



WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

An Extraordinary Meeting of the **COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** will be held virtually on **MONDAY 22 FEBRUARY 2021 AT 7.00 PM**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Susan Parsonage', written in a cursive style.

Susan Parsonage
Chief Executive
Published on 12 February 2021

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.

Note: The Council has made arrangements under the Coronavirus Act 2020 to hold this meeting virtually via Microsoft Teams. The meeting can be watched live using the following link: <https://youtu.be/W6ku1hCoPME>

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

Please note that other people may film, record, tweet or blog from this meeting. The use of these images or recordings is not under the Council’s control.



WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

Our Vision

A great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business

Enriching Lives

- Champion outstanding education and enable our children and young people to achieve their full potential, regardless of their background.
- Support our residents to lead happy, healthy lives and provide access to good leisure facilities to complement an active lifestyle.
- Engage and involve our communities through arts and culture and create a sense of identity which people feel part of.
- Support growth in our local economy and help to build business.

Safe, Strong, Communities

- Protect and safeguard our children, young and vulnerable people.
- Offer quality care and support, at the right time, to prevent the need for long term care.
- Nurture communities and help them to thrive.
- Ensure our borough and communities remain safe for all.

A Clean and Green Borough

- Do all we can to become carbon neutral and sustainable for the future.
- Protect our borough, keep it clean and enhance our green areas.
- Reduce our waste, improve biodiversity and increase recycling.
- Connect our parks and open spaces with green cycleways.

Right Homes, Right Places

- Offer quality, affordable, sustainable homes fit for the future.
- Build our fair share of housing with the right infrastructure to support and enable our borough to grow.
- Protect our unique places and preserve our natural environment.
- Help with your housing needs and support people to live independently in their own homes.

Keeping the Borough Moving

- Maintain and improve our roads, footpaths and cycleways.
- Tackle traffic congestion, minimise delays and disruptions.
- Enable safe and sustainable travel around the borough with good transport infrastructure.
- Promote healthy alternative travel options and support our partners to offer affordable, accessible public transport with good network links.

Changing the Way We Work for You

- Be relentlessly customer focussed.
- Work with our partners to provide efficient, effective, joined up services which are focussed around you.
- Communicate better with you, owning issues, updating on progress and responding appropriately as well as promoting what is happening in our Borough.
- Drive innovative digital ways of working that will connect our communities, businesses and customers to our services in a way that suits their needs.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillors

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

Substitutes

Andy Croy	Carl Doran	Pauline Helliard-Symons
Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey	Chris Bowring	Caroline Smith
Michael Firmager	Ken Miall	Malcolm Richards

ITEM NO.	WARD	SUBJECT	PAGE NO.
72.		<p>APOLOGIES To receive any apologies for absence.</p>	
73.		<p>DECLARATION OF INTEREST To receive any declarations of interest.</p>	
74.		<p>PUBLIC QUESTION TIME To answer any public questions relating to items on this agenda</p> <p>A period of 30 minutes will be allowed for members of the public to ask questions submitted under notice.</p> <p>The Council welcomes questions from members of the public about the work of this committee.</p> <p>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</p>	
75.		<p>MEMBER QUESTION TIME To answer any member questions relating to items on this agenda.</p>	
76.	None Specific	<p>FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT UPDATE To consider an update on Flood Risk Management within the Borough</p>	5 - 10
77.	None Specific	<p>ARTS & CULTURE STRATEGY To consider the proposed Arts and Culture Strategy</p>	11 - 24

78. None Specific **UPDATE ON MAY 2021 ELECTIONS** **25 - 28**
To consider an update on the elections due to be held in May 2021

79. None Specific **WORK PROGRAMME** **29 - 30**
To consider the work programme for the remainder of 2020/21 municipal year

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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Agenda Item 76.

TITLE	Flood Risk Management Update
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 22 February 2021
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Place and Growth - Chris Trill

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

To inform Members of the progress made with the Lead Local Flood Authority's (LLFA) duties under the Flood and Water Management Act (FWMA) 2010 during 2020/2021.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee review the report and consider the ongoing work in relation to flood risk reduction in the Borough.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

Flood risk management is a key responsibility of Wokingham Borough Council in its role as the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) following the introduction of the Flood and Water Management Act (FWMA) in 2010. The LLFA has been gradually progressing with the implementation of its responsibilities (to manage the coordination of surface water and groundwater flood risk in order to protect residents from flooding) whilst continuing to deliver existing reactive drainage maintenance services. This report provides an update to Members on the progress made during 2020/21. The next 12 months will also see further progress which will be reported back to O&S committee next year.

