



WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

A Meeting of the **EXECUTIVE** will be held in the Council Chamber - Civic Offices, Shute End, Wokingham RG40 1BN on **THURSDAY 29 JULY 2021 AT 7.00 PM**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Susan Parsonage', with a long, sweeping tail stroke.

Susan Parsonage
Chief Executive
Published on 21 July 2021

Note: Although non-Committee Members and members of the public are entitled to attend the meeting in person, space is very limited due to the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic. You can however participate in this meeting virtually, in line with the Council's Constitution. If you wish to participate either in person or virtually via Microsoft Teams please contact Democratic Services. The meeting can also be watched live using the following link:
https://youtu.be/YH98_e3ISJ0

This meeting will be filmed for inclusion on the Council's website.

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



WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

Our Vision

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

Enriching Lives

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

Safe, Strong, Communities

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

A Clean and Green Borough

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

Right Homes, Right Places

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

Keeping the Borough Moving

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

Changing the Way We Work for You

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

MEMBERSHIP OF THE EXECUTIVE

John Halsall	Leader of the Council
John Kaiser	Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Finance and Housing
Parry Bath	Environment and Leisure
Graham Howe	Children's Services
Pauline Jorgensen	Highways and Transport
Charles Margetts	Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services
Stuart Munro	Business and Economic Development
Gregor Murray	Resident Services, Communications and Emissions
Wayne Smith	Planning and Enforcement
Bill Soane	Neighbourhoods and Communities

ITEM NO.	WARD	SUBJECT	PAGE NO.
13.		APOLOGIES To receive any apologies for absence	
14.		MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING To confirm the Minutes of the Executive Meeting held on 24 June 2021.	7 - 28
15.		STATEMENT BY THE LEADER OF COUNCIL	
16.		DECLARATION OF INTEREST To receive any declarations of interest	
17.		PUBLIC QUESTION TIME To answer any public questions A period of 30 minutes will be allowed for members of the public to ask questions submitted under notice. The Council welcomes questions from members of the public about the work of the Executive Subject to meeting certain timescales, questions can relate to general issues concerned with the work of the Council or an item which is on the Agenda for this meeting. For full details of the procedure for submitting questions please contact the Democratic Services Section on the numbers given below or go to www.wokingham.gov.uk/publicquestions	
17.1	None Specific	Pamela Jenkinson has asked the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and Communities the following question: Question Would you please confirm that Cranstoun, who are to	

replace Berkshire Women's Aid's refuges for abused women, actually have refuges available in Wokingham, ready for the changeover of funding and services, in order to ensure the safeguarding of the vulnerable women, concerned?

17.2 None Specific

Liz Mayers has asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

Question

This time last year I was party to a group complaint, submitted by 76 Wokingham residents, about your conduct with regards your statement, comments and posts about Black Lives Matter and the tragic murders in Reading. The complaint was first mislaid, then mixed up with other similar individual complaints and generally mis-handled. Finally, part of the resolution was you would under-go training about the key messages of your equality policy. When did that happen, and what did you learn?

17.3 None Specific

Kiran Nar has asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

Question

The Sewell report claims that there is no racism in the UK and last week we saw this was a lie following the appalling response from racists towards black footballers. We know racism exists and continues to exist in all walks of life including in Wokingham Borough. It has been over a year since I made a formal complaint relating to WBC's response to BLM and your response was that Equality is hardwired in WBC's DNA and you were committed to equality. I note today that there is a no team leading equality initiatives anymore, the BME Forum has been disbanded and there has been no real commitment to understand the lives and experience of 155,000 of the non- white population in WBC. What are you really doing to foster good community relationships and eliminate racism in the Borough?

17.4 None Specific

Keith Kerr has asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

Question

The Black residents of Wokingham are suffering from the weight of discrimination they endure in their daily lives, going about their business of living and working in Wokingham. What contact have you had with representatives from the Black community of WBC and what tangible or practical action have you taken to

assuage these discriminations?

18.

MEMBER QUESTION TIME

To answer any member questions

A period of 20 minutes will be allowed for Members to ask questions submitted under Notice

Any questions not dealt with within the allotted time will be dealt with in a written reply.

18.1 Arborfield; Hurst; Shinfield North; Shinfield South; Winnersh

Jackie Rance has asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question:

Question

Could the Executive Member for Planning, please tell me how many houses have been granted planning permission in the past 10 years for the Wards of Hurst, Shinfield, Arborfield and Winnersh?

18.2 None Specific

Rachel Bishop-Firth has asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question:

Question

How many public health funerals has Wokingham Borough arranged during the last two years, ensuring that all residents are treated with dignity in death even if they or their relatives cannot afford a funeral?

Matters for Consideration

19.	None Specific	REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING REPORT FY2021/22 - QUARTER ONE	29 - 42
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A decision sheet will be available for inspection at the Council's offices (in Democratic Services and the General Office) and on the web site no later than two working days after the meeting.

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**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE EXECUTIVE
HELD ON 24 JUNE 2021 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.35 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: John Halsall (Chairman), John Kaiser, Parry Batth, Pauline Jorgensen, Charles Margetts, Stuart Munro, Gregor Murray, Wayne Smith and Bill Soane

Other Councillors Present

Gary Cowan
Lindsay Ferris
Michael Firmager
Sarah Kerr
Imogen Shepherd-DuBey

1. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillor Graham Howe.

2. STATEMENT FROM THE LEADER OF COUNCIL

The Leader of Council made the following statement:

Good evening and welcome to the first Executive meeting of the municipal year.

We are now in the sixteenth month of Covid, and things are now inexorably returning to normal.

We are also a year away from the horrific murders of James Furlong, Joe Ritchie-Bennett and David Wails in Forbury Gardens Reading.

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

As you are aware we have had an increase in Corona cases of the delta variety. We responded with surge testing and surge vaccinations. A truly magnificent effort mounted at very short notice, and all credit to our Officers. As of lunchtime today we have had 3,288 jabs done at Bulmershe, 17,544 PCR tests, including residents, schools and businesses, which have resulted in 46 positive cases who were people without symptoms. These individuals are now isolating. 14,441 doors were knocked on in four wards and 1,000 vulnerable adults supported with testing. 33 families were visited by Children's Services and 931 businesses contacted. Case rates peaked at 96.4 on the 7th June and is now down to 74.8 on the 18th June. It is difficult to know what the rates would have been if we not undertaken all this work but the upward trajectory we were on was alarming to say the least; so without doubt it made a significant impact.

Since the last Executive we have had local elections and they were a demonstration of our residents' faith in this Conservative administration. Our majority has stayed the same, despite the opposition's confident predictions of no overall control.

We won a larger share of the vote than any other party and our share went up! So how does the expression go "...aaaah....Conservatives are winning here! "

I am delighted to see that we are now not only the healthiest local authority but also the most prosperous, having for a long time been one of the most desirable places to live. This is despite being the lowest funded with the lowest level of deprivation. A huge testament to this administration but not a moment for complacency. Whilst I am Leader of the Council, the Executive will strive every day to make this Borough the greatest, safest and happiest place to live, work and bring up a family.

This is a wonderful Borough with a great future. We have some of the finest Officers and Directors, well led by the Chief Executive.

We have a huge, ambitious and detailed programme to deliver for our residents and I wish to highlight just one in this preamble, the local plan.

I imagine the flawed but persistent public criticism of our finances was to ensure that on gaining control the opposition could disingenuously claim that magically our finances had been instantaneously fixed. Let me repeat there is nothing to fix! Our finances are strong, transparent and in rude health as you will see later on this evening.

I am a great believer in democracy which needs to have an administration, an opposition and a free press.

Ideally, the administration must:

- have a track record of delivering;
- be solid in a crisis, like the pandemic;
- be stable;
- have a great plan for the future;
- be experienced and professional,

We are blessed in having such an administration.

The opposition does not have to have, nor does it have any of these attributes; they can look both ways at the same time. We are blessed in having such an opposition.

We are also blessed in having a vibrant press.

Some roles are semi-judicial. Recently Members appear to have taken a political stance rather than a judicial one. Members of the Planning Committee must decide. This will not please everybody and may not please anybody, but they need to do so. Abstentions on party lines make a mockery of the process much to the distain of the public.

Nationally, both the Liberal Democrats and the Tories committed to building 300,000 homes per year in their 2019 manifestos. It is disingenuous to pretend that this is a new Conservative policy. The Labour Party committed to “regenerate housing” and building one million new homes, which is more or less the same as the other parties.

There is a consensus within the Borough Council that whilst we note Parliament’s apparently settled view the minimum of these new homes should be in Wokingham Borough consistent with our need to provide more affordable housing and social housing.

There is no conflict between the climate emergency agenda and the housing agenda, we must do both.

The administration has recently published its housing and its 1-4-5 plus 100 strategies. We also worked very hard last year to successfully dissuade the Government from a housing number which would have been more than 1,600 per annum to a more reasonable number between 600-800. We are still working on whittling down this number.

Being the healthiest and most prosperous local authority, with the lowest deprivation and great schools is a great success; a testament to nineteen years of Conservative administration. However, there is a downside which is that it is a very desirable place to live. I doubt that there is a square inch of the Borough which does not have a developer's option on it. To counter the threat of unrestrained speculative development, we cannot just say we won't allow it as this position will be overturned.

We must have a current local plan which conforms to the criteria of the time. We will be presenting one in the Autumn. We will engage in a "community-led approach, putting local residents at the heart of the system where residents are taken notice of and listened to, not taken for granted or even worse simply ignored and certainly not a free for all for landowners and developers."; I quote.

Opposition to this plan will be support for unrestricted development, which is entirely irresponsible and will be a developer's charter. Local authorities who have taken a different view (mostly Lib Dems) have found that their planning decisions have been taken out of their local authority hands and placed with the MHCLG and speculative development has been permitted by the planning inspectorate in the absence of a local plan.

Failure to develop a local plan as the opposition suggest will ensure that decisions are not made by local residents and communities but by developers, the planning inspectorate and the MHCLG.

WBC's opposition Leader will ensure "that homes will be dumped near you".

3. STATEMENT BY THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HEALTH, WELLBEING AND ADULT SERVICES

Just wanted to really pick up a couple of points. I mean John has been over the key statistics which are very impressive and a testament to all the hard work that has gone on here. It is worth remembering it is only Monday 7th June that surge testing started in Wokingham. On that day we wrote to the CCG and the Regional Director of the NHS. Then we had surge testing and it was now time for surge vaccination. The Friday of that week surge vaccination was approved. The Tuesday we had our surge vaccination centre open and jabbed around 300 people. This has been an incredible effort by all staff connected to the Council, our partners in the NHS, and all those people who have worked with us. I want to extend my real thanks for this co-operation.

The vaccination centre, as John said, has jabbed so far 3,288 people. We saw some data from the NHS which showed the real difference that this has meant in the wards where Covid was strongest. Which is that vaccination rates in the 18-24 age group have gone up from around 16-17% to over 50% in two weeks, which is real evidence on the ground, as we know that the only way to defeat this is vaccinations. It is real evidence of the concrete progress this has made.

Our surge testing programme has found 46 positive cases. I think it is worth noting again the importance of surge testing. This means that there were 46 people in the Borough

carrying Covid who did not necessarily know they had it and each one of those could have spread it to 2, 3, possibly more people. Thanks to this we have managed to identify these people and they are now isolating. We wish them a speedy recovery.

The other side of the coin though is that with nearly 18,000 tests back and only 46 cases it means we do not have an uncontrolled runaway situation here. The case rate is beginning to come down. We must remain watchful and cautious going forward but the situation is coming under control.

