where 45% have also increased use of social media.
- 81.4% of businesses have applied to the Job Retention Scheme. This was 68% in Wokingham Borough possibly showing higher resilience than the national average.
- 17.5% of businesses had applied for a business grant through a devolved government in the ONS survey. 58% of businesses had applied to the Small Business Grant and 28% for the larger retail, hospitality and leisure grant in Wokingham Borough.
- 16.9% of businesses told ONS they had applied for a government-backed loan, this figure was 26% for the bounce back loan for Wokingham Borough businesses.

Regional Context

The Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (TVB LEP) latest briefing on recovery (week beginning 7th July) includes the following findings for Berkshire:

- Lower rate of furloughing than nationally
- Total of 107,500 employments furloughed in Berkshire – representing 18.0% of workforce jobs (Lower than the UK average of 24.3% of furloughed employments as % of workforce jobs)
- Total of 32,500 claims from the Self Employment Income Support Scheme – representing 69% of eligible claims with average value of £3,200 per claim.
- Claimant Unemployment rate remains below UK average but significantly higher increase in claimant numbers with a total of 29,375 claimants in April 2020 in Berkshire. That represents a 5.1% claimant unemployment rate (UK=6.4%)
- Claimant unemployed has increased by 166% since March 2020, when there were 11,055 claimants
- 9% of Berkshire-based enterprises have already actioned or plan to action a restructure (TVB COVID insights survey)

TVB LEP have identified areas of impact based on sectors in the local area. Impacts for the top three sectors who responded to the WBC survey are below.

Hotels, leisure, entertainment and tourism (17%) – Most at risk locally

- Hospitality and tourism has seen a sharp decline in trade since January. There were 500,000 redundancies in the last week and seasonal hires of 500,000 cancelled. 70% drop in booking at the national level.
- Entertainment, Art & Leisure has also seen a sharp decline in demand with the shutdown of venues and businesses. Nationally, there has been a complete loss of revenue for physical venues and disruption of new productions and services.

Retail (14%) – Some risk locally

- Demand for non-food retail is suppressed and the sector has experienced severe supply chain disruption. The workforce is at high risk of infection.
- Nationally, recession has further depressed demand and cash flow issues have caused problems with salaries and leases.

Business services/consultancy (10%) – Low risk locally

- Demand has been limited and affected by lockdown.
- Services have adapted well to home working and business continuity is high
- Nationally there has been a decline in some areas of business but new work/continuity in legal and finance.

Local Context

The TVB LEP June briefing also highlighted some key facts about Wokingham Borough:

- Estimates suggest that Covid-19 will cause a higher fall in Wokingham's economic output (GVA) compared to the national average
- Wokingham's GVA has been projected to decline by 41% in Q2 2020, higher than UK rate of 35% decline and 79 highest (out of 382) local authority (Centre for Progressive Policy, modelled on sector GVA from OBR)
- Wokingham's claimant rate remains below the UK average, but claimant unemployment has grown at a significantly higher rate with 3,525 claimants in

May 2020, a claimant rate of 3.4% (UK=6.4%) and an increase from 1,140 in March 2020

- 11,000 employees working in Wokingham Borough (12.7% of total) are in industries hardest hit by shutdown (16.9% nationally)
- Residents in Wokingham are slightly more able to work from home compared to nationally due to the occupational mix of residents' jobs with 27,200, or 32.3 % of working Wokingham residents capable of working from home (based on ONS analysis for UK)
- This reflects a higher share of residents in managers, directors and senior officials, professional and associate professional occupations and a lower share of residents working in skilled trades, caring leisure and other services occupations, sales and customer service occupations
- Much lower rate of furloughing in Wokingham compared to the UK average with 17,920 furloughed jobs up to 31 May 2020 (Equivalent of 17.7% of workforce jobs and lower than UK average (24.3%))

TVB LEP have also recently commissioned their own Business Insights Survey across Berkshire which will include some Wokingham-specific information however the results of that are not as yet available.