Background

During the financial year 2020/21, the Flooding and Drainage team made further progress in fulfilling Wokingham Borough Council's (WBC) statutory obligations as Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) under the Flood and Water Management Act (FWMA) 2010. The primary responsibility as an LLFA is to manage the coordination of surface water and groundwater flood risk in order to protect residents from flooding. As the highways authority, WBC is also responsible for ensuring that the highways drainage is working effectively in order to prevent highway and property flooding following heavy rain. In order to continue to deliver these responsibilities, a number of actions have been taken over the past 12 months including:

1. The completion of the Surface Water Management Plan for Earley
2. Emergency flood response and subsequent S19 Flood Investigation Reports
3. CCTV condition surveys and repair works to the highways drainage system
4. The delivery of numerous capital drainage schemes across the borough
5. Ongoing revenue drainage maintenance works
6. Comments on planning applications in relation to flooding and drainage
7. Designation of additional flood risk structures.
8. Smart drainage trials
9. Manhole Inventory
10. Thames Water partnership to reduce surface water flood risk
11. Designation of additional flood defence structures
12. Maintenance of the Section 21 Asset Register

1. Completion of a Surface Water Management Plan for Earley

As a Lead Local Flood Authority, WBC has a responsibility to manage the risk of Surface Water Flooding in the borough. To help achieve this, last year, officers carried out a Surface Water Management Plan (SWMP) of Earley, which resulted in the successful delivery of a capital scheme to reduce flood risk to properties in Egremont Drive. For several years properties parallel to the ditch running to the rear of Egremont Drive have experienced surface water flooding as a result of debris blocking the concrete culvert in the ditch. In order to reduce the risk of flooding here, the Council have removed a section of culvert, cleared the stream and increased its depth. In the longer term, the Council intends to deliver a natural flood risk management scheme in partnership with Early Town Council, which will involve storing water in an offline attenuation basin downstream of Maiden Erlegh Lake. Feasibility and preliminary design for this scheme has already begun and officers intend to deliver this scheme within the next 2 years.

Moving forward, officers intend to carry out SWMPs for all town and parishes at risk of surface water flooding in the borough. During the next financial year, officers will begin to work with consultants to develop a SWMP for Hurst, focusing on the roads affected by flooding in January 2021 including Broadwater Lane, Nelsons Lane and Islandstone Lane.

2. Emergency response to flooding and subsequent S19 incident reports

As a Risk Management Authority (RMA) under the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, and as Highways Authority, WBC must respond to incidents of flooding across the borough during storm events. The Highways Contractor is responsible for closing flooded roads, delivering sandbags, tankering water away from properties, and providing any other assistance possible to reduce flood risk to properties and infrastructure.

In February 2020, Wokingham was hit by Storm Dennis and Storm Ciara, causing a significant amount of flooding to various parts of the borough. During the storms, officers and WBCs highways contractor responded to residents calls for assistance and successfully prevented several properties from flooding. However, unfortunately not all properties and roads avoided flooding. Under the FWMA Section 19, WBC has a responsibility to investigate all incidents of flooding that led to a road closure or a property internally flooding. The aim of a S19 report is to identify the cause of flooding and to make recommendations as to how key stakeholders, including but not limited to the Council, Thames Water, the Environment Agency and the residents, can reduce the flood risk in future. A S19 report was completed for the following locations: Greensward Lane, Church Lane and Reading Road Arborfield, and Bath Road Knowl Hill.

Officers have been working with the highway contractor, residents and other risk management authorities to ensure that the necessary works identified by the S19 reports to reduce flood risk are completed as soon as possible.

More recently, the Council has responded to major flooding across the borough in January/February 2021. Swallowfield, Riseley, Hurst and Remenham were among the parishes badly affected during the latest heavy rainfall event. S19 reports for those roads and properties affected by the flooding are now underway so that the causes can be identified and action can be taken to reduce the risk in future.