Obviously finding these 46 cases means the case rate over the next week or two may rise slightly as they work through the figures, but this is not a cause for alarm.

I think in summary I would say again my thanks to all the partners who worked with us to deliver this and any advice we can give to people, which will be familiar to many in the Borough already, to stop the spread of Covid is take a lateral flow test twice a week at home, which will be familiar to anyone who has got children at secondary school. Get vaccinated as soon as you can. If you are offered the opportunity, go and get the vaccine, it is the only defence and if you are asked to isolate please do it properly.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The Minutes of the Extraordinary meeting of the Executive held on 18 March 2021 and the Executive meeting held on 25 March 2021 were confirmed as correct records and signed by the Leader of Council.

5. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor John Halsall declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 7, Revenue Monitoring 2020/21 – Outturn, by virtue of the fact that he was the Treasurer of Thames Rowing Club which had received Covid support from the Council. Councillor Halsall took part in discussions and voted on the matter.

Councillor John Kaiser declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 7, Revenue Monitoring 2020/21 – Outturn, by virtue of the fact that he was a remunerated Non-Executive Director of WBC (Holdings) Ltd, Wokingham Housing Ltd and Berry Brook Homes Ltd. Councillor Kaiser took part in discussions and voted on the matter.

Councillors Stuart Munro and Wayne Smith declared personal interests in Agenda Item 7, Revenue Monitoring 2020/21 – Outturn, by virtue of the fact that they were Non-Executive Directors of WBC (Holdings) Ltd. Councillors Munro and Smith took part in discussions and voted on the matter.

6. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

6.1 Daniel Hinton asked the Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions the following question:

Question

Like many interested parties across the Borough The members and followers of Greener Wokingham are looking forward to WBC running one, or more local deliberative processes. Can you tell residents what progress has been made in determining which LDP are right for our Climate Emergency and what the likely topics of the LDPs will be?

Answer

Local deliberative processes aim to help us better understand the views of our residents and community groups on the Council's response to climate change.

Tackling the climate emergency in Wokingham will require active participation from our residents, all of whom have a big part to play in delivering the big changes that are needed on our journey to decarbonisation.

Through the right consultative and participation methods, the Council will be able to hear their voices, collect their views and gather insight to inform future decisions.

To advise on which deliberative processes to use, significant research and consultation have been undertaken both internally and externally.

Fifteen community engagement options recently used for climate emergency were reviewed and scored based on the policy stage, length of the process, number of participants, participant selection, delivery form and cost. These include crowd sourcing, citizen's assemblies, juries and panels, advisory groups, polling e-panels, to name but a few.

This comparison not only highlights the breadth of options available but also enables us to identify the most suitable solutions to use to engage the community with the different aspects of our climate emergency agenda.

Successful case studies from other local authorities engaging residents with climate emergency were sourced to demonstrate the potential effectiveness of these approaches.

These examples vary in terms of the number of residents involved, the length of process and the cost of delivery. They also produce similar results on engaging the community, producing recommendations and actions and informing the climate emergency panels.

Following this research, a detailed proposal to deliver community deliberative processes is being developed, which will come towards this Executive in the coming months, to provide comprehensive information on how these methods will be set up and delivered.

Some of the potential topics for discussion will reflect the behaviour change needed to achieve net zero, and this includes:

- Our vision for future living across Wokingham Borough;
- modal shift in transport;
- reducing energy consumption through behaviour, technology and home improvements;
- reducing the amount of waste we generate and improving our recycling behaviours;
- reducing food waste and supporting sustainable consumption; and also
- Conscious consumption. So shopping local, using less plastic, avoiding fast fashions and taking staycations.

This process will involve a diverse and unbiased range of participants to obtain the best quality feedback from balanced discussions. The results will then be openly fed back into the Council and also back to the community.

Supplementary Question

Can I put a request in that we look at how we can increase biodiversity in the Borough and see if we can get this as one of the subjects of the early LDPs as you go forward?

Supplementary Answer

Yes, I can certainly confirm that we can do that. I think it is a great thing to add to our list of local deliberative processes for the future. Increasing biodiversity is really important to us as a Council.

Yes, absolutely I think getting our residents' views and opinions on how we do that would be very valuable to our community and our climate emergency going forward.

6.2 Nick Dyer had asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question but as he was unable to attend the meeting the following written response was provided:

Question

Since 2013 the monthly membership fee (currently £30 per month/£360 p.a.) has allowed squash players to book off-peak courts at no additional cost. On 11th May 2021, without prior consultation, members were advised that with effect from 1st June that IN ADDITION to the monthly fee, a charge of £5.50 would be levied for every off-peak booking.

This means ADDITIONAL COST as follows:

- 1 court booking per week = £286 p.a.
- 2 court bookings per week = £572 p.a.
- 3 court bookings per week = £858 p.a.
- 4 court bookings per week = £1144 p.a.

Not many people play 4 times a week, but I and a number of others do (we were described by PFP as "abnormal members"!) but the impact on us is huge. The group I represent are mainly senior citizens for whom this is our main source of exercise which is now being discouraged. We believe some members will cancel and the rest of us will significantly reduce usage emerging from a pandemic.

I would like to know what impact analysis on INDIVIDUALS was carried out by the Council before they sanctioned these draconian price increases by Places for People and how they can be justified.

Answer

Within the existing terms and conditions for those that hold a membership with Places Leisure (PFP), changes can be made to memberships and at this point members will be notified and consulted prior to any changes and can, if they wish, cancel their membership.

Proposed price changes that are not deemed core pricing sessions (which are increased yearly as per inflation and agreed with the Sport and Leisure team) are put forward for discussion and review and once agreed PFP will initiate the changes in line with their terms and conditions.

Background and supporting details for the change by PFP:

Place Leisure inherited the previous contractor's membership and racket sport pricing structures in May 2018 and not a current membership option that PFP offer within their pricing structure. The legacy memberships were honoured for over three years whilst refurbishment & improvement works were carried out across all Wokingham sites.

The membership implemented for those that were on a legacy 1Life membership is not a rackets membership, as mentioned above there is no such membership that PFP offer. The implemented membership is excellent value when combined with usage of the gym, fitness classes, swimming & 50% off racket sports usage.

Racket Sport hire price has not increased from 1st June 2019, instead the booking structure for members has been reviewed and amended in June 2021, the headline membership rate of £41 a month unlimited use has not been increased this year, and there are no plans to review this until 2022. On average, members book a racket court 1-2 times weekly. This frequency of use ensures their membership is still excellent value.

After consultation, Mr Dyer was immediately transferred to a more suitable senior (over 60's) membership, benefiting from unlimited access to the gym, group exercise classes along with the 50% reduction on courts at St Crispin's LC for £29.00 a month.

Recommendations are also encouraged that members split the price of a squash court with their playing partner, rather than paying for the court in full themselves, reducing the racket usage costs by half.

The over 60's membership reduction also supports all those residents that Mr Dyer mentions, supporting and encouraging older residents within the Borough an affordable membership option for all activities offered.

Places Leisure pricing remains extremely competitive and in many areas versus other like-for-like leisure providers in the local area (e.g. Everyone Active in Bracknell and GLL in Reading) and provides excellent value for money in which we encourage for the residents of Wokingham.

7. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

7.1 Gary Cowan asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

Question

I participated in a workshop recently which looked at building over 4,500 houses, 3 schools, community centres, new roads etc at Hall Farm stretching to and including parts of Winnersh.

When asked a senior Officer at the workshop suggested that the evolving local plan was to provide 700 to 750 houses a year until 2036 but in the local Wokingham Paper you are quoted as stating the number each year would be in the region of 14,000 plus a year to 2036.

Was the 700 to 750 the housing number the Council would like to put in the Hall Farm Arborfield to Winnersh and the 14,000 plus the number for the Borough as a whole?

Can the Leader of the Council update me on the actual or approximate housing numbers the Council are planning for the Borough in the evolving housing plan to 2036?

Answer

First of all I would just like to point out Gary that I cannot be responsible for what is printed in the press.

As the mastermind behind the current plan, you are well aware what the paradigms around a local plan process are. Indeed, you were the Executive Member to whom could be attributed the four SDLs and all the development for the last decade. I can therefore assume that you are familiar with the process.

You are also correct in describing the local plan as evolving.

Government policy requires all local authorities to set out plans to deliver new housing, and Wokingham Borough Council is no different. This is a central issue to be grappled with through the new local plan.

Unfortunately, due to the change in the emergency planning arrangements around AWE Burghfield we are no longer able to rely on providing for most of the new housing need through the creation of the Grazeley garden town, as proposed in the Draft Local Plan consultation last year, and we are having to review alternative possible approaches. The meeting you attended is part of an evidence gathering exercise, considering how development might be managed on a strategic scale, should this approach be taken. Information on this process is available on our website.

I should stress at this juncture that no decisions have been made as to what the alternative approach will be recommended for consultations and all options remain on the table.

Returning to your question, the figures you quote are confusing the amount of housing the Government requires to be built each year within Wokingham Borough with the amount of housing that needs to be managed by the local plan over its entire period.

You will recall that last year the Government White Paper proposals were that Wokingham Borough would have to provide in excess of 1,600 per annum, which with buffers would have been around 2,000 per annum. You were sceptical that this would and could be eased. But a Conservative administration is capable of having a dialogue with a Conservative Government and I can say without fear of contradiction that the policy was abandoned because of our opposition. At the time it was said that I was notorious in Whitehall.

The applicable Government policy calculates the amount of housing a local authority needs to enable through a standard method. For Wokingham Borough, the standard method currently calculates the housing need as 768 dwellings per year. This figure is recalculated each year as you know but it has generally been in the range of 760-820 dwellings.

You may recall that when you were Lead Member for Planning at the time the 2010 Local Plan was accepted with a figure of 623 new homes per year.

The Draft Local Plan we consulted on last year covered the period 2018 to 2035/36, an 18-year period. 768 dwellings per year for 18 years is just under 14,000 dwellings. There is no requirement to provide 14,000 dwellings each year.

For completeness, much of the required 14,000 dwellings will be met from sites which already have planning permission. For example 9,000 dwellings have already been completed, are under construction or have planning permission as part of the four Strategic Development Locations defined by your adopted Core Strategy local plan In 2010, on which you were instrumental.

I am in discussions with MHCLG to ameliorate the requirement by seeking clarification on exceptional circumstances and the five year land supply.

Consultation on the new local plan is anticipated in the autumn.

Supplementary Question

I was looking at the Wokingham Borough Council Managing Development Local Plan Document, which was adopted in February 2014 and was signed off by the then Executive Member for Planning, which was Councillor Keith Baker. Looking at Appendix 14 it makes reference to South Wokingham SDL and the requirement to build 2,490 houses by 2026, which is the end of the Plan. I think the same line would apply to all four SDLs. I attended a planning meeting briefing on South Wokingham and its evolution fairly recently and in that the developers and Officers said that once planning permission had been granted for the remainder of the work it would take at least 10 years to complete the project. If all of those houses are supposed to be built by 2026, 10 years on takes it up into 2030, 31, 32 and this really will apply, I would think, to all the SDLs.

So my concern is, and the question is, if you lump the incomplete houses in the existing Local Plan will they be added to the numbers that you will be agreeing in the new Local Plan and so whatever the number will be it will be plus all of the incomplete ones in the existing Local Plan?

Supplementary Answer

I think you are assuming parts of the evolving Local Plan which are yet to evolve and I think you will have to wait for that position unless Wayne can provide anything further.

Councillor Wayne Smith provided the following response:

I think you are right Gary. I think the issue we have had in South Wokingham is the delay in getting the scheme off the ground. So, I think you are right but it will not be in addition to, they will be negative numbers off the overall plan.