Wokingham Business Health Check Survey

In June 2020 the Council sent out a Covid-19 Business Survey to understand how businesses are operating and adapting in the face of the Coronavirus pandemic and the likely long-lasting changes they will face. The survey helped to find out how businesses had been affected and captured current thoughts on how businesses intend to approach the recovery phase of the pandemic.

Around 2,000 surveys were sent out and responses are still coming back however as at 16th July we had received 159 responses with the majority coming from the retail, hospitality and business services/consultancy sectors.

Included in the survey were links to additional guidance, advice and support on the council's own website, the Business Growth Hub and Public Protection Partnership's website. As well as providing the latest guidance and support tools both the Business Growth Hub and PPP have been able to offer 1:1 bespoke support and advice – with the Growth Hub recruiting additional staff to meet demand.

Analysis of the results is still underway however some key findings of those businesses who responded include:

- 50-60% were concerned about the economy and their own businesses in both the short and long term
- 72% of businesses had furloughed staff and 54% had their hours reduced.
- 59% had staff working from home although over 50% felt home working was not practical for their business
- 54% had seen a reduction in the number of customers.
- Around 47% were concerned about great isolation issues for their employees and over 30% were concerned about potential impact on mental health
- 68% had taken advantage of the Government's coronavirus job retention scheme, 58% of small business grant funding and 35% of the HMRC time to pay scheme

- 30% felt confident that their businesses could return to pre-pandemic levels in the short term, 65% in the medium term (2-5 years) and 71% in the longer term (+5 years)
- 75% had imposed spending restrictions and were reviewing all non-essential expenditure to try and mitigate risk
- Where businesses identified any positive impact 48% highlighted a lower carbon footprint, 41% less time commuting to work/meetings and 38% fewer travel expenses
- When asked about what lasting changes they expected to make as a result of the pandemic 45% highlighted an increased use of social media, 38% a great on-line presence and 36% an increase in home working

As mentioned previously where a business provided their contact details we have followed up with an individual discussion – to date with around 84 businesses.

Those discussions have been wide ranging covering key areas of concern (mainly furloughed staff, loss of trade/no trade and loss of income) and whether financial support available was sufficient (with many referred to the business grants scheme).

29 businesses to date have asked for more advice on safe re-opening and health & safety issues, 31 have asked for access to local business networks, 30 for signposting to free business advice organisations such as the Business Growth Hub and the Business Bank and 25 for advice and resources to support the mental health wellbeing of their staff.

The final question asked '*Whilst the Council cannot provide financial assistance, are there any other ways which you think the Council could offer support going forward for businesses at a local level?*' The vast majority say no and that they were thankful for WBC contacting them. However a number detailed concerns with business rates and the cost implications with them on their businesses.

We are also continuing to get e-mail requests for advice and support through our economic development inbox

Wokingham Business Taskforce

The recently formed Wokingham Business Group has been refocused to concentrate on helping support local businesses through the recovery period. Several new members from the business community have been identified through our survey and other partnership work and the first meeting is being held on 23rd July.

The Taskforce consists of representatives from individual businesses, business groups and associations, support and advisory groups, the Council's Chief executive and other senior staff and the Lead Member for Economic Development. It will be chaired by a member of the business community and we hope will help improve the flow of information with our businesses as well as help shape and monitor our longer term economic recovery plans.

2. Business Grants

The Council has also administered a number of government grant schemes including the **Small Business Grant Fund** - a £10,000 Small Business Grant for small businesses in receipt of small business rate relief or rural rate relief with an rateable value of £15,000 or

less and the **Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Businesses Grant Fund** - for businesses in the retail, leisure and hospitality sector with a rateable value above £15,000 and below £51,000 who were eligible for a grant of up to £25,000. A grant for £10,000 was available for qualifying retail, leisure and hospitality businesses with rateable value of up to £15,000.

To date across both these Funds we have paid out £18,190,000 to 1387 local businesses – 81.7% of our allocated funding.

In addition we have also been able to offer **Discretionary Business Grants** targeted at those small businesses with high fixed property-related costs that were not eligible for the Small Business or Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Grants. The grants are primarily and predominantly aimed at small and micro businesses, businesses with relatively high ongoing fixed property-related costs, businesses which can demonstrate that they have suffered a significant fall in income due to the COVID-19 crisis and businesses which occupy property, or part of a property, with a rateable value or annual rent or annual mortgage payments below £51,000.

To date we have paid out £1,061,500 to 190 local businesses (from an allocation of £1.1m)

3. Re-opening Town & Village Centres – retail and hospitality

In recent weeks one key area of focus has been on the safe re-opening of the retail and hospitality industries and our town and village centres.

To support that work we have set up 3 very successful partnerships with local business and town and parish representatives in Wokingham town centre, Woodley and Twyford. Each has its own action plan but with linked communications using the '*Stay Safe, Shop Local, Shop Twyford*' (or Woodley or Wokingham) strapline.

As the situation, advice and guidance continues to change at a rapid pace it has not been possible to always carry out the level of consultation or involvement we would normally do prior to introducing any changes. We recognise that not all measures introduced have been popular with everyone and are continuing to listen to concerns raised and make changes where possible, balancing the desire to get back to normal with the continuing health and safety risks.

Actions to date include:

- Development of individual local action plans
- Comprehensive communications plan covering Borough-wide messages and any specific to the 3 centres – social media, press and hard copies
- Social distancing signage and markers
- Monitoring system to monitor footfall and traffic flows (in Wokingham town centre)
- Support packs available for all retail outlets across the Borough with links to guidance plus options for posters, social distancing markers etc
- Reallocation of road space to enable social distancing (Wokingham Town Centre) – with on-going review and amendments.
- Review with CLASP (Care, Listening and Supporting Partnership) of the social distancing measures introduced to Wokingham town centre to identify areas for improvement

- Hospitality survey to identify which pubs, cafes and restaurants were intending to open and what support they needed
- Webinar for hospitality businesses led by Council, PPP and Police
- 1:1 advice and support (including visits) on safe re-opening for both retail and hospitality businesses
- Guidance on temporary structures if required to enable safe re-opening
- Option and advice to extend seating onto pavements etc
- Re-opening of town centre toilets
- Social Distance Ambassadors in Wokingham town centre and Woodley during first week of re-opening
- Increased PPP and Police presence for hospitality reopening – monitoring and providing advice and support

We hope to cover the costs of all communication material and the materials needed for the reallocation of road space through funding under the Re-opening the High Streets Fund and from the Department of Transport Emergency Active Travel Fund.

PART B – HOUSING

1. Emergency Housing Provision

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic we set up an Emergency Accommodation Group working across all Directorates to define and quantify any immediate and/or potential emergency accommodation needs as a result of Covid-19 and then source suitable provision.

The Group considered potential needs for additional accommodation for homeless households and rough sleepers, displaced homeless young people, early release prisoners, victims of domestic abuse, repatriation of overseas citizens, emergency housing provision for children in care, short term dementia/nursing home provision, hospital discharges and accommodation for additional care workers.

Fortunately in many cases the additional need did not materialise and/or it could be met within existing provision. However working our Registered Provider (RP) partners and our own housing companies we leased 13 additional properties, meeting the needs of 9 homeless households and 7 care workers along with a property held by our Children's Services in case of emergency. We also reached an agreement with a local hotel to provide emergency overnight accommodation and that was used on a small number of occasions.

2. Rough Sleepers

One area of particular focus has been addressing the housing needs of our rough sleeper cohort – in line with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's (MHCLG) 'Everyone In' policy. To date we have provided emergency accommodation for around thirty-five rough sleepers of which about half have at least some support needs.

We are in the process of developing personal housing plans for each rough sleeper, which for some will include priority for an offer of permanent accommodation. This is a

step up in our approach to tackling rough sleeping in the borough, matching Government's national agenda and the priorities we set out in our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2024.

We have also commissioned Two Saints to deliver a new Housing First in-reach and outreach support service for rough sleepers in the borough using funding secured for 2020/21 through our successful bid to MHCLG's Rough Sleeping Initiative. This new service will commence from July 2020. We are also currently in discussions with our RP partners and the local voluntary sector to develop joint working opportunities.