3. CCTV drainage surveys and repair works

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the highway network has seen significantly lower volumes of traffic as people have been advised to stay at home. This has presented the drainage team with an opportunity to carry out CCTV drainage conditions surveys and repair works on sections of highways drainage pipe systems that have been less accessible in the past due to heavy vehicular use. Between April 2020 and February 2021 the drainage team have conducted CCTV surveys and repair works at the following locations:

Reading Road
Wargrave Hill
Bath Road
Shinfield Road
Hartley Court Road
Greensward Lane
Reeds Avenue

Wilderness Road
Pepper Lane
Barkham Road
Pheasant Close
Easthampstead Road
Norreys Avenue
Nine Mile Ride
London Road
Binfield Road
Finchampstead Road
Avery Close
Greensward Lane
Jouldings Lane

The repair works resulting from the CCTV works have led to a significant drop in reports of surface water flooding in these locations and consequently has allowed emergency flood response to be focused elsewhere.

4. Delivery of capital drainage schemes

In addition to the programme of CCTV surveys and repair works carried out this financial year, officers have delivered several capital drainage schemes in 2020/21 including at Lower Wokingham Road (resolution of a long standing surface water drainage issue involving the installation of 20 metres of additional pipework), Castle Road (installation of a large soakaway), Gipsy Lane (installation of 30 metres of additional pipework), Egremont Drive (removal of restrictive culvert) and Redhatch Drive (replacement of existing drainage infrastructure).

In 2020/21 officers are also expecting to deliver capital schemes for Barkham Ride, Broadwater Lane, Bull Lane and Church Lane.

5. Ongoing drainage maintenance revenue works

WBCs contractor emptied over 40,000 gullies between January 2020 and January 2021 as part of the annual gully cleansing programme. As normal, the contractor records the silt levels within the gullies allowing officers to continue to develop a risk based approach to gully cleansing. WBC now has almost 4 years of silt level monitoring data allowing officers to identify areas where silt builds up rapidly and where silt doesn't build up at all. This information is reviewed annually in order to update the annual gully cleansing programme, ensuring that a risk based approach is used and that areas prone to silt build up are targeted more regularly.

In addition, 1045 drainage problems, reported by residents, were responded to on the highways network, including localised flooding, gully emptying, delivery of sandbags, replacement of small sections of pipe, installation of new drainage, manhole and gully lid replacement and CCTV works.

6. Commenting on planning applications in relation to flooding and drainage

During 2020/21 the Flooding and Drainage team provided consultation responses to 632 planning applications. This has helped to ensure that the most appropriate drainage

strategies are being implemented by developers, in turn contributing towards a reduction in surface water flood risk across the borough.

7. Smart drainage trials

As previously mentioned, officers have been monitoring silt levels within the gullies over the last 4 years to identify which gullies are more susceptible to silt build up. This has allowed the drainage team to use a more risk based approach for the annual gully emptying programme, targeting those areas where more cleansing is required. On top of this, the drainage team are now piloting a scheme that uses gully sensors to identify when a gully needs emptying, allowing for proactive maintenance of the gullies, and reducing the number of reactive response to flooding incidents. The roads included within the pilot scheme are Gipsy Lane and Wilderness Road, Earley and Reading Road, Arborfield.

If the scheme proves to be a success in these locations, the drainage team will look to roll the scheme out on a much wider basis across the borough and will ultimately look to eliminate the annual gully cleansing programme, instead using gully sensors to proactively identify when a gully needs emptying.

8. Manhole Inventory

Over the last 2 years officers have collated data on almost 5,000 highways drainage manholes to assist with the development of a highways manhole inventory for the borough. This is a requirement of the Highways Maintenance Management Plan which states that all WBC highways drainage manholes must be inspected at least once every 5 years in order to record condition and identify any required maintenance.

The information is now stored on our online asset register and moving forward we will be inspecting 20% of our manhole infrastructure each year to ensure this data is kept up to date and accurate. The benefit of this is that the drainage team can proactively carry out manhole upgrades and repairs, and identify any blockages in the pipe systems, before it leading to flooding.

9. Thames Water partnership to reduce surface water flood risk

The drainage team are currently working closely with Thames Water in order to identify locations in the borough that experience flooding due to the surface water drainage systems and the highways drainage systems being combined (typically seen in locations with older properties and older road networks). Where these systems exist, Thames Water and the Council's team will work in partnership over the next 2 years to deliver capital schemes to reduce the burden on the surface water drainage systems, consequently reducing flooding.

10. Designation of additional flood defence structures

Over the last 12 months officers have formally designated a number of features/structures within the borough that could have an impact on flood risk if significant changes are made to them. This means that the owner of the feature/structure is unable to do anything to it without the previous consent of the LLFA. Furthermore, the feature/structure will be

shown as a designated structure on the local land charges register so that any successive owner is aware of the significance of it in terms of flood risk.

11. Section 21 Asset Register

Under Section 21 of the FWMA the LLFA has a duty to maintain a register of features or structures within the borough that, in the opinion of the Authority, could affect flood risk. The LLFA must also maintain a record, aligned to the register, of information regarding the ownership and state of repair of each feature or structure.

The register and record helps the Council to develop more informed maintenance regimes which can take account of assets important for managing flood risk. It also helps to establish where the borough's drainage and watercourse systems are, allowing for quicker identification of the responsible authority in incidences of flooding.

The information is currently being stored in ArcGIS, allowing staff to view the assets via a mapping system. Part of the information has been made publicly available so that residents are able to report faults with individual assets across the borough.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£0	Yes	R
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£0	Yes	R
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£0	Yes	R

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision
None
Cross-Council Implications
N/A
Public Sector Equality Duty
Due regard has been given to WBCs duties under the Equality Act

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2
Not applicable

List of Background Papers
The Flood and Water Management Act 2010 http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/community-and-safety/emergencies/drainage-and-flooding/

Contact Francesca Hobson	Service Delivery and Infrastructure
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TITLE	Arts & Culture Strategy
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 22 February 2021
WARD	None specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Place and Growth - Chris Trill

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

The Council currently does not have a cultural strategy but has an aspiration that the Borough's cultural offer will grow and develop into the future. The strategy has the potential over time to significantly enhance the cultural offer in the Borough to the benefit of the vast majority of residents, improving quality of life and enhancing well-being. The strategy is closely aligned with the principles and priorities of key national agencies such as Arts Council England (ACE) and Public Health England (PHE) and has the potential to leverage external funding.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee considers the attached Arts & Culture Strategy and offers comment.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

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

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

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

Background

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

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

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

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

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

Analysis of Issues

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

Cultural activities are universal in their ability to contribute to well-being and impact on all residents across all age-groups. In addition they can support better outcomes for more vulnerable groups, be this tackling social isolation, improving health and well-being or educational attainment. Unsurprisingly the strategy therefore links to a range of the Council's key priorities and has touch points with a large number of Council services. The Borough does not currently have a cultural strategy and with increasing interest in, and support for, developing the cultural offer and identity of the Borough this is a substantive gap. An up to date approved strategy that aligns with both national imperatives and local priorities is extremely useful in shaping future provision, extending reach to more vulnerable cohorts and communities, co-ordinating and aligning activity across a range of partners and stakeholders and for maximising the impact of collective resources. Set within the context of national policy, the attached 10 year strategy sets out an ambitious vision, key priorities and desired outcomes. The priorities themselves

were established following an earlier pre-drafting phase of consultation and examples of best practice and are as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

and the general public. Addressing this ‘gap’ is undoubtedly a major challenge but for an aspirational 10 year strategy it feels appropriate to articulate this need. New and enhanced cultural venues have therefore been included within the desired outcomes for Priority 1 in the Strategy: Enhancing cultural identity and sense of ‘place’.

In parallel with the consultation process work has been undertaken to establish the Arts & Cultural Alliance as a partnership vehicle involving key stakeholders for taking forward implementation of the strategy. The Alliance held its first meeting in October 2020 and is subsequently playing a pivotal role in the development of an initial Action Plan to progress implementation of the Strategy from April 2021 and this pays testimony to the enthusiasm and commitment of the many cultural organisations in the Borough. The Alliance includes cross-party political representation as well as a range of key local arts & culture organisations.

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)	20,000	yes	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	Nil		
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	Nil		

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

The appointment of a Cultural Development Officer in April 2020 acknowledged the need for a dedicated resource to support the Council’s aspirations to develop the Borough’s cultural offer and raise its profile. The annual cost of approximately £40,000 would be offset through income generation linked to an expanded programme of cultural activities and events. Through 2020/21 the scope for income generation has been curtailed by the Covid pandemic and that is anticipated to continue to impact over the current year, not least because of the uncertainty that undermines the effective planning for events. The figures above therefore reflect a ‘part-year’ effect with income generation to offset costs strengthening as the year progresses.

Cross-Council Implications

The strategy is potentially a key strand for delivering the Council's Community Vision: 'for Wokingham Borough to be a great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business.' In particular it addresses the linked strategic priority for 'Enriching Lives' but it also contributes to 'Safe, Strong Communities' as well as addressing elements of the Health and Well-being Strategy.

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

Public Sector Equality Duty

Due regard has been taken to the Public Equality Duty and an Equalities Impact Assessment was considered as part of the decision to approve the draft strategy in April 2020.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2

N/A

List of Background Papers

None

Contact Grant Thornton	Service Place Commissioning
	Email grant.thornton@wokingham.gov.uk

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'Places of Culture'

An Arts & Culture Strategy* for Wokingham Borough

2020 – 2030

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Why Have a Cultural Strategy?

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

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

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

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

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

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

Wokingham - 17 Parishes – One Borough

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

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

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

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

Vision

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

Strategy and Priorities

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

The early consultation has highlighted the following six key priorities:

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

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

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

Cultural Ambitions for 2030

1. Enhance cultural identity and sense of 'place'

- All 17 parishes have a clear cultural footprint and distinct offer that is contributing to the Borough's overall identity and reputation as a dynamic cultural hub.
- High profile cultural events, activities or installations that have a regional and national reputation and profile.
- Cultural enhancement of the public realm, both public art and activities, to create interest and excitement across the Borough.
- Culture and cultural opportunities are integrated into regeneration and renewal plans as part of place-making strategies as the Borough's population grows.

- New and enhanced cultural venues are attracting large numbers of residents and visitors and are financially sustainable.
- The Borough's Town Centres are vibrant and thriving with an extensive, varied and renowned cultural programme across all the main towns.

2. Fostering Social Interaction and Community Cohesion

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

3. Improving Health and Well-being

- 'Cultural Commissioning' and social prescribing of cultural activities by health and social care organisations is an integral part of their activities to improve well-being.
- Cultural organisations, where applicable, fully understand and can evidence and promote their relevance to, and impact on, the health and well-being agenda.
- Links between culture and sports and leisure activities, both indoors and outdoors, are well developed with extensive cross-promotion, joint working, sharing of venues and this is generating mutual benefits for both sectors.
- A lively and regular programme of cultural activities has extended reach and participation rates, reducing social isolation and enhancing emotional and mental well-being.

- Cultural interventions not only improve individual well-being, they also raise awareness of key health issues and increase accessibility and engagement for more vulnerable residents.

4. Developing Opportunities for Children and Young People

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

5. Supporting Economic Growth

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

- The increased cultural offer locally has supported growth of the night and day time economies helping local centres and businesses thrive.

6. Maximising Partnerships and Collaboration

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

Developing and Delivering the Strategy

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

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

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

DRAFT

TITLE	Update on May 2021 Elections
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 22 February 2021
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Andrew Moulton, Assistant Director Governance

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

That Members and the public have information on the elections scheduled to take place in May 2021.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee notes the update on the elections taking place on 6 May 2021.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

On Thursday 6 May 2021, there will be combined elections held for the Thames Valley Police & Crime Commissioner election, Borough and Town/Parish council elections.

These polls are likely to be delivered against the backdrop of evolving public health restrictions. These present complex new challenges for all involved in the electoral process.

At its meeting on 22 December, the Committee noted the timing arrangements for the May 2021 counts and asked for a further update which this report seeks to provide.

The Government announced on 5 February 2021 that, “the May 2021 polls will take place in a way that is fundamentally similar to previous polls – but there will be differences, as there have been in many areas of life during the pandemic.”

Detailed planning for the successful and safe delivery of polls on 6 May continues including risk assessing every step in the elections process.

The report provides updates on:-

- The Government’s announcement of 5th February 2021
- The verification and count
- Polling stations
- Communication
- Risk Management and mitigation

Background

The purpose of this report is to provide a further update for the Committee about the plans and preparations for the elections on 6 May 2021.

The Police & Crime Commissioner election is held every five years and will next take place on 6 May 2021. This is the election that was postponed from May 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Also, on 6th May, Borough elections will take place across 18 of the 25 borough wards. These are the scheduled elections that were postponed from May 2020.

There are a number of Parish Elections scheduled for May 2021 for which elections may be necessary should seats be contested but as usual no certainty will be received until the close of nominations which is currently 19 working days before polling day.

Finally, at the time of writing two Town Council by-elections have been called by electors which will also take place on 6 May 2021.

Updates

Government Announcement of 5th February

The rules for the May 2021 polls are set out in legislation and guidance. The polls will run as normally as possible, and sensible measures are being put in place to protect against spread of disease and overcome practical challenges.

The electoral process formally begins with the notice that a poll is going to take place and, for elections, the nominations process where candidates are required to obtain signatures from a certain number of supporters, in order to get their name onto the ballot paper. Campaigning will be ongoing up until the elections.

Voters will continue to have access to three methods of voting:

- in person at a polling station
- by postal vote
- by proxy vote

The Government is proposing to change the rules for proxy voting to ensure that anyone who is self-isolating can request a proxy vote at the last minute – up to 5pm on polling day itself. The Government is working with suppliers, local authorities and Royal Mail, who are ensuring the COVID-19 secure and effective operation of the postal vote system, from the issuing of postal vote applications to the point where they are counted. The Government has assured close working with local authorities who will ensure the COVID-19 secure and effective operation of polling stations. Voting in person will still be available for all those who would like to, and there will be no change to the hours of polling.

Following the closure of polling stations, votes must be counted and results announced as soon as is practicable. As with the voting process, plans are being put in place to ensure this process is COVID-19 secure and effective. The Government expects the

counts may take more time than for previous polls. However, results should of course still be announced before the terms of new elected officials begin.

Further details of the Government's Delivery Plan can be found at www.gov.uk/government/publications/may-2021-polls-delivery-plan/may-2021-polls-delivery-plan#electoral-process-and-how-it-will-run-in-may-2021

Election Counts

The latest planning assumptions show the following:-

- the verification of all polls will take place on Friday 7 May;
- the Borough elections counts will take place on Saturday 8 May (with the contingency of Sunday 9 May if required); and
- the Police and Crime Commissioner count for the Wokingham area and Town and Parish counts will take place on Monday 10 May;
- All counts will be at the usual count venue of Loddon Valley Leisure Centre, albeit there will be different arrangements to ensure a COVID-safe environment.

Polling Stations

At its meeting of 18 February, the Council is being asked to re-designate a small number of polling places either due to non-availability on 6th May or due to being unsuitable from a health and safety perspective due to the additional requirements to ensure all polling stations are COVID-safe for voters and staff.

With regard to the four schools in the Borough that are used as polling stations, work continues to minimise any disruption to these schools.

Communication

The Council's website remains the main source of essential information for residents. In addition, the Council's social media accounts are also used to promote key messages such as, for example, reminding residents how they can apply for a postal vote.

For candidates, agents, and any member of the public considering standing as a councillor, a briefing has been organised for 1 March which will provide interested parties with an overview of the elections process and ask questions of the Returning Officer and his staff. This will be followed by further detailed briefings as appropriate. Anyone wishing to attend the briefings should contact the Electoral Services Team at electoralservices@wokingham.gov.uk.

Risk Management and Mitigation

Using guidance from the Electoral Commission, a detailed risk register is in place covering such aspects as staffing, communication, contractors and suppliers, the nomination process, postal voting, polling stations, and the verification and count. All detailed assessments are being produced in consultation with Health and Safety and Public Health colleagues.

Given the additional risks associated with this series of elections, it has been agreed to add "May 2021 elections" to the Council's Corporate Risk Register (CRR) which

provides a further corporate focus and capacity to ensure the successful delivery of the polls. The Audit Committee at its meeting of 22 February will be reviewing the CRR.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£0	Yes	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	**	Yes	Revenue
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	**	Yes	Revenue

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

** The costs of elections are not separately broken down within the service budget for Electoral Services.

Cross-Council Implications

Many parts of the Council are involved in ensuring the elections are operated effectively and efficiently e.g. provision of poll clerks.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Specific elements and processes associated with the elections process e.g. re-designation of polling places will be assessed individually prior to implementation.

List of Background Papers

None

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Committee Work Programme 2020-21

DATE OF MEETING	ITEM	PURPOSE OF REPORT	REASON FOR CONSIDERATION	CONTACT OFFICER
29 March 2021	Update from Police & Fire Services	To receive an update from the Police & Fire services	Work Programme	Callum Wernham
	Work Programme	To consider the work programme for the Committee for 2020/21	Standing Item	Democratic Services

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