7.2 Imogen Shepherd DuBey asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

Question

Having looked at the Recovery Strategy document, I am having trouble seeing what WBC are doing, over and above the business-as-usual items that are mentioned in this document. This document seems to cover the work that WBC would be doing anyway, but it does not demonstrate what additional funding is being made available to help local Businesses recover and how it might be used. Even Wokingham Town Council has

managed to find funding for advertising and banners promoting businesses in Wokingham Town Centre, but at this critical time, we have seen no wider help at all from WBC.

Please can you identify what additional funding is being allocated to business recovery and how is going to be used?

Answer

In sending you our proposed Recovery Strategy earlier than the usual date of distribution, I was hoping you would come up with something useful that we could expand on the comprehensive Recovery Strategy we already have in place. Sadly, you have not but it is really good to have Wokingham Town Council coming to the party, albeit late in the day.

Taking your specific point regarding Wokingham Town. Rather than just hang up some bunting and banners we will continue to regenerate the Town Centre in the context of Business Recovery at a total investment of approximately £150m. This will involve working hard with our resources to bring in attractive retailers by encouraging them that this is a great place to come and set up a business. We have already been successful in doing this during the pandemic. We will continue to administer support schemes available to businesses and ensure our businesses across the whole Borough receive any restart support available in addition to the £66m support we have already distributed. Additional staffing resources have been secured to reach out to our businesses in this regard.

We know that one of the best ways to bounce back is to create vibrancy within the Town, which we will do through attracting desirable retailers as I have previously mentioned, creating the right environment and facilitating events to draw people in.

Our regeneration activity will include the completion and sale of the homes we are building around Elms Field and surrounding areas, a new hub for leisure, swimming and other events, including a new library. You will also be aware from this agenda that we are even investing sizeably in a boxing hub in the town centre, which we are expecting to be of great appeal across age ranges and genders.

All of this considerable investment and resource will be directed into; building out the town centre assets and facilities to create an attractive business environment; supporting current businesses to bounce back; attracting desirable retailers and facilitating the environment and events to draw people into the town. These endeavours stretch into the 100s of million pounds and are without a doubt on top of business as usual for any local authority. But we know this is the right thing to do as our businesses deserve every opportunity to rise and thrive following such a difficult time. Who knows, we might also put up a bit of bunting.

Supplementary Question

Your answer doesn't really answer my question. There was no budget line in the budget meeting that we had in February to talk about recovery at all. I know that there has been grant funding from central Government and that has been distributed and that is great. But I want to know what additional costs the Covid recovery is having on Wokingham and I don't see any sign of that in this report. Also, I wasn't aware that we were allowed to comment on this report as it seemed to have got dumped on us. So, this is why we are asking the question now.

Aside from the grants that central Government has given us what funding has come from Wokingham Borough Council? How much money has it cost us for this Covid recovery plan because it was not in the budget for this year?

Supplementary Answer

I correct you it is all in the budget. We have been working on the recovery plan for the last 12 months and it is all encompassed in the MTFP.

As I said I am delighted to hear that Wokingham Town Council is finally coming to the party.

As far as I can tell both Wokingham and Earley Town Councils have slept for sixteen months, having delegated all the functions to the Officers. There is no evidence that either body has done anything material in that time. Whilst not doing anything it has kept all the Officers on full pay at the residents' cost. No identifiable furlough has occurred and no recovery plan has been published.

It is appalling that Earley Town Council have not in two years been able to finish the transfer of Sibley Park Woods and grass areas from Persimmon Homes whilst suggesting that they should be custodians of more land.

If my memory serves me correctly the Lib Dems were against developing Elms Field which is now and has been throughout the pandemic a centre of vibrant activity. Any day it is literally full reflecting the popularity of the facility.

Our regeneration of the Wokingham town centre has kept it alive free of the voids which other town centres have suffered. Again, if my memory serves me correctly your former Leader and your party was against redevelopment but proposed no shops but a dark warehouse from which goods could be collected.

£150m has been spent in the town centre providing a cinema, car parking, a swimming pool, new shops, a hotel, a leisure centre, a theatre, etc, etc. We Conservatives have led in Wokingham Town, Woodley, Earley and Twyford. Every improvement has been opposed by the Lib Dems who after the event have claimed responsibility.

The Twyford library was completely devoid of any Lib Dem involvement, it is a Tory achievement of which I am proud.

Oh no, I do you a misjustice the Lib Dem Leader is very concerned about spending and would wish to curtail presumably cancelling the library, Carnival Pool etc etc. Central to your question was increasing spending. The Lib Dems only see issues in terms of spending and every proposal made increases it.

Wokingham Town, despite Covid, is vibrant and I entreat Wokingham Town Council to welcome shoppers and visitors to use it. You should be doing all in your power to revitalize this wonderful asset that the Tory Borough Council has developed. The residents expect it.

It is truly good for our residents that the Lib Dems are in opposition. I concur with the assertion that Lib Dem questions are whatever they are.

7.3 Shahid Younis had asked the Deputy Executive Member for Equalities, Poverty, the Arts and Climate Emergency a question which was withdrawn prior to the meeting.

**7.4 Lindsay Ferris asked the Leader of the Council the following question:
Question**

When you gave your Budget Speech in February this year, there was no mention of a Recovery Plan, something, you may remember I commented on in my speech in response to your proposals. I have been through the current proposals and I can still see no Budget commitments within the Document, only a broad comment about working within the financial restrictions of the Council. That seems to confirm no specific financial allowance has been made to perform any of the proposals, such as they are, mentioned within the Document.

Is this document nothing more than an after-thought?

Answer

It is true about the Lib Dem questions. Thank you Lindsay for your question. It will obviously surprise you to know that we have been working with our Officers since the early months of lockdown in March 2020 on the Council's response to recovery. This predates your rhetoric at Council in February 2021 by about 10 months. Although, quite rightly, our primary attention during the pandemic has been on our response and saving lives, there has been 'shadow' Gold meetings chaired by our Deputy Chief Executive which has focused on recovery. Work has been going on across the Council for over a year and this document simply brings this together in a formal way. The only way in which I would refer to this document and the huge work that sits beside it, as an after-thought, is that throughout the pandemic it has been the thought that we have been saving lives, communities and businesses.

As for budgets for recovery, here are some financial commitments that were incorporated in the MTFP in February 2021:

- completion of £150m investment in Wokingham Town Centre regeneration and recovery;
- climate emergency investment in seeking to become carbon neutral as part of recovery £71m over 3 years;
- investing in our contain and outbreak management plan to enable recovery over £2m;
- £250k as an initial pilot to support those with low level mental health issues, to help those who need it recover from the impact of the pandemic;
- £160k over the next 2 years to enhance our approach to domestic abuse which is another area which will need greater support as a result of the pandemic.

As I said these are just some, there are plenty more that I could cite. However more significantly you are missing the fundamental point of this Strategy. All of the Council's resources will be utilised with these Pillars in mind as these Pillars are considered to be the most significant areas that need attending to in delivering successfully on our Council Plan.

The Recovery Strategy is also clear on its status as being a flexible, dynamic, evolving strategy, informed by the data and insight we gather along the way. No one can know all the specific issues and challenges our community will face over the next five years. You

will be aware from the approach that we have taken to the pandemic; we will act clearly and decisively to do what needs to be done, we will target Council resources to where it is most important and will not be shy in seeking additional budgetary resources if and where it is needed.

Supplementary Question

I think I can make a similar comment about responses to questions as well as you made earlier. I think you have missed the point of what we have been saying particularly the Covid recovery plan because what you have mentioned mostly this evening is our activities which have been going on for 3, 4, 5 years. We as a result of the problem with Covid have had a significant number of businesses struggling, a lot of people being laid off and at the Community and Corporate O&S meeting you admitted that it was a reaction to the situation.

What are you actually doing to deal with the extra requirements associated with having a Covid problem? We have all those extra problems. What is it extra that you are doing as a result of Covid?

Supplementary Answer

We generally live within the budget that we set in the MTFP and that is good financial management. I have always been rather appalled by the financial literacy of the opposition. We will come back to the Executive or Council if we need further budgetary additions to that envelope. So, we will live within that envelope.

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

Question

Who was involved in the decision-making process for the price increases at St Crispin's Leisure Centre that has led to in some cases, a 4-fold increase in cost for some users?

Answer

Within the existing terms and conditions for those that hold a membership with Places Leisure (or PFP for short), changes can be made to memberships and at this point members will be notified prior to any changes and can, if they wish, review their membership options or cancel their membership.

Proposed price changes that are not deemed core pricing sessions (which are increased yearly as per inflation and agreed with the Sport and Leisure Team) are put forward for discussion and review and once agreed PFP will initiate the changes in line with their terms and conditions.

The change in cost relates to a legacy membership inherited by PFP from the previous contractors in May 2018 and not a current membership option that PFP offer within their pricing structure. The legacy memberships were honoured for over three years whilst refurbishment and improvement works were carried out across all Wokingham sites.

The membership implemented for those that were on a legacy 1Life membership is not a rackets membership, as mentioned above and there is no such membership that PFP offer. The implemented membership is excellent value when combined with usage of the gym, fitness classes, swimming and 50% off racket sports usage.

Racket sport hire prices have not increased since 1st June 2019, instead the booking structure for members has been reviewed and amended in June 2021, the headline membership rate is £41 a month unlimited use and has not been increased this year, and there are no plans to review it until next year. On average, members book a racket court once or twice a week. The frequency of use ensures that membership is still excellent value.

The members that were affected and have raised concerns and are eligible were immediately transferred to a more suitable senior (over 60's) membership, benefiting from unlimited access to the gym, group exercise and classes along with the 50% reduction on courts at St Crispin's Leisure Centre and for only £29.00 a month.

Recommendations are also encouraged that those members split the price of a squash court with their playing partner, rather than paying for it themselves, therefore reducing the racket usage by half.

Places Leisure pricing remains extremely competitive and in many areas versus other like-for-like leisure providers in the local area (for instance Everyone Active in Bracknell and GLL in Reading) and we provide excellent value for money in which we encourage the residents of Wokingham to use these fantastic facilities and they are of the best in the country..

Supplementary Question

I am quite surprised by your answer. I mean you have already highlighted that these price increases particularly affect squash players as you are aware. We have actually crunched the numbers and it is more expensive now to use the squash courts at St Crispin's than Wellington Health and Fitness Club.

A much better facility at Wellington Health and Fitness Club is actually cheaper than St Crispin's. St Crispin's is a Council owned facility.

My question is how are you intending to fulfil the Council's Leisure Strategy, of increasing participation in sports and leisure activities, when you price people out of using facilities run supposedly for public benefit?

Supplementary Answer

I think that I did explain that these were legacy charges which were not there, people enjoyed free sessions off-peak and those sessions have lasted for three years and we do not intend to carry these on. The PFP have implemented a price for those off-peak sessions. Squash is a fantastic game unfortunately we have to be competitive.

As you are aware Sarah Wokingham Borough Council is the lowest funded authority in the Country and we rely solely on the increased income that we get through our council tax paid by our fantastic residents. We want to use these funds wisely to provide our sports and facilities which are the best in the country and as such all of our residents to enjoy these facilities through paying appropriate and competitive prices.

So, I do not know where you are going to get your forward price increases and really I am at a loss to understand that.

7.6 Michael Firmager asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question:

Question

Relating to Revenue Monitoring 2020/21 – Outturn: The report shows that there were real pressures placed on the Council's finances last year, which we nonetheless were able to handle successfully due to strong financial management. Can you tell me what the plans are for progress on the Local Plan this year and how this will affect the current budget in light of continuing COVID pressures?