Moving forward, we have had initial discussions with MHCLG about the recently announced additional capital and revenue funding. A detailed prospectus is due to be released by MHCLG by the end of July and we will be co-producing our bid over the coming weeks.

3. Operational Housing

Colleagues across our housing and localities services and our housing companies have worked hard to continue to provide vital services and support to our tenants and leaseholders during the pandemic – either in person in the community or remotely.

As well as ensuring all our tenants and leaseholders were aware of any changes in service we also highlighted and provided contact information on what support was available to help with both welfare issues and if they were experiencing financial difficulties.

In addition at the start of lockdown we contacted every one of our sheltered housing and Fosters residents to understand their particular situation and needs. Where possible we moved them on to our 'I'm OK' system which enables us to carry out a remote daily check on the resident so minimising face to face contact. Where the 'I'm OK' system was not suitable for residents we have continued to make daily contact with them as well as maintaining a daily presence across all schemes.

We also contacted 850 of our general needs residents who are over 65 and carried out individual assessments to identify any who required regular welfare checks. For those who did we have continued to contact them once a week to ensure they are ok or if they need any extra support.

Urgent and emergency repairs continued to be carried out during the height of the pandemic however our repairs service is now moving back towards full delivery again. We recognise there will be a backlog of routine repairs that may take some time to clear. We have continued to carry out all necessary compliance and health and safety checks and have maintained 100% performance on gas servicing. Major works or improvements were halted, with some postponed works unlikely to be completed this financial year. We are, however, still aiming for all stock to meet the Decent Homes Standard by December 2020.

The total number of homeless presentations has increased during this time, with the most significant increase seen in those presenting without children. In Q1 2019/20, we received 33 single homeless applications. During the same period in 2020/21, this figure increased to 59. We are also anticipating an increase in presentations once the suspension of evictions is ended on 23rd August.

Our lettings team have now returned to full service, following the lifting of lockdown restrictions. There have been incidents of anti-social behaviour during this time, most notably at Broadway House, where staff have been working under difficult circumstances to manage occurrences as they arise. Thames Valley Police have obtained three closure orders.

Rental income figures are showing minimal impact currently, although we expect to see that change as the Government reduces support for employers. As of 30th June 2020 HRA rents were up 0.20% against target (101.09% on 2019/20) with the team continuing to offer support and advice to customers.

Our tenant involvement work has also continued, with meetings now taking place virtually.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

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

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

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision
None relevant

Cross-Council Implications
No decision

Public Sector Equality Duty
Due regard has been given to WBC's duties under the Equality Act

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2
Not applicable

List of Background Papers	
None	
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Upcoming Meeting Work Plan

DATE OF MEETING	ITEM	PURPOSE OF REPORT	REASON FOR CONSIDERATION	CONTACT OFFICER
2 September 2020	Virtual Meeting Discussion (Suggestion to be discussed)	To have an open discussion about the implementation of virtual Council meetings, how they may be improved, and whether there was appetite to continue in a hybrid capacity in future	Chairman's suggestion	Andrew Moulton/Anne Hunter/Callum Wernham
	Road Repairs	To receive an update on the programme for road repairs in the Borough	Work Programme	Andy Glencross
	Work Programme	To consider the work programme for the Committee for 2019/20	Standing Item	Democratic Services

DATE OF MEETING	ITEM	PURPOSE OF REPORT	REASON FOR CONSIDERATION	CONTACT OFFICER
Late September, Extraordinary (Date TBC)	MTFP 2021-24	To begin a review of the MTFP for 2021-24 (timetable of meetings, topics to be covered etc.)	Work Programme	Graham Ebers
	Covid-19 Community Response	To receive a report on WBC's community response to the pandemic, including the community hub, charity response, response and staff redeployment programme	Committee request/OSMC consideration	Matt Pope/Graham Ebers
	Property Investment Portfolio	To receive an update on WBC's property investment portfolio	Work Programme	Bernie Pich
	Work Programme	To consider the work programme for the Committee for 2019/20	Standing Item	Democratic Services