

Note: Minor amendments were made to these minutes at the meeting of the Committee held on 19 January 2021

**MINUTES OF AN EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE  
COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
HELD ON 22 DECEMBER 2020 FROM 7.00 PM TO 11.00 PM**

**Committee Members Present**

Councillors: Guy Grandison (Chairman), Emma Hobbs (Vice-Chairman), Shirley Boyt, Paul Fishwick, Graham Howe, Clive Jones, Abdul Loyes and Alison Swaddle

**Councillors Present and Asking Questions**

Councillors: Andy Croy and Rachel Burgess

**Officers Present**

Nigel Bailey (Interim Assistant Director – Housing & Place Commissioning), Neil Carr (Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist), Mark Cupit (Assistant Director Delivery & Infrastructure: Place and Growth), Graham Ebers (Deputy Chief Executive (Director of Resources & Assets)), Andy Glencross (Assistant Director – Highways & Transport), Andrew Moulton (Assistant Director - Governance), Simon Price (Assistant Director, Housing, Income and Assessments), Nicky Thomas (Senior Specialist – Assessments), Chris Traill (Director - Place & Growth) and Callum Wernham (Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist)

**Executive Members Present**

Parry Bath (Executive Member for Environment and Leisure), John Kaiser (Executive Member for Finance and Housing), Charles Margetts (Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing, and Adult Services), UllaKarin Clarke (Executive Member for Children's Services), and Pauline Jorgensen (Executive Member for Highways and Transport)

**56. APOLOGIES**

There were no apologies for absence.

**57. DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

A declaration of interest was submitted from Emma Hobbs relating to agenda item 62, on the grounds that she was a trustee on the Citizens Advice Bureau. Emma stated that she would still take part in discussions and any voting related to this item.

A declaration of interest was submitted from Graham Howe relating to agenda item 62, on the grounds that he was the Deputy Executive Member for Children's Services. Graham stated that he would take no part in any discussions or voting relating to this particular issue.

**58. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions.

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## **59. MEMBER QUESTION TIME**

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

### **59.1 Andy Croy asked the Chairman of the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee the following question:**

#### **Question**

Claimants in receipt of child benefit have had the uncertainty surrounding the 'Child Benefit Tax' removed for a year while for this year at least, and two years after the issue was raised, the carers finally have the 'Carers Tax' removed.

Five out of the seven options considered were cuts to this benefit. There is nothing in the survey responses to suggest that, despite the wording of the survey, respondents wanted a cut to the benefit.

Why weren't options for a generalised improvement to the scheme even considered?

#### **Answer**

Firstly, we are unsure what the "tax" is referred to in the question. CTR is a benefit scheme that provides relief from council tax for those most financially vulnerable residents of the borough by giving a reduction in the amount of Council tax they pay.

I can only assume that you are referring to the fact that Child Benefit is not included in the income calculation when we assess CTR. This has always been the case since the Council have been running the CTR scheme and this continues with the new proposals.

When devising a scheme we have to consider both the impact on the residents eligible to receive CTR and all residents who pay council tax, along with the financial impact it will have on the Council and its delivery of services.

Therefore when considering a new or revised scheme alternatives were modelled in the context of affordability, the overall impact on the recipients benefiting from the scheme and the Council's budget.

Wokingham's scheme is comparable and on a par with most other Local Authorities CTR schemes and we are now proposing to make this scheme more generous by disregarding Carers Allowance in total for the first time.

Council Tax is a vital source of income for the council in responding to the current pandemic and council tax rates are holding up relatively well including payments by those in the CTR scheme. We will however keep this under close review and will ensure that we provide whatever support we can to those in genuine hardship in accordance with our commitments under the emerging Anti-Poverty Strategy.

### **59.2 Rachel Burgess asked the Chairman of the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee the following question:**

#### **Question**

When the Council Tax Reduction scheme first replaced the Council Tax Benefit in 2013, expenditure on the scheme was £4.6m. This fell significantly in the ensuing years. These new proposals for 2021-22 are to spend £4.17m, which is just £6k more than the 'do

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nothing' position. Adjusted for inflation this represents a drop of at least 16% in the funding for this scheme since its introduction in 2013, with many fewer residents helped by the scheme.

As the report notes, we are still seeing the impact of Covid on low income residents – so why has the funding for this scheme fallen so significantly, when we know residents are struggling?

### **Answer**

Initially in 2013 the Council Tax Reduction Scheme was funded by government and schemes were written to reflect this. The funding for this was withdrawn from 2015 and was then incorporated within the Revenue Support Grant, which was reduced to zero in 2018 for WBC.

There is therefore no set budget provision for the CTR Scheme; it effectively reduces the level of Council Tax we are able to collect and therefore the money available to provide vital services for the community. Our CTR scheme and its costs need to be designed in this context.

For 2021 we are however seeking to enhance the scheme by not taking Carers Allowance into account in the calculation of the CTR award and are proposing not to make any scheme reductions.

It should be noted that in addition to the CTR scheme the council is doing what it can to assist those in hardship which includes:

- £150 Hardship Payment for each CTR recipient paid against their council tax
- Test & Trace Support Payments for those on low income who have to self-isolate
- Winter Grant
- Council lead voluntary support for the vulnerable
- Local Welfare Provision
- Discretionary Housing Payments
- Section 13a Discretionary Scheme.

### **Supplementary Question**

I appreciate that you are enhancing the scheme, or proposing to do so, but that increase is only £6,000, which is tiny compared to the size of it. We know Council Tax is a regressive tax, and I think that it is as important as ever that a Council Tax reduction scheme does whatever it can to make sure that residents who are in financial hardship can receive the financial help that they need. So, in light of the reductions to the scheme made over several years, and the current extremely difficult circumstances in which people find themselves, as part of your role in this Committee in scrutinising this scheme, would the Committee consider tonight proposing an increase to the funding for this scheme. If you look at the detail as to how this is calculated, there are a number of different levers that you could pull to increase the funding for the scheme, is that something that you could consider this evening?

### **Supplementary Answer**

It is a difficult one in that regard, as all we can do is make a recommendation. Now, what we can do is effectively ask for more data on this, as in terms of the scheme itself and the values that have dropped or the inflationary figures, I do not have those numbers in my

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head. It could be a case that the scheme numbers have reduced because the numbers of people that have claimed it have reduced. Now, has that reversed in the last twelve months because of Covid, I do not know. But, it is something that we need to ask questions about, and do the proper Overview and Scrutiny of, in order to drill into that detail and see if the amount being proposed for the budget in February is the appropriate and correct amount, as that is the role of Overview and Scrutiny.

At this point, further discussion was had about this topic.

## **60. COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME**

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 5 to 18, which set out proposed changes to the Council Tax reduction scheme.

The report outlined the results of the public consultation which ran from 30<sup>th</sup> September to 11<sup>th</sup> November. In addition, the report gave details of the proposed change to the 2021/22 scheme, which would seek to disregard the total value of any carer's allowance as opposed to the previously disregarded value of £46.35 per week. Overall, this would equate to an approximate positive change for claimants of £6,059 per annum total between all eligible claimants.

John Kaiser (Executive Member for Finance and Housing), Graham Ebers (Deputy Chief Executive – Director of Resources & Assets), Simon Price (Assistant Director Neighbourhoods and Communities) and Nicky Thomas (Senior Specialist – Assessments) attended the meeting to answer Member questions.

During the ensuing discussions, Members raised the following points and queries:

- How had Covid-19 (C-19) changed the responses received to the consultation compared to previous years? Officer response – Officers had noted an enhanced level of responses this year, partly due to the consultation being sent out to the wider charitable sector.
- Would more people be eligible under the scheme this coming year due to C-19 and potential lost jobs? Officer response – Officers were always nervous when major Government schemes, such as the furlough scheme, were due to come to an end. There had been a notable increase in Universal Credit applications, which could lead to increased demand on the Council Tax reduction scheme.
- A number of Members were reassured by comments made by John Kaiser, whereby he stated that this was a statutory scheme and if additional funding was required then it would be provided to meet the costs of the scheme. Graham Ebers added that there were a variety of variables and risks associated with Council tax, and this statutory scheme was just one part of a significant and complex strategy. Graham added that the best way to guard against unforeseen demand and costs was to ensure safe general fund balances.
- How many people were currently using the Council Tax reduction scheme? Officer response – Approximately 3896 people were using the scheme at present.
- Considering nearly 4000 people were using the scheme, some Members found it disappointing that only 109 of those persons responded to the consultation. What

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additional outreach was being considered to engage with more of these persons in future? Officer response – The consultation had been advertised and sent to all voluntary sector partners this time around. Officers would take away these comments and look to try and extend the reach of the consultation in future, perhaps by working with the Department for Work and Pensions to increase engagement with persons using the scheme.

- It was noted that many people may not have understood the first question within the consultation. Officers stated that they would take this comment on board.
- As some people may get embarrassed responding to such a survey, would officers seek to word the consultation very carefully next year? Officer response – This was definitely the plan, and a review of the consultation was already scheduled for next year.
- Did foster carers pay Council Tax? Officer response – This was Council Tax related rather than Council Tax reduction related, and it depended on whether they had a specific exemption to the general Council Tax policy.
- The Committee reiterated their desire for more service users to be engaged with the consultation from next year. Officers stated that they would take this on board and thoroughly review next year.

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) John Kaiser, Graham Ebers, Simon Price and Nicky Thomas be thanked for attending the Committee;
- 2) Officers would look to increase engagement with service users during the 2021/22 consultation, possibly by working more closely with the Department for Work and Pensions;
- 3) Officers review the wording of consultation question 1 as part of the scheduled review of the consultation;
- 4) Officers review the wording and phrasing of the entire consultation as part of the scheduled review of the consultation, as so to make respondents as comfortable as possible.

**61. MAY 2021 ELECTION COUNT UPDATE**

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 16 to 22, which gave details of the preparations for the count related to the elections scheduled to be held in May 2021.

The report outlined a variety of proposed changes to the standard format of the elections count timetable, including conducting the Borough and Town and Parish Council counts during the day on Friday 7<sup>th</sup> May, and conducting the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) count during the day on Monday 10<sup>th</sup> May. The counts were expected to take place at the usual venue of Loddon Valley Leisure Centre, however there were contingency plans in place should this venue not be available for any reason. The report detailed a number of potential issues and possible solutions relating to Covid-19 (C-19) and social distancing guidelines.

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Andrew Moulton, Assistant Director – Governance, attended the meeting to answer Member queries.

During the ensuing discussions, Members raised the following points and queries:

- Given current circumstances, Members appreciated the work that had already gone into planning for the counts, and found suggestions to be sensible. Given the need for social distancing, was it possible to use a separate hall to split the count and enable more effective social distancing? Officer response – This was being looked at as an option, however at the moment this didn't appear to be feasible, however this was at an early stage of planning. There would be a lot of communications regarding this, and other elements of the counts, in 2021.
- What time would the Friday count be expected to start? Officer response – A start time had not yet been decided, however the count would need to begin as early as realistically possible. Once a start time had been agreed, this would be communicated.
- In the case of a dispute during the count, how would any disagreements be managed? Officer response – The count would be held in a C-19 secure and safe way, whilst still offering all of the transparency and objectivity that Members and the public expect from Wokingham counts. The only difference may be that the process takes a bit longer this time around.
- If, for example, the Friday count started at 8am, what time would counting finish with a view to re-start on the Saturday? Officer response – Whilst there was no definitive answer with regards to this currently, it was likely that counting would stop during the early evening on Friday 7<sup>th</sup> May.
- What would the likely cost implications be of running the elections and counts in a C-19 safe manner? Officer response – A definitive cost could not be given at the moment, however it was likely that there would be increased costs associated with the May 2021 elections and count, and this was built in to the planning assumptions. In the past, extra costs incurred by Local Authorities through no fault of their own were reimbursed by the Government.
- Would extra staff be employed at polling stations to ensure the public could vote safely? Officer response – Officers were planning to employ additional staff at specific polling stations in order to ensure the public could vote safely.
- How were smaller polling stations going to be managed? Officer response – A paper was being presented at January Council which would outline a number of suggested venues to replace smaller venues which may not be suitable for the May 2021 elections.
- A particular school had commented that they had been told that there would not be expected to close, was this the case? Officer response – Officers were aware of the particular school in questions, and a call was being organised in with the Head Teacher. It was likely that additional support would be required at the school including additional staff, which could result in the school having to close.

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- It was noted that there was an expectancy of higher postal votes, and the Cabinet Office had so far been very clear that they expected the elections scheduled in May 2021 to go ahead.
- Agenda page 20 referred to staggered counts for Borough Wards. Would this mean that observers would get access limited to when their particular Ward was being counted? Officer response – The main concerns were about providing a safe counting environment, and ensuring that the process was transparent. No final decisions had been made, and officers were awaiting advice from the Electoral Commission shortly. An update regarding progress and developments could come back to the Committee in a couple of months' time.
- It was noted that Members could get in touch directly with the elections team to voice any concerns regarding unsuitable venues, for example if they felt that the entrance and exit situation would be unsuitable. Any Ward Members who may be affected by potential venue changes would be contacted in advance.

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) Andrew Moulton be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) Officers be thanked for their work thus far in planning for safe elections and counts to take place;
- 3) A further update on planning and preparation for the elections and counts return to the Committee in a couple of months' time.

**62. MTFP 2021-24: SPECIAL ITEMS AND CAPITAL BIDS**

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 23 to 116 and supplementary agenda pages 3 to 66, which detailed the special item and Capital bids to be included within the proposed 2021-24 Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP)

Parry Batth (Executive Member for Environment and Leisure), John Kaiser (Executive Member for Finance and Housing), Charles Margetts (Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing, and Adult Services), UllaKarin Clark (Executive Member for Children's Services), Pauline Jorgensen (Executive Member for Highways and Transport), Graham Ebers (Deputy Chief Executive – Director of Corporate Services), Chris Traill (Director of Place and Growth), Nigel Bailey (Interim Assistant Director – Housing & Place Commissioning), Mark Cupit (Assistant Director Delivery & Infrastructure: Place and Growth), and Andy Glencross (Assistant Director – Highways & Transport) attended the meeting to answer Member queries.

Charles Margetts stated that if nothing changed, Adult Services would see a year on year growth in costs of approximately 4%. As such, a demand management special item was crucial to provide a better service for service users and to reduce costs by being more proactive rather than reactive, for example getting involved in a case earlier to avoid immediate crisis care. Charles added that a further special item included funding to provide a mental health nurse to meet the statutory start term needs related to Covid-19 (C-19). Regarding capital bids, Charles stated that these included a bid for a new elderly person's dementia care home to be situated within the Borough.

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During the ensuing discussions relating to Adult's Services, Members raised the following points and queries:

- Relating to bid ASC 8, relating to demand management, what year on year saving could be expected? Executive Member response – Approximate savings of £1m per year could be expected going forward. The special item was to fund staff on short term contracts in order to set up the new system. This would require a cultural shift and change on the front end of the service, as more planned care would be delivered going forward with a more manageable workload for staff.
- Relating to bid ASC 9, relating to the hiring of a mental health professional, what ages would the service users be approximately? Executive Member response – This post would work with people from a variety of different age groups, and the role would add additional capacity within the existing team to deal with severe mental health breakdowns, which had seen a spike due to C-19.
- Relating to bid ASC 10, relating to transitions from Children's Services to Adult's Services, was the £270k proposed funding enough? Executive Member response – This had not been as well resourced in the past as it could have been, and this was additional funding to improve this service. The level of funding could be adjusted if needed. In addition, this was part of a much larger programme to get all areas of Wokingham Borough Council's (WBC's) Adult Services into the top 10% of the country.
- The transition programme from Children's Services to Adult's Services happened at 14 years of age at WBC, how did this compare to other Local Authorities? Executive Member response – An answer would be provided at a later date.
- Relating to the capital bid regarding the Learning Disability Outreach and Overnight Respite Centre, why had this taken a considerable amount of time to come about? In addition, why had the original published figure stated £2m of investment, whereas the supplementary papers stated a cost of £1.8m? Executive Member and officer response – A detailed answer would be provided at a later date, however Loddon Court had been adequate for some time, however it now needed investment to be brought up to standard.

The Committee moved on to their overview of the special items and capital bids for the Children's Services Directorate.

UllaKarin Clark stated that the proposals in front of Members were not just about saving money, but also about providing a better and more efficient service for the Borough's children and their families. UllaKarin added that agency workers had been reduced from 36% to 27% of staff, and this trend was hoped to continue going forwards.

During the ensuing discussions Members raised the following points and queries:

- How many agency staff were currently employed by Children's Services? Executive Member response – There would always be a certain need for agency staff within the service, but a lower total number was always better and cheaper for the service. Agency staff were very useful for covering sick and maternity leave, however the service could not continue to employ agency staff for vast swathes of posts and

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therefore WBC were looking to entice more permanent staff with a variety of different incentives. The numerical figure of agency staff currently employed would be provided after the meeting.

- It was noted that costs of sending children to out of Borough schools and centres was becoming more expensive as other Authorities know that we are dependent on their services. It was therefore necessary to invest in in-Borough facilities to provide for most of the needs of children within the Borough. It was noted that it was very unlikely for all children to have their needs completely met in-Borough.
- Relating to the capital bid for the multi-faceted placement hub, when would this project be completed? Executive Member response – This was a rolling programme, and this would be the first hub to be refurbished, and more could be refurbished in the future if there was a need. This was about improving the service provision, and as this was a statutory service then all costs would be met. The works for this project could and would not start until this funding was formally approved.
- Why was the compass team being funded through special items rather than a permanent budget line? Officer response – This was effectively about the funding for the team being proven as effective before being made a permanent line. The hope was that this could provide some good savings and better outcomes for children.
- Relating to bid CS20, parenting assessments, how much of an issue was this? Executive Member response – The issue was that currently the Early Help team had to be used for this function, which took them away from their work. If this team was not used then outside help would have to be commissioned which was expensive.
- Relating to bid CS29, Children's Transformation Programme, was the £1m of funding enough to reach a 'Good' OFSTED rating, and when was the next scheduled OFSTED inspection? Executive Member response – The next inspection was possibly due in the spring, and the service had to make improvements to become 'Good' and then 'Outstanding'. If the inspection came before implementation of schemes, then proposals would be presented to OFSTED which would be used when calculating WBC's OFSTED rating. WBC was very committed to completing the journey to a 'Good' rating, and the reserves were there to support that journey if needed.
- Relating to bid CS24, Recruitment & Retention Strategy, had comparisons been made with other Local Authorities such as South Buckinghamshire or Oxford? Executive Member response – The service was making comparisons with similar sized Local Authorities such as Bracknell and West Berkshire. Some authorities offered allocated parking at office sites whereas WBC did not currently. WBC needed to become more inventive with the remuneration offer to professional Children's Services staff, regardless if they were in a management role.
- It was noted that when WBC achieved 'Good' or 'Outstanding' OFSTED ratings, this would in turn attract more high quality staff to join the WBC team in permanent positions.

The Committee moved on to their overview of the special items bids for the Place and Growth Directorate.

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Pauline Jorgensen stated that special items included the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, the updated Local Transport Development Plan, and funding to cover loss of income at car parks due to C-19.

During the ensuing discussions Members raised the following points and queries:

- Relating to bid P&G8, CRM, was £120k a suitable estimate? Executive Member response – This was an initial IT estimate prior to proper costing.
- Relating to bid P&G26, Local Transport Plan 4 and Delivery Plan, would this move alongside the Local Plan Update? Executive Member response – Yes, this would be developed alongside the Local Plan Update.
- Would Member have access to the proposed CRM system? Executive Member response – This was very desirable and the hope was that this could be achieved.
- Relating to bid P&G15, additional funding to support the local Plan Update, this was a very important project for WBC to stop speculative development within the Borough. Taking this into account, was the proposed funding enough? Executive Member response – A considerable amount of money had already been spent on the Local Plan Update, and this was additional funding to progress it further.
- Relating to bid P&G23, Building Control Fees Shortfall, how sure were WBC that the remaining partner Authority would not pull out? Executive Member response – WBC had made saving due to the service arrangement over the years, and the proposals asked for £100k to realign the service to meet the needs of the service. It was obviously a risk that the other partner within the service could drop out, and the service position would be re-evaluated going forwards.

The Committee moved on to their overview of the special items for the Communities, Insight, and Change Directorate.

Graham Ebers stated that the continuous improvement programme special item bid remained unchanged, and this would help deliver organisational change and improvements across WBC. Bid CIC12 would help to provide additional HR support for a year to deliver an enhanced people's strategy. CIC13 would provide much needed funding for the Community Safety Partnership and the Wellbeing Board, which had previously received no funding resource.

During the ensuing discussions Members asked raised the following points and queries:

- Did the previous 21C programme create issues for services? Executive Member response – It is possible that some of the changes made during the 21C programme would not have been made in hindsight, for example the thinning out of staff within HR. It was important for WBC to have a strong HR department, and bid CIC12 reflected this commitment.
- It was noted that one of the key focusses of 21C was to protect specialist staff. The issue was that some of them became alienated. Key improvements were made, including more digital processes and streamlined procedures.

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- It was noted that Committee Members supported funding towards the Community Safety Partnership and Wellbeing Board.

The Committee were updated on the sole Special Item for Resources and Assets. The Committee had no queries regarding this bid.

The Committee moved on to their overview of capital bids relating to the Climate Emergency agenda.

Pauline Jorgensen outlined a variety of highways projects including congestion management improvements. One key improvement would be that more utility work would be completed out of hours.

John Kaiser outlined a number of proposed projects including solar farms, the first of which would have a planning application submitted in 2021. Solar sites such as the one proposed could provide clean energy for the Borough for a period of 40 years, whilst generating revenue for WBC. John outlined the proposed energy reduction project, which would offer businesses support to lower their carbon footprint.

During the ensuing discussions, Members raised the following points and queries:

- Could energy reduction and clean energy generation projects result in helping people who suffer from fuel poverty pay their bills? Executive Member response – Whenever homes were built by WBC or one of our Council owned companies, it would be ensured that good quality materials and insulation was used. This would provide long term energy savings for residents.
- Regarding traffic management congestion, would any of this be funded from WBC reserves? Executive Member and officer response – My Journey received a contribution with each house that was built. S106 and some Local Enterprise Partnership monies also fed into funding this scheme. The first year of this scheme was fully funded, and further years would be funded by a variety of sources including grants.
- How would the shortfall in the capital funding be met? Executive Member response – Unless WBC knew that they would be receiving a grant for a project, then the project would not be included within the plan for the next year. Not all projects were undertaken in any given year, which meant that there would be residual money to roll over into future years and other projects. The capital programme was a large and complicated set of projects, which were undertaken on a rolling basis.
- What year 1 savings would be realised from the proposed solar farm? Executive Member response – The savings line would be achieved in the form of income generation from the first full year of operation.
- How many solar farm sites would be provided for the £1.2m to £1.4m bid? Executive Member response – The funding would provide for one large site to be commissioned and built.
- Relating to the bid to provide upgrade to existing WBC accommodation, what improvements were being made? Executive Member response – WBC only had this

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type of accommodation at Grovelands, and the funding would provide temporary accommodation which was of good quality whilst being energy efficient.

At this point of the meeting Guy Grandison proposed that the end time of the meeting be extended for a maximum of 30 minutes, to 11pm. This was seconded by Paul Fishwick and carried.

The Committee moved on to their overview of capital bids relating to the Environment and Leisure portfolio.

Parry Batth gave an overview of a variety of projects within this portfolio, including the Carnival Pool redevelopment. Parry stated that the Carnival pool redevelopment was progressing well, and the outcome would be an asset to the Borough and its residents.

During the ensuing discussions, Members raised the following points and queries:

- What were the timescales for the completion of the Carnival Pool redevelopment, and were there any expected delays? Executive Member response – The project was scheduled to be completed in 2021, and there were no delays to the timescales.
- What date would the proposed in-Borough crematorium be built? Executive Member and officer response – The project was due to be completed in 2022/23.
- Relating to the housing and regeneration bids, the bid sheets contained a lack of detail. As this was a public document, what would be done in future to improve upon issues such as this one? Executive Member and officer response – This bid was about providing 1000 homes in 4 years at a return of 5% for WBC. The policy needed more of a strategic direction in order for the document to be clearer.
- How would it be ensured that the proposed crematorium would be as environmentally friendly as possible? Executive Member response – Officer and Member would make sure that all aspects of the proposed crematorium were as green as possible, reducing the carbon footprint wherever possible. Measures would include an arboretum and lots of tree planting.
- How many homes would be knocked down in phase two of the regeneration project, and how many homes would replace them? Officer response – A total of 249 new homes would be built, which was more than the amount being demolished. Of the 249 homes, 179 would be affordable.
- What was the correct costing for the proposed crematorium? Executive Member response – The project would cost £4m altogether including construction costs.
- It was noted that the Service was very proud of all workers who had maintained services such as weekly waste collection during the pandemic.

The Committee moved on to their overview of the capital bids relating to the Roads and Transport portfolio.

Pauline Jorgensen outline a number of proposals including improvements to the California Crossroads, and Highways Carriageways Structural Maintenance programme.

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During the ensuing discussions, Members raised the following points and queries:

- Had a consultation been carried out regarding proposals relating to California Crossroads? Executive Member and officer response – A consultation had been carried out and responses had been taken into account. The requested funding was to enable works to be carried out. This was a multi-year project, and some detailed design work and the consultation costed money. Any roll-over of funding would go towards construction.
- How would any funding gaps be addressed? Executive Member response – There was always a chance that projects would move between years, which left funding available for other projects.
- With regards to the drainage blocks at California Crossroads, how would this be dealt with in the absence of additional funding? Executive Member and officer response – As part of the detailed design work, it was identified that where the drainage drained to had collapsed. There would be the ability to bid for additional funding to cover costs, which would go through the Executive as a supplementary estimate.

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) Parry Batth , John Kaiser, Charles Margetts, UllaKarin Clark, Pauline Jorgensen, Graham Ebers, Chris Traill, Nigel Bailey, Mark Cupit, and Andy Glencross be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) An answer be provided relating to how WBC's transition age of 14 between Children's and Adult's Service compared with other Authorities;
- 3) An answer be provided relating to the proposed Wokingham Learning Disability Outreach and Overnight Respite Centre, and why the original published figure stated £2m of investment, whereas the supplementary papers stated a cost of £1.8m;
- 4) The numerical figure of agency staff currently employed within Children's Services be provided;
- 5) All Members and officers be thanked for their contributions throughout the budget scrutiny process during this municipal year.