Answer

A review of the adopted plans is being undertaken to ensure that the Council's planning policies continue to be effective in managing decisions on development proposals.

The Council is currently involved in the process of preparing two local plans: the Central and East Berkshire Joint Minerals and Waste Local Plan; and the Local Plan Update.

The Central and East Berkshire Joint Minerals and Waste Local Plan is being undertaken in partnership with Reading Borough Council, Bracknell Forest Council and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. The Plan was submitted for examination in February and we are awaiting the programme from the appointed Inspector.

The programme for the Local Plan Update has unfortunately needed to be changed. This reflects the need to revisit and consult on a revised strategy to manage the growth following the extension of the emergency planning arrangements around AWE Burghfield in 2020. This change in circumstances meant that the strategy outlined in the Draft Local Plan from February last year is no longer practically achievable.

Consultation on a revised strategy for the Local Plan will be held this autumn. This will formally be set out in an update and the Local Development Scheme due for consideration by the Executive in July, next month.

We all recognise the importance of preparing new local plans to ensure we continue to have effective planning policies. Budgets already exist for both plans which are sufficient to cover the costs of their preparation, including procuring all the evidence.

8. WBC RECOVERY STRATEGY

The Executive considered a report setting out a proposed strategy for the Council that addresses the key issues arising from the pandemic and attends to 'recovery' in the context of delivering the Corporate Plan.

The Leader of Council introduced the report and advised that the Recovery Strategy had been worked up during the pandemic and most of the financial consequences set out in the Strategy had been included in the Medium Term Financial Plan. If additional funding was required then proposals would be brought back to the Executive in the form of supplementary estimates.

Whilst the Council could never have predicted the course of the pandemic, it was clear that it would do damage to the Borough and its economy therefore whilst there was a team within the Council dealing with the requirements of the pandemic there was also a team working on the aftermath.

Councillor Halsall advised that the pandemic had been approached in three phases: response, recovery, and reorientation. He also highlighted and provided additional detail on the nine key pillars and the three key principles, as set out in the Strategy.

Gregor Murray stated that given that Covid had brought with it a reduction in the particulates that adversely affected our air and also an increase in home working, which provided benefits for the environment, he was pleased to see that the Strategy included an additional focus on maintaining the lower particulate rate and also working with residents and local businesses to maintain some of that home working which had a great carbon benefit. Councillor Murray also welcomed the fact that the Council was making investments in mental health as it was known that this was going to be an area of concern for a lot of residents post Covid.

RESOLVED that the Wokingham Borough Council Recovery Strategy be approved and the challenges of recovery in a changing landscape and the need to be agile in approach be noted.

9. REVENUE MONITORING 2020/21 - OUTTURN

(Councillors John Halsall, John Kaiser, Stuart Munro and Wayne Smith declared personal interests in this item)

The Executive considered a report setting out the revenue outturn position of the Council for the 20/21 financial year.

During his introduction, the Executive Member for Finance and Housing reminded the meeting that the Council was the lowest funded unitary council in the UK with regards to Government grants. This had meant that over the past 10 years the Council had to reduce its spending in real terms by around £35m, however it had managed to continue offering high levels of service and end up with a general reserve balance which at the start of the pandemic was £12.4m. Councillor Kaiser went into detail on the programmes that had been embarked upon during this time which included the setting up of the Council owned housing companies, which not only delivered affordable homes but also made a profit to be reinvested back into services, investing in Wokingham town centre, and commercial investments which were performing well.

Councillor Kaiser further highlighted some of the projects that had been completed as part of the capital programme. This included five new primary schools, one new secondary school and six major road projects. The road projects consisted of Arborfield relief road, which was delivered on time, the new bridge at Barkham, relief roads in Winnersh and Shinfield, the start of the new southern and northern relief roads as well as the new station and new station link roads. He went on to mention the 700 new affordable and social homes that had been completed over the last two years and the regeneration and replacement of Gorse Ride in Finchampstead which would deliver over 200 new homes.

Councillor Kaiser went on to inform the meeting about the work that had been carried out to ensure that during the pandemic those who were homeless were looked after and taken off the streets as well as providing information on the action and support that had been provided to the poorest and most vulnerable in the Borough and to businesses.

As set out in the report Councillor Kaiser highlighted that despite the challenges that had been faced during the pandemic the Council had come in under budget for the 20/21 financial year both on business as usual (£1.2m) and overall including Covid 19 costs in the sum of £800k. The HRA was showing a surplus of £1.4m and general reserves were

standing at £10.4m. The only area where an increase of costs was showing was the Dedicated School Grant which was due to the increase in costs for children with special needs. The Council had been working with the DfE to address this issue and had plans to deliver additional in-Borough provision to arrest these costs going forward.

Councillor Kaiser paid tribute to the Chief Executive, the Chief Finance Officer, the senior management and the commitment of all staff to deliver services on time and on or in some cases below budget with no reduction in the quality of services to residents. He also thanked the charity sector for their contribution.

Following a query by Councillor Jorgensen it was confirmed that the Council's net debt was £131m.

Councillor Margetts highlighted that the actions taken during the pandemic all cost money eg purchasing PPE privately when it was not available from central Government, setting up vaccination centres, etc, and these had only been possible because of the strong financial position of the Council.

With regard to the carry forward requests, amounting to £7.4m, Councillor Kaiser clarified that the budget for these had been approved in the 2020/21 budget agreed by Council therefore they would not create any additional pressure on the 2021/22 budgets.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the outturn position of the revenue budget and the level of balances in respect of the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account and Schools Block be noted;
- 2) the General Fund carry forward requests of £7,464,939, as set out in Appendix B to the report, be agreed;
- 3) a supplementary estimate of £16,000 for the Digital Infrastructure Group be approved.

10. CAPITAL OUTTURN 2020/2021

The Executive considered a report setting out the Capital Programme outturn for 2020/2021.

In addition to the information provided during the revenue monitoring outturn item the Executive Member for Finance and Housing drew Members' attention to the fact that the Council had managed to spend £171m during the year, which was only £3m below target and which was a major achievement given the pandemic.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the outturn position of the capital programme for 2020/21, as summarised in the report below and set out in detail in Appendix A, be noted;
- 2) the proposed fourth quarter carry forwards into the 2021/22 Capital Programme, as set out in Appendix B, be noted and approved;
- 3) the Quarter 4 budget adjustments to the 2020/21 capital programme which include:

- a. £4.22m of ringfenced funded capital budget provisionally programmed for 2021/22 is brought forward into the current year (2020/21), for the acceleration of the delivery of the SCAPE – Road Infrastructure project;
- b. Reduction in capital programme budget of £114k across schools devolved programme, due to the reduction in the funding from the devolved schools grant; be noted and approved.

11. IMPLEMENTING THE LEISURE STRATEGY

The Executive considered a report which proposed two new leisure developments which would take forward the draft Leisure Strategy by further enhancing the Council's facilities to increase physical activity and improve wellbeing.

The Executive Member for Environment and Leisure introduced the report and highlighted the proposal for a boxing fitness hub. He advised that local research had shown that combat sports and fitness sessions attendances were on the rise. In line with the town centre regeneration an opportunity for a high-end fitness studio with classes as its main attraction had become available. Focus would be on combat exercise classes and fee-box sessions for training and exercise purposes.

Councillor Batth went on to provide information on the proposal for a 3G pitch and additional car parking at Laurel Park. It was noted that data from the current Playing Pitch Strategy showed that Wokingham had over 540 football teams and there was a need for additional 3G pitches. Laurel Park's pitches were rated as 'poor' within the Strategy and maintenance work is being carried out on the pitches to improve them. Installing a new 3G pitch and additional parking would mean that players would not have to travel outside the Borough.

Councillor Jorgensen was pleased to see the proposal for a 3G pitch at Laurel Park as there were issues with the current pitches on that site. She highlighted that local residents had problems with people parking and the traffic on matchday so asked if a solution to this issue could be considered whilst building the 3G pitch.

Due to the shortage of cricket pitches in the area Councillor Jorgensen asked if consideration could also be given to the inclusion of an astroturf cricket square at Laurel Park. Councillor Batth welcomed these suggestions and advised that between 40-50 parking bays were being proposed at Laurel Park, subject to planning permission, which should assist with the issues local residents were facing. He agreed to look at the possibility of including a cricket square.

Given the physical and mental health benefits of boxing Councillor Murray welcomed the proposal of setting up a boxing fitness hub into the community and particularly the introduction of self-defence classes for women. He asked that a commitment be made that these classes would be prioritised as part of the club's activities and that they would be well promoted and publicised, particularly in schools, and run at various times of the day to make sure that anybody who wanted to attend was able to do so. Councillor Batth confirmed his commitment and support for Councillor Murray requests.

RESOLVED that the following be approved:

- 1) a new boxing fitness hub based in a first floor unit in Peach Place, Wokingham. This is to be managed by WBC Sport and Leisure Team and approval for all associated fees and charges to be agreed for the hub as set in Schedule 1;

- 2) the borrowing of £630k for the hub which will be funded by income from the activities, resulting in a surplus after all costs on average of £80k p.a.;
- 3) a new 3G pitch and additional car parking located at Laurel Park, subject to funding and planning, and borrowing of £300k to be self-financed by project.

12. COMMUNITY SAFETY STRATEGY 2021-2024

The Executive considered a report setting out a proposed Community Safety Partnership Strategy and priorities covering the period 2021-2024.

The Leader of Council highlighted the work that was being carried out to address residents' safety and their environment. This included appointing a Community Safety Manager, a Domestic Violence Manager and an Anti-Social Behaviour Manager.

In addition, environmental health, trading standards and licensing, together with more than 150 pieces of legislation, were being brought back under the Council's control. The Licensing and Appeals Committee, which would be renamed the Licensing, Trading Standards and Appeals Committee, and would develop, over a number of years, a Wokingham Borough Council policy for each of these services.

Councillor Halsall advised the meeting of the work that would be carried out by the Community Safety Partnership, environmental health, trading standards, licensing with health partners and towns and parishes to provide a consistent and joined up approach and also the creation of a responsive and out of hours service.

With regard to the Community Safety Strategy Councillor Halsall drew Members' attention to the priorities for the Community Safety Partnership and the five delivery areas as set out in the report.

The Executive Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods advised the meeting that the Community Safety Strategy was deferred from the previous Executive meeting in order that additional public and stakeholder consultation could be undertaken. The current Strategy and priorities came to an end in March 2021 and legislation states that the Community Safety Partnership must have in place:

- a strategy for crime and disorder, including anti-social behaviour, combatting the misuse of drugs, alcohol and other substances in the area;
- a strategy for the reduction of re-offending in Wokingham Borough; and
- a system for monitoring the strategy for effectiveness and make any changes where necessary and expedient.

With regard to the development of the Strategy Councillor Soane highlighted the workshop that had taken place on 10th December 2020, as set out in Appendix 2, the consultation that had been carried out over a period of five weeks in February/March with residents and stakeholders and the input of Members and Officers of the Council. It was noted that although the Strategy had an end date of 2024 it would be reviewed annually.

RESOLVED: That the Community Safety Partnership Strategy and new priorities for 2021-2024 be endorsed for implementation on 1 July 2021.

13. COMMERCIAL HOSPITALITY OPPORTUNITY FOR DINTON PASTURES COUNTRY PARK

The Executive considered a report relating to a proposal to commence a contract opportunity for the provision of hospitality services at Dinton Pastures Country Park.

The Executive Member for Environment and Leisure explained that the intention was that the contracted hospitality services would provide an outstanding customer experience, innovative food/drinks offer and increased income for the Council. The expectation was that the contract would commence on April 2022 and would be based on a five-year term with the possibility of a five-year extension. There was currently only one café at Dinton Pastures and one upcoming café which would form part of the new Activity Centre.

Councillor Batth went through the various stages of the tender process which included giving the shortlisted candidates the opportunity to pitch their business cases to a panel. This was an exciting opportunity to develop and realise the Council's commercial ambitions whilst delivering excellent customer service for the thousands of visitors who attend the Country Park annually.

Following a query by Councillor Jorgensen it was confirmed that the official opening of the Activity Centre would be 11 September however a soft opening was proposed at the end of July.

Councillor Kaiser queried whether there was an opportunity to open a restaurant for use in the evenings as he felt that would be very successful. Councillor Batth confirmed that the proposal was for a café upstairs in the activity centre and a high class restaurant on the site which was currently occupied by the Dragonfly café.

RESOLVED: That the commencement of the procurement process to select a contractor who will provide outstanding hospitality services at Dinton Pastures Country Park (i.e. the Dragonfly Café and new Dinton Activity Centre Café) from April 2022 be approved.

14. ENHANCED PARTNERSHIP

The Executive considered a report relating to the proposed establishment of an Enhanced Partnership (EP) under the Bus Services Act 2017.

The Executive Member for Highways and Transport introduced the report and explained that the proposal was intended to improve the Council's working relationships with the various local transport operators, including commercial, community and voluntary, in the Borough. Councillor Jorgensen clarified that the first stage of the process was merely to give notice of the Council's intention to establish an Enhanced Partnership which was not legally binding. The Enhanced Partnership agreement, which would be legally binding, would be brought back to the Executive once the working party had agreed the key requirements for the bus service improvement plan and the EP agreement and discussions had been held with the local transport operators.

Given that bus services had been significantly impacted by Covid and a shift towards public transport was necessary to meet climate aims Councillor Murray queried what would happen if the Council did not sign up to the Enhanced Partnership and what opportunities would be provided if it did sign up over and above those that were currently available? Councillor Jorgensen stated that the Council would lose its Covid bus funding if it did not, at least, give notice of its intention to form an Enhanced Partnership. Signing up would give the opportunity to have more influence on the bus providers and therefore the

bus routes, both commercial and subsidised and also hopefully lead to a better relationship with the major bus companies in the area. It was hoped that this would also give the Council more negotiating power in the rural areas.

RESOLVED: That it be agreed that Wokingham Borough Council give notice to establishing an Enhanced Partnership under the Bus Services Act 2017.

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TITLE	Revenue Budget Monitoring Report FY2021/22 - Quarter One
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 29 July 2021
WARD	None specific
LEAD OFFICER	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Finance and Housing - John Kaiser

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

To deliver the Council Priorities for the Community, ensuring the efficient effective and safe use of resources.

The Council agrees and sets its budget in the February preceding the current financial year and this report seeks to update Executive on the budget position throughout the year and provide an estimate of the outturn position and impact on balances at year-end (31 March 2022).

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive is asked to:

- 1) note the financial impact of the COVID-19 crisis as illustrated in the Executive Summary;
- 2) note the overall forecast of the current position of the General Fund revenue budget, Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) illustrated in the Executive Summary and appendices attached to the report;
- 3) approve a supplementary estimate of £31,500 for Tone of Voice project.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is to allow the Executive to note the current expenditure to date (as at 30 June 2021) for the first quarter of the current financial year and to inform the Executive of the forecast outturn positions for 2021/22 for the Council's net revenue expenditure, its General Fund Balance (GFB), the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), and the Schools' Block funding.

Recommendation 1 – Financial Impact of Covid-19

The financial impact from Covid-19 continues to be present as highlighted in the table below. 2020/21 was a challenging year financially, with a full year impact of £0.4m reported in the Outturn Report to June 2021 Executive. For 2021/22, we are estimating a full year impact of £0.6m. This relates largely to areas which had significant pressures in 2020/21 and includes loss of income across many services and the impact on costs of

the leisure services the Council provide. In addition, the emergency grant support from central government has reduced for this year, adding to the pressure.

Throughout the year, the financial impact from Covid-19 will continue to be monitored closely and reported to government monthly and reported quarterly to Executive. As government funding support reduces, it is likely that some covid costs will naturally start to become business as usual. Any impact from this will help inform future budget setting and financial monitoring reports.

Back in December and January, the Executive agreed £1.7m of additional budget to support the Covid recovery. The majority of this budget was approved to be carried forward in the Outturn report at June Executive. This money will continue to support the recovery from Covid 19 throughout 2021/22. This budget is ringfenced to Covid-19 recovery and has been excluded from the table below.

	£,000
Additional Expenditure	£6,413
Lost Income	£2,483
Delayed Saving Plans	£250
3rd Party Income (CCG, Income compensation)	(£5,323)
Impact from Covid-19	£3,822
Less: Emergency Government Funding	(£3,187)
Net Impact from Covid-19	£635

Recommendation 2 – Current Position

The Executive has agreed to consider Revenue Monitoring Reports on a quarterly basis. In February 2021, the Council agreed and set its net General Fund (Revenue) budget at £147.763 million; following year end, this is to be further adjusted to account for agreed carry forward of budget and movements between directorates. This gives a working budget for each of the Councils Directorates. The working budgets, spend to date and forecast outturn are shown in the table below.

Directorate	2021/22 – End of June Position				
	Approved Budget £,000	Forecast Spend £,000	(Favourable) / Adverse Variance (Forecast Less Budget) £,000	(Favourable) / Adverse Variance split into:	
				Business as Usual (BAU) £,000	Covid Impact £,000
Adult Social Care	£55,821	£56,311	£490	£0	£490
Chief Executive	£8,481	£8,481	£0	£0	£0
Children's Services	£36,498	£36,873	£375	£0	£375
Community, Insight & Change	£5,775	£6,506	£731	£0	£731

Place & Growth	£40,373	£41,659	£1,286	£0	£1,286
Resources & Assets	£815	£2,475	£1,660	£220	£1,440
COVID - Other	£0	(£500)	(£500)	£0	(£500)
COVID – Government Grant Funding	£0	(£3,187)	(£3,187)	£0	(£3,187)
Net Expenditure Total	£147,763	£148,618	£855	£220	£635

Further details of the outturn forecast position and variances are also shown at Appendix A. The main items of the variances identified to date are:

Adult Social Care & Health – The covid costs of £490k show the impact of early indications of increasing demand from the hospital discharge programme. This is both increasing costs of care packages and delaying the benefit expected to be received from the demand management programme.

Children’s Services – While we are forecasting an on budget BAU position for the year, unbudgeted costs of individuals on remand, stepping down from inpatient mental health services, along with an increased number of unaccompanied asylum seekers, have flagged early risks on the placement budget which will be kept under close review.

Expenditure on statutory Home to School Transport has outstripped previous projections, largely as a result of a significant rise in the number of children and young people with an Education Health & Care Plan. Under the governance of the Community Transport Programme, a robust programme of actions has been established to bring costs back in line with financial planning assumptions.

The £375k covid pressure reflects the ongoing financial impact on the service of supporting and safeguarding vulnerable children and families during the pandemic.

Communities, Insight & Change – no material business as usual variances identified.

c£0.7m Covid pressures relates mainly to additional costs for emergency accommodation and homelessness B&B costs. Additional resources to support communication on Covid 19. Some pressures relate to lost income and additional support service costs such as IT.

Place and Growth – no material business as usual variances identified.

c£1.3m Covid pressures consists mainly of lost income across car parking which will be compensated for in part from income claims to government. The compensating income is shown within the line called “other” on the table above.

Resources and Assets – quarter one estimate is a pressure in the region of £220k across the directorate. This is made up of £160k pressure from the dissolution of the Shared Legal Services and Internal Audit Shared Services with RBWM and an additional £60k from an increase in External Audit fees following a national review of the local authority audit fee arrangements.

In addition to the overspend currently identified in Resources and Assets, the Council have identified a financial risk in relation to the funding of the “National Cost of Living” pay award for Council employees. Like most local authorities, the Council had budgeted for a 0% pay award in 2021/22 on the guidance from central government however it now looks likely that a pay award will be agreed for this financial year. If agreed, this will be an additional cost in the region of c£1m based on initial estimates.

c£1.4m Covid pressures include c£0.9m relating to our Leisure services, c£0.4m relating to property portfolio and c£0.1m of lost income from activity and prevention programmes.

General Fund

Taking account of the net overspends above and the effect of Covid-19 pressures (if assuming no further government funding), the balance on the General Fund reserve as at 31 March 2022 is estimated to be £8.2m. This remains a prudent level of reserves and above the minimum recommended reserve balance of £6.6m set out in the Medium Term Financial Plan. See Appendix B for further details.

Housing Revenue Account (HRA)

The Housing Revenue Account is currently expecting to be on budget with no material variances. Some additional costs are expected around specialist cleaning due to Covid-19 however these are planned to be met within existing budgets. HRA reserves are estimated to be £1.4m on 31 March 2022. This remains a prudent level of reserves and above the minimum recommended reserve balance of £0.9m set out in the Medium Term Financial Plan. See Appendix C for further details.

Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)

Schools are funded through a direct grant from Central Government known as the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). This is used to fund individual schools through an agreed formula, costs associated with Early Years Services, support for children with Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND), and to fund relevant support services. This year the Schools Block is forecasting an in year adverse variance of £2.4m against a net income of £162.5m – this represents 1.5% of the total income.

Similar to last year and as is the case with the vast majority of authorities across the country, the overspend on the DSG relates to ongoing pressure on the High Needs Block, driven largely by continuing increases in the number of children and young people with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and their related needs resulting in demand for specialist placements.

The Council are working closely with the DfE on the deficit recovery plan with the next meeting in August.

See Appendix D for further details.

Recommendation 3 – Supplementary Estimate

The Executive are asked to approve a supplementary estimate for £31,500 for Tone of Voice project.

The project is to work in partnership with an external branding company to help us improve our tone of voice when interacting with customers. The principles and approaches can be applied across the organisation to help drive cultural change and improve the way we communicate and interact with customers, to improve their experiences. The support we receive will leave a legacy of principles, tools and approaches for us to continue momentum of positive change and outcomes, ensuring sustainability and value for money.

The desired outcomes are;

- Give customers a positive experience every time they interact with us
- Improve our reputation and create a positive impression of the Council
- Reduce repeat customer contact and increase early resolution in complaints
- Boost confidence in teams, when communicating with customers, starting with complaints
- Streamline complaints processes and make them more efficient
- Objective measurement around the quality of customer communication, and a quality assessment team with the skills to apply it consistently

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)	£635k	No, shortfall of £635k.	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	N/A		
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	N/A		

Other Financial Information

Effective monitoring of budgets is an essential element of providing cost effective services and enables any corrective action to be undertaken, if required. Many of the budgets are activity driven and can be volatile in nature.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

None

Public Sector Equality Duty

Public Sector Equality Duty assessment are undertaken during individual business cases.

Climate Emergency – *This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030*

None – this is only a report on the financial position for quarter one.

List of Background Papers

Appendix A – Revenue Monitoring Summary
Appendix B – General Fund Balance
Appendix C – Housing Revenue Monitoring Summary
Appendix D – DSG Monitoring Summary

Contact Mark Thompson	Service Business Services
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REVENUE MONITORING REPORT June 2021

GENERAL FUND SUMMARY

Directorate	End of Year Position					Comment on major areas of estimated over / (underspend) including impact from Covid 19
	Current Approved Budget	BAU Forecast (i.e. excluding Covid Impact)	Excl. Covid Net over / (under) spend	Covid Forecast	Incl. Covid Net over / (under) spend	
	£,000	£,000	£,000	£,000	£,000	
Resources and Assets	815	1,035	220	1,440	1,660	<p>BAU - £160k pressure from the dissolution of the Shared Legal Services and Internal Audit Shared Services with RBWM and an additional £60k from an increase in External Audit fees following a national review of the local authority audit fee arrangements.</p> <p>Covid - c£0.9m Leisure Contract Impact. Working closely on a regular basis with Leisure partner to review the full year impact. c£0.4m relating to our property portfolio, primarily operational property. c£0.1m lost income from activity and prevention programmes.</p>
Chief Executive	8,481	8,481	0	0	0	No material variances identified.
Children's Services 35	36,498	36,498	0	375	375	<p>BAU - no material variances identified yet however unbudgeted costs of individuals on remand, stepping down from inpatient mental health services, along with an increased number of unaccompanied asylum seekers, have flagged early risks on the placement budget which will be kept under close review.</p> <p>Expenditure on statutory Home to School Transport has outstripped previous projections, largely as a result of a significant rise in the number of children and young people with an Education Health & Care Plan. Under the governance of the Community Transport Programme, a robust programme of actions has been established to bring costs back in line with financial planning assumptions.</p> <p>Covid - The £375k covid pressure reflects the ongoing financial impact on the service of supporting and safeguarding vulnerable children and families during the pandemic.</p>
Adult Social Care & Health	55,821	55,821	0	490	490	<p>BAU - No material variances identified.</p> <p>Covid - The covid costs of £490k show the impact of early indications of increasing demand from the hospital discharge programme. This is both increasing costs of care packages and delaying the benefit expected to be received from the demand management programme.</p>
Place and Growth	40,373	40,373	0	1,286	1,286	<p>BAU - No material variances identified.</p> <p>Covid - c£1.3m Covid pressures consists mainly of lost income across car parking which will be compensated for in part from income claims to government. The compensating income is shown within the line called "other" on the table above.</p>
Communities, Insight & Change	5,775	5,775	0	731	731	<p>BAU - No material variances identified.</p> <p>Covid - c£0.7m Covid pressures relates mainly to additional costs for emergency accommodation and homelessness B&B costs. Additional resources to support communication on Covid 19. Some pressures relate to lost income and additional support service costs such as IT.</p>
COVID - Other	0	0	0	(500)	(500)	£500k income expected from Sales, Fees and Charge compensation scheme
COVID - Grant funding from Government	0	0	0	(3,187)	(3,187)	
Revenue Expenditure Total	147,763	147,983	220	635	855	

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Estimated General Fund Balance - 30th June '21

Note	£,000	£,000
1 Estimated General Fund Balance (as at 31/3/2021)		(£10,462)
Budgeted drawdown from general fund (as per MTFP)	£1,207	
		£1,207
<u>Supplementary Estimates</u>		
Mar 21 - Employment Hub	£10	
Mar 21 - Covid Winter Grant Scheme	£100	
Jun 21 - Digital Infrastructure Group	£16	
Jul 21 - Tone of Voice	£32	
		£158
<u>Service Variance (excluding COVID-19 Impact)</u>		
Adult Social Care & Health	£0	
Chief Executive	£0	
Children's Services	£0	
Communities, Insight & Change	£0	
Resources and Assets	£220	
Place and Growth	£0	
		£220
2 Estimated net impact from Covid - 19		£635
Estimated General Fund Balance 31/3/2022		(£8,242)

Notes

1. General balance as at 31/03/21 is estimated pending completion on the 2020/21 statement of accounts.

2. Based on assumption that no further funding comes from central government. The Council will continue to lobby for additional funding to cover the impact from Covid-19.

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REVENUE MONITORING REPORT June 2021

HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT

Director: Keeley Clements

Lead Member, Housing Services: John Kaiser

Service	Position at End of June			
	Full Year Budget	Full Year Forecast	Full Year Variance	
	£,000	£,000	£,000	
Rents	Expenditure	342	342	0
	Income	(15,006)	(15,006)	0
	Net	(14,663)	(14,663)	0
Fees & Charges / Capital Finance Charge	Expenditure	97	97	0
	Income	(125)	(125)	0
	Net	(28)	(28)	0
Housing Repairs	Expenditure	3,236	3,236	0
	Income	(30)	(30)	0
	Net	3,206	3,206	0
General Management	Expenditure	2,061	2,061	0
	Income	(110)	(110)	0
	Net	1,951	1,951	0
Sheltered Accommodation	Expenditure	266	266	0
	Income	(476)	(476)	0
	Net	(210)	(210)	0
Capital Finance	Expenditure	5,267	5,267	0
	Income	(59)	(59)	0
	Net	5,208	5,208	0
Subtotal Excluding Internal and Capital Charges		(4,535)	(4,535)	0
Internal and Capital Charges		4,535	4,535	0
Total		0	0	0

Housing Revenue Account Reserve	£,000	£,000
HRA Reserves as at 31st March 2021		(1,404)
- Planned contribution to reserves	(11)	
- Net Variance (Total)	0	
2021/22 - Net Spend against reserves		(11)
HRA reserves as at 31st March 2022		(1,415)

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REVENUE MONITORING REPORT June 2021
DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT MONITORING REPORT

	Position at End of June			Comment on major areas of estimated over / (underspend)
	Full Year Budget	Full Year Forecast	Full Year Variance	
	£000	£000	£000	
Schools Block including academies (excluding De-delegation)	121,507	121,507	0	No material variances identified
Early years	11,302	11,302	0	No material variances identified
High Needs Block	23,390	25,838	2,448	Spend above budget, still being driven by continuing increases in the number of children and young people with EHCPs and demand for specialist placements. A meeting with the DfE is being held in August to discuss our deficit management plan and strategy going forward.
41				
Central Schools Services Block (includes Growth Fund)	1,745	2,187	442	Unspent growth fund carried forward from previous years
De-delegation	773	828	55	Unspent de-delegated contingency fund carried forward from last year
Other schools grant	3,829	4,026	197	Offset by increased grants income below.
Total Expenditure	162,545	165,687	3,142	
Dedicated School Grant (DSG)	(158,716)	(159,240)	(524)	Growth fund carried forward from previous years released
Other school Grants	(3,829)	(4,026)	(197)	Increased grants passported to schools.
Total Income	(162,545)	(163,266)	(721)	
Total in-year (surplus) / deficit	0	2,421	2,421	
Brought Forward (surplus) / deficit balance	0	6,535	6,535	Deficit brought forward from previous years
Total Year End (Surplus) / Deficit	0	8,956	8,956	

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TITLE	Capital Monitoring 2021/22 - Quarter 1
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 29 July 2021
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Finance and Housing - John Kaiser

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

Effective use of our capital resources to meet the Council Plan investment priorities, and delivering value for money for residents.

RECOMMENDATION

The Executive is asked to:

- 1) approve and note the proposed rephrasing to the Capital Programme following the annual budget profiling review from the Medium Term Financial Plan, to get more realistic profiling for financial management and cashflow purposes, as set out in paragraph 3 and Appendix B of the report;
- 2) note the position of the capital programme at the end of Quarter 1 (to 30 June 2021) as summarised in the report below and set out in detail in Appendix A to the report;
- 3) note and approve additional budget added to the capital programme for a parcel of land at Winnersh Triangle Stations, for the Park and Ride project, to the value of £175k. Funded by a transfer of a nearby parcel of land to the same third party, also for £175k.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report informs the Executive of the progress of the Council in delivering its capital programme for the financial year 2021/2022. The Executive have previously agreed to consider Capital Monitoring Reports on a quarterly basis and this report highlights the capital monitoring as at the end of the first quarter of the financial year (30 June 2021).
2. The COVID 19 pandemic continues to have a financial impact on the Council's finances, in terms of both its revenue and capital resources. It is therefore essential that the capital programme is closely reviewed to assess the assuredness of funding sources and if there have been any changes in service requirements. The Council on the other hand must recognise that capital investment will play an important role in local and regional recovery from the impact of the crisis.
3. The Council's finance team working with services across the council have conducted a review of the programme to identify rephrasing of projects to match expected

delivery, taking account of the impact on the service delivery and project cost. This work supports more accurate financing monitoring and cashflow analysis. The review has identified £152.7 million of rephasing of budgets into future years as at end of quarter 1; a full list of the adjusted projects is at 'Appendix B - List of proposed rephasing of projects in Quarter 1' and Executive is asked to approve the updated rephasing of these projects.

4. The programme will continue to be monitored and reviewed throughout the financial year and any further rephasing will be notified to Executive for approval. Review of capital projects has identified a £0.7m savings (further detail in note 5 and on Appendix A), which can be reinvested into future funding of capital schemes in the capital programme.

Capital Monitoring Forecast Outturn Position for 2021/2022 (as at 30 June 2021):-

	£'million
Capital Programme approved at Council (Feb 2021)	204.4
Budget rephased from prior years (existing projects)	209.2
New Budgets added in quarter 1	0.3
Capital Approved Budget	413.9
Budget rephased to later years	(152.7)
Working Capital Programme	261.2
Forecast variances to the programme – savings	(0.7)
Forecast Capital Outturn	260.5

5. As at 30 June 2021, there are £(0.7)m savings variances to the capital programme identified. This are made up as follows:

<u>Analysis of material budget savings identified as at 30 June 2021</u>	£'million
Resources & Assets –	
Town Centre Regeneration (Strategic acquisitions) –	(0.714)
Total	(0.714)

6. All projects that have been rephased have been made in consultation with the project / programme managers and they confirm there is a nil or negligible impact of the re-phased programme on service delivery and the rephasing does not increase the cost of the project or have a revenue impact on the service area.
7. Note and approve additional budget added to the capital programme as acquisition of a parcel of land at Winnersh Triangle Station, required for the Park and Ride project, to the value of £175k (professionally valued). Funded by a transfer of a nearby parcel of land to the same third party Winnersh Midco S.à.r.l. (also professionally valued at £175k). This will show in the accounts the true cost of the land transfer to enable this project to proceed.

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)	£260.5m	Yes	Capital
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£152.7m	Yes	Capital
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	To be agreed in MTFP in Feb'22		

Other Financial Information

None

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

Stakeholders should be reassured of the effective management of the council's resources.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Equality assessments are carried out as part of each capital project

Climate Emergency – This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030

The capital programme includes projects which help achieve our priorities in relation to climate change.

List of Background Papers

Appendix A: Capital Monitoring Summary Report for Quarter 1 (2021-2022)
Appendix B: List of proposed rephasing of projects in Quarter 1 to 2022-23

Contact James Sandford	Service Business Services
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APPENDIX A - CAPITAL MONITORING REPORT June 2021

Directorate	Current Approved Budget £,000	Current Approved Budget is split into:		Analysis of Current Year (Yr 1)		Comments
		Current Year (Yr 1) £,000	Next Year (Yr 2) £,000	Current Forecast £,000	(Under) / Overspend £,000	
<i>Notes</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>		
Adult Social Care & Health	16,783	5,573	11,211	5,573	0	Material Variance (Under/Overspend): None
Children's Services	22,977	14,792	8,185	14,792	0	Material Variance (Under/Overspend): None
Communities, Insight & Change	9,667	9,080	587	9,080	0	Material Variance (Under/Overspend): None
Housing Revenue Account (HRA)	12,350	9,350	3,000	9,350	0	Material Variance (Under/Overspend): None
Place & Growth	179,918	116,215	63,704	116,215	0	Material Variance (Under/Overspend): None
Resources & Assets	172,235	106,259	65,976	105,545	(714)	Material Variance (Under/Overspend): £(714)k Town Centre Regeneration (Strategic acquisitions) - No further acquisitions required
Total	413,930	261,268	152,662	260,554	(714)	

Notes

- 1) Current approved budget is made up of approved budget through the MTFP plus additional budget approved in year.
- 2) Current approved budget is split at the start of the year into budgeted spend in current year and spend in next year.
- 3) Current forecast is estimated spend for the year.

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Appendix B - List of proposed rephasing of projects in Quarter 1 into Year 2 (2022/23)

Working closely with the services across the Council, the following table highlights the changes to the rephasing of the capital programme since start of year. There is no material impact on service delivery or project cost.

Project	Amount £
---------	-------------

Since Start of Year, the following projects have been identified to be reprofiled to spent in 2022/23.

Adult Social Care & Health	
Older People's Dementia Home construction	7,575,000
Learning Disability Accommodation Transformation, purchase of properties	1,860,000
Learning Disability Outreach and Overnight Respite Centre (refurbishment)	930,000
Learning Disability Demand Management, purchase of properties	550,000
Mosaic Modernisation Reimplementation	295,750
Total - Adult Social Care & Health	11,210,750
Children's Services	
Basic Needs Primary Programme	2,618,407
Primary Strategy - Matthews Green	1,200,000
Multifaceted Placement Hub, new build	1,050,000
Care Leaver Supported Accommodation: Funding for renovation costs of Seaford Court	740,000
Investment in Special Education Needs Provision	520,714
Primary strategy - Spencer's Wood Primary School	462,000
Matthews Green Primary School - Furniture, Fixtures and Equipment (FFE)	312,500
Sixth Form Expansion - to meet provision across borough	250,000
Primary strategy - Spencer's Wood Primary School - FFE	200,000
Arborfield / Barkham Primary School - FFE & Information Technology (IT)	375,000
Wescott Resource Base Expansion	175,000
Southfield School Expansion	150,000
Schools Access works across various sites	81,410
Shinfield West Primary School - FFE	50,000
Total - Children's Services	8,185,030
Communities, Insight & Change	
Purchase of council houses HRA (Housing Revenue Account)	3,000,000
Maintaining an enhanced level of Information Technology (IT) infrastructure	200,000
Library Offer - library improvements	156,751
Information Management Technology (IMT) - Security & Infrastructure/Networking/Licences	120,000
Replace wireless access points	60,000
IT Infrastructure: Wide Area Network (WAN) connectivity	50,000
Total - Communities, Insight & Change	3,586,751
Place & Growth	
SCAPE - Major Road infrastructure (distribution roads etc.)	18,316,807
Shinfield Eastern Relief Road	7,985,910
California Crossroads	5,697,706
GCN (Great Crested Newt) District Level Licence	4,800,000
Toutley Highways Depot Modernisation	3,985,025
New Eco-Crematorium	3,035,000
Payment of commuted sum to Wokingham Housing Limited	3,000,000
Bridge Strengthening	2,796,743
Greenways	2,451,984
Sports Provision to Serve North & South SDL's (Strategic Development Locations)	2,140,000
Gypsy, Roma, Traveller - Additional Pitches	1,500,000
Managing Congestion	1,500,000
Public Rights of Way Network	1,230,497
Highway Infrastructure Flood Alleviation Schemes	1,200,000
Transport corridor improvements - Shepherds Hill to Thames valley Park Park & Ride	950,000
Denmark Street Environmental Improvements	801,316
Wokingham Town Centre Regeneration - Environmental Improvements	630,000
Wokingham Borough Cycle Network	500,000
Winnersh Triangle Parkway	450,000
Completed Road Schemes Retention	336,743
Street Lighting - LED (Light-Emitting Diode) Project	192,630
Coppid Beech Northbound on-slip widening	97,253
Traffic Signal Schemes - Shute End/Rectory Road	41,113
Urgent works to the memorials in cemeteries	25,000
Street Lighting Column Structural Testing	40,000
Total - Place & Growth	63,703,727
Resources & Assets	
Community Investment - delivering Housing and Regeneration across the borough primarily for community benefit	27,900,000
Carnival Pool Area Redevelopment	14,262,501
Renewable Energy Infrastructure projects	6,500,000
Strategic residential portfolio - deliver an ongoing pipeline of housing schemes within the borough	5,076,000
Solar Farms (additional projects)	4,000,000
Wokingham Town Centre Regeneration - former Marks & Spencer's Site - Construction &	2,665,312
Wokingham Town Centre Regeneration - excluding Residential Phase	1,414,526
Bulmershe swimming pool /Leisure centre - New build	1,101,709
Energy Reduction Projects	1,000,000
Peach Place New Development - Incentives	701,931
Wokingham Town Centre Regeneration - former Marks & Spencer's Site - Lettings	500,000
3G (Third Generation Synthetic Surface) Pitch at Laurel Park	200,000
Leisure Centre Fit Out	200,000
Investment Fund - Waitrose 108-114 Crockamwell Rd Woodley	150,000
Library Fit Out	150,000

Project	Amount £
Wokingham Town Centre Regeneration - Carnival Pool Feasibility, Planning & Phase 2 works	76,599
Investment Fund - various project costs	40,000
Emmbrook 3G Pitch	37,307
Total Resources & Assets	65,975,885
Total Reprofiting into 2022/23	152,662,144

TITLE	Local Development Scheme 2021
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 29 July 2021
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Place and Growth - Steve Moore
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement - Wayne Smith

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

The purpose of this report is to seek Executive's approval to adopt an updated Local Development Scheme (LDS), the document which sets out the timetable for the preparation of local plans for the following three year period.

Amending the LDS will ensure that residents and others are able to understand when future stages in plan preparation are anticipated.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive adopt the Local Development Scheme 2021 attached as enclosure 1 to the report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A review of the adopted local plans is being undertaken to ensure that the council's planning policies continue to be effective in managing decisions on development proposals.

The council is required to maintain a Local Development Scheme (LDS), the document which sets out the programme for the preparation of local plans.

Between 2021 and 2022 two local plans are proposed to be produced by the Council:

1. Central and East Berkshire Joint Minerals and Waste Local Plan; and
2. Local Plan Update.

Since the publication of the last LDS in 2020, there has been changes in circumstances, resulting in the need to revise the programme for each of the above local plans.

The Central and East Berkshire Joint Minerals and Waste Local Plan is now at examination, having been submitted in February 2021. The dates provided within the recommended LDS are indicative, with actual dates being dependent on availability of the Planning Inspector appointed to examine the plan and the issues that are identified for discussion.

The programme for the Local Plan Update has been amended to reflect the need to revisit and consult on strategic options to manage growth following the extension of the

emergency planning arrangements around AWE Burghfield in March 2020. This change in circumstances meant that the strategy outlined in the Draft Local Plan (February 2020) is no longer practically achievable.

The adoption of the LDS will ensure that residents and others are able to understand when future stages in plan preparation are anticipated.

BACKGROUND

The existing statutory development plan for Wokingham Borough consists of the following alongside made (adopted) neighbourhood development plans:

- Core Strategy, adopted January 2010;
- Managing Development Delivery, adopted February 2014;
- Replacement Minerals Local Plan for Berkshire, adopted May 2001; and
- Waste Local Plan for Berkshire, adopted December 1998.

The council is undertaking a review of the above local plans. The Core Strategy and the Managing Development Delivery plans will be superseded by a Local Plan Update. The Replacement Minerals Local Plan for Berkshire and Waste Local Plan for Berkshire, which apply to local authorities across Berkshire, will be superseded by a new Joint Minerals and Waste Local Plan covering the central and eastern Berkshire area.

A Local Development Scheme (LDS) is a public statement of the programme for the production of local plans. The council has a duty to maintain an up-to-date LDS under national planning legislation and regulations.

Maintaining a LDS will ensure that residents and others are able to understand when future stages in plan preparation are anticipated.

BUSINESS CASE

Preparing and updating local plans is a statutory requirement. Section 15 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act requires local planning authorities to prepare and maintain a LDS which sets out the plans which are to be prepared, their scope, and the timetable for preparing them.

Maintaining up-to-date local plans ensures that planning policies continue to be effective in managing decisions by the council, and where these are appealed, by Planning Inspectors. Without effective planning policies, there would be no real control or influence over where and how new housing and other types of development take place. This could lead to housing and other forms of development being allowed in poor locations, being of lower quality, and in places where infrastructure cannot be improved to help deal with the impacts, e.g. pressures on roads, schools and community facilities.

Between 2021 and 2022 two local plans are proposed to be produced by the council:

1. Central and East Berkshire Joint Minerals and Waste Local Plan; and
2. Local Plan Update.

Since the publication of the last LDS in 2020, there has been changes in circumstances, resulting in the need to revise the programme for each of the above local plans.

The Central and East Berkshire Joint Minerals and Waste Local Plan is now at examination, having been submitted in February 2021. The dates provided within the recommended LDS are indicative, with actual dates being dependent on availability of the Planning Inspector appointed to examine the plan and the issues that are identified for discussion.

The programme for the Local Plan Update has been more substantial changes. This reflects the need to revisit and consult on strategic options to manage growth following the extension of the emergency planning arrangements around AWE Burghfield in March 2020. This change in circumstances meant that the strategy outlined in the Draft Local Plan (February 2020) is no longer practically achievable.

It should be noted that this LDS is being updated at a time when national planning reforms are being proposed. These are not expected to impact on the proposed timetable which is based preparing the local plans under existing arrangements.

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)	£0	Yes	NA
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£0	Yes	NA

Other Financial Information

The costs of preparing and adopting the recommended LDS are contained within the Growth and Delivery base budget.

In order to achieve a sound local plan, the projects outlined in the recommended LDS, there are costs associated with gathering evidence, site investigation work and the statutory examination. Budgets already exist for both of the outlined local plans. The costs associated with procuring evidence can be met within the associated budget items but it is not possible to robustly estimate the costs associated with the examination process and, whilst an estimate has been made, it may be necessary to seek require additional financing in a future year.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

The recommended LDS has not been subject to consultation. The LDS does however ensure that residents and others are able to understand when future stages in plan preparation are anticipated.

Public Sector Equality Duty

This report relates to programme for the preparation of local plans and not the scope or approach of policy. As such an equality assessment has been scoped out.

An equality assessment has and will continue to be undertaken to support the preparation of local plans, with views on the assessment capable of being made as part of the consultation process.

Climate Emergency – *This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030*

There are no direct implications for climate change as a result of the recommendation of this report.

The Draft Local Plan (February 2020) contained a suite of proposed planning policies that seek mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change and the transition to a low-carbon economy.

List of Background Papers

Local Development Scheme 2020

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Local Development Scheme 2021-2024

July 2021



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

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Local Plan Update

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The existing statutory development plan for Wokingham Borough consists of the following alongside made (adopted) neighbourhood development plans:
- Core Strategy, adopted January 2010;
 - Managing Development Delivery, adopted February 2014;
 - Replacement Minerals Local Plan for Berkshire, adopted May 2001; and
 - Waste Local Plan for Berkshire, adopted December 1998.
- 1.2 The council is undertaking a review of the above local plans. The Core Strategy and the Managing Development Delivery plans will be superseded by a Local Plan Update. The Replacement Minerals Local Plan for Berkshire and Waste Local Plan for Berkshire, which apply to local authorities across Berkshire, will be superseded by a new Joint Minerals and Waste Local Plan covering the central and eastern Berkshire area.
- 1.3 The council has a statutory duty to maintain an up-to-date Local Development Scheme (LDS) – the document which sets out the programme for preparing new local plans.
- 1.4 This LDS sets out the local plans that will be prepared and the programme for their preparation, including when public consultation and publication is likely to take place.
- 1.5 This LDS is produced in accordance with The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended) and sets out the details for the next three year period, between 2021 and 2024.
- 1.6 In addition to local plans, there are several other types of policy documents that are adopted by the council and used to guide decisions on planning application. The programme for preparing these other types of documents is not a requirement for this LDS, however reference is made here for completeness.

Neighbourhood Development Plans

- 1.7 Commonly referred to as simply neighbourhood plans, these are produced by a parish or town council. A neighbourhood plan must be in conformity with strategic policies set out in relevant local plans and with government planning policy. They are not able to propose lower levels of development than those set out in up-to-date local plans but could propose higher levels. Before a neighbourhood plan is adopted it must be subject to a referendum. If over 50% of the votes are in favour the council has a duty to adopt the plan unless it does not meet specific regulations.

Supplementary Planning Documents and Guidance

- 1.8 Supplementary Planning Documents and other forms of supplementary guidance provide more advice to explain the policies and proposals set out in local plans. Unlike local plans, they are not subject to examination, however consultation is a key element of their preparation.

Statement of Community Involvement

- 1.9 A Statement of Community Involvement sets out how the council will engage with stakeholders in the preparation of local plans and when assessing planning applications. The council's SCI was last reviewed and published in March 2019.

2. Proposed Local Plans

- 2.1 Between 2021 and 2022 two local plans will be produced by the council:
1. Central and East Berkshire Joint Minerals and Waste Local Plan; and
 2. Local Plan Update.

Central and Eastern Berkshire Joint Minerals and Waste Local Plan

- 2.2 The Central and Eastern Berkshire Joint Minerals and Waste Local Plan will review and put in place planning policies for minerals and waste development. The plan is being produced jointly by the local planning authorities of Bracknell Forest Council, Reading Borough Council, the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, and Wokingham Borough Council. The authorities have commissioned Hampshire Services of Hampshire County Council, to support the preparation of the plan.
- 2.3 The plan will identify the approach to the delivery of minerals and the treatment of waste and will allocate sites for such uses. Upon completion it will replace all the saved policies in the Replacement Minerals Local Plan for Berkshire and Waste Local Plan for Berkshire.

Local Plan Update

- 2.4 The Local Plan Update will review and put in place planning policies for non-minerals and waste development, up to 2037. Upon completion it will replace the current Core Strategy and Managing Development Delivery plans which cover the period to 2026.
- 2.5 The Local Plan Update will cover a wide range of matters. A key area will be assessing the future development needs for new homes, employment land and other uses such as accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers. It will then set a strategy for delivery including allocating key sites as necessary.

Policies Map

- 2.6 The Policies Map spatially illustrates policies contained in local plans on an Ordnance Survey base map. It will be updated to reflect any changes as local plans are reviewed and adopted). The Policies Map will show matters such as:
- local development constraints, e.g. Green Belt;
 - designations, e.g. development limits (outside of which it would be difficult for example to get planning permission for a new housing site);
 - site allocations, e.g. sites may be allocated for housing, employment, etc.

What process do local plans have to go through?

- 2.7 Local plans are prepared in accordance with a regulatory process. The process includes consultation with the community and stakeholders. Following its preparation, a local plan is subject to examination by an independent Planning Inspector.
- 2.8 The four main stages in the preparation are:
1. The pre-production stage, including evidence gathering by the council on key issues and development options, and consulting statutory bodies on the scope of the sustainability appraisal.
 2. The production stage, including public and stakeholder consultation by the council on the development issues and options, and the scope of the local plan and the consideration of consultation responses.
 3. The submission and examination stage, where the local plan will be submitted to the Secretary of State and subject to scrutiny by an independent Planning Inspector who will assess it for its the legal compliance and soundness.
 4. Finally, the adoption stage, where the local plan formally becomes part of the development plan.

3. Programme for preparing local plans

- 3.1 The programme for the preparation of the Central and East Berkshire Joint Minerals and Waste Local Plan and the Local Plan Update are set out below.
- 3.2 Please note that following the submission of a local plan, the timing of the examination and subsequent stages is dependent on the availability of a Planning Inspector and the issues raised that require exploration through that process. The timings shown below are therefore indicative only.

Central and East Berkshire Joint Minerals and Waste Local Plan

Title	Central and East Berkshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan
Status	Development Plan Document
Role and content	It sets out policies and guidance for minerals and waste related development over the period to 2036. It identifies where mineral resources are present and sets the framework for assessing any proposed extraction. It also considers how waste will be managed.
Coverage	Wokingham Borough Reading Borough Bracknell Forest Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead
Timetable	Issues and Options consultation

	<p>Consultation held June – July 2017 This aim of this consultation was to engage communities in discussions about managing waste and minerals, and gathering evidence to inform future options for the plan policies and site allocations.</p> <p>Draft Plan consultation Consultation held August – October 2018 The consultation set out a full set of draft policies, including the spatial strategy directing the location of future minerals extraction and waste management. The consultation included a full suite of policies intended to assess and manage the impact of minerals and waste development.</p> <p>Focused consultation: Sand and gravel provision and operator performance Consultation held February – March 2020 The purpose of the Focused Consultation was to seek feedback on the proposed Area of Search, the potential new sites (Land West of Basingstoke Road, Spencers Wood and Area between Horton Brook and Poyle Quarry) and Policy DM15 (Past Operator Performance).</p> <p>Proposed Submission Plan consultation Consultation held September – October 2020 The purpose of this consultation was to consider compliance with all legal requirements including the Duty to Cooperate and soundness.</p> <p>Submission to Secretary of State Submitted 25th February 2021</p> <p>Examination Summer 2021</p> <p>Inspector’s report received Expected to be received Autumn 2021</p> <p>Adoption Expected to be achieved in Winter 2021/22</p>
Notes	Upon adoption, the Local Plan Update will supersede the existing adopted Replacement Minerals Local Plan for Berkshire, adopted May 2001; and Waste Local Plan for Berkshire, adopted December 1998.

Local Plan Update

Title	Local Plan Update
Status	Development Plan Document
Role and content	It sets out policies and guidance for the development of the borough over the next 15 years. It looks ahead to 2037 and identifies where the main

	developments will take place, and how places within the borough will change, or be protected from change.
Coverage	Wokingham Borough
Timetable	<p>Issues and Options Consultation held August-September 2016. The Focus was early opinion gathering on a range of high level issues.</p> <p>Spatial Options Consultation: Right Homes, Right Places Consultation held November 2018-February 2019. The focus was to provide opportunity to comment on the suitability of land promoted across the borough for potential development. In addition, some high level opinions were sought, e.g. on development density and height</p> <p>Draft Local Plan Consultation held February-April 2020. The consultation set out a full set of draft policies, including the spatial strategy directing the location of future development and supporting allocations. The consultation includes a full suite of policies intended to assess and manage the impact of development.</p> <p>Revised Draft Local Plan Expected to be held autumn 2021</p> <p>Pre Submission Local Plan Expected to be held summer 2022</p> <p>Submission Expected to occur November-December 2022</p> <p>Examination Expected to be during 2023</p> <p>Inspector's report received Expected to be received summer 2023</p> <p>Adoption Expected to be achieved by end of 2023</p>
Notes	Upon adoption, the Local Plan Update will supersede the existing adopted Core Strategy and Managing Development Delivery local plans.

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TITLE	Commercialisation Strategy
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 29 July 2021
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Finance and Housing - John Kaiser

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

This report is to allow the adoption of a Commercial Strategy to support and enable members and officers to make positive choices about where they want to invest, rather than having to make decisions about where to reduce expenditure.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive:

- 1) agree the adoption of the Commercial Strategy attached at Appendix A to the report;
- 2) delegate to the Chief Finance Officer authority to revise and update the Strategy as required to ensure legislative compliance and delivery of best practice in the Council's commercial ventures and activities.

SUMMARY

The Council's Corporate Plan and MTFP both recognise and highlight the need for the Council to be a more commercial organisation. This is as an enabler to improve service delivery and organisational efficiency and a also critical component of our financial strategy to address the financial budgetary pressures and in pursuit of best value for money in all our activities. The commercialisation strategy is council-wide and applies as much to prevention and demand management in care services as it does to creating new lines of income through traded services.

The vision for Wokingham Borough Council includes an aspiration that we will be a "...commercially-minded council" explained as:

"a commercial mind-setthat promotes the ability to deliver services differently, demands innovation and ensures we are able to maximise our assets for the benefit of our communities and to deliver financial sustainability."

This is further developed by key commercial principles which will allow the Council to reach its commercial objectives by:

- continually identifying and developing opportunities to commercialise existing and new services.
- ensuring our partnerships (private and public) are efficient and deliver value.

- having a strategic commissioning and procurement approach that derives the maximum value from every pound spent.
- adopting the most effective delivery models to deliver best value services.
- ensuring the Council prices commercially ensuring we cover all our direct costs (except when we have made a conscious and evidenced decision to subsidise).
- becoming commercially astute, by understanding the market and developing the knowledge to make it work for us.
- all understanding and recognising where we have a role to play.

This strategy has been developed in consultation with Commercial Gov, a private sector organisation who have worked with developing successful commercial agendas in award-winning Councils.

The strategy is attached at Enclosure 1 to this report. If this strategy is not adopted or fully engaged with, then there is a risk that mandated income and efficiency targets in the MTFP will not be achieved.

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)	Specific MTFP target of: (£200k)	Yes	Both available for pump priming of income generating projects to deliver revenue benefits
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	Specific MTFP target of: (£500k)	Yes	
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	Specific MTFP target of: (£800k)	Yes	

Other Financial Information

Best practice in commercialisation is outlined in this strategy should enable services to achieve best value for money within their own budgets and will support both their individual efficiency targets and the commercial benefits mandated in the MTFP. There are considerable efficiency and income targets across all Directorates that result from commercially minded activities as defined in this strategy. These are in addition to the unattributed savings stated in the box above.

Effective cost reduction and efficiency targets may not be achieved if the Council fails to adopt a commercial approach to its activities.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation
This is an internal strategy and has been agreed by Corporate Leadership Team

Public Sector Equality Duty
All commercialisation business cases will consider the Council's ED&I responsibilities, and this will form an essential criteria on the qualitative assessment.

Climate Emergency – <i>This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030</i>
Qualitative assessments of Climate Emergency considerations are a relevant part of any business case

List of Background Papers
Enclosure 1 – Commercial Strategy

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COMMERCIAL STRATEGY

**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

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INTRODUCTION

Our Corporate Plan and MTFP recognise the need for the council to be a more commercial organisation. This is both as an enabler to improve service delivery and organisational efficiency and a critical component of our financial strategy to address the financial gap that will be caused as a result of the government's removal of the Revenue Support Grant. Successful delivery of the Commercial Strategy should enable members and officers to make positive choices about where they want to invest, rather than having to make decisions about where to reduce expenditure.

Our vision for Wokingham Borough includes an aspiration that we will be a "...commercially-minded council" explained as:

"a commercial mind-setthat promotes the ability to deliver services differently, demands innovation and ensures we are able to maximise our assets for the benefit of our communities and to deliver financial sustainability."

This is further developed by a set of commercial principles which convey the future state of the organisation:

- We continually identify and develop opportunities to commercialise existing and new services
- Our partnerships (private and public) are efficient and deliver value
- We have a strategic commissioning and procurement approach that derives the maximum value from every pound spent

- We adopt the most effective delivery models to deliver best value services
- We price commercially ensuring we cover all our direct costs (except when we have made a conscious and evidenced decision to subsidise)
- We are commercially astute – we understand the market and know how to make it work for us.
- We all understand and recognise where we have a role to play

This Strategy explores:

1. The drivers behind our aspiration to be a more commercial organisation
2. What this means for Wokingham Borough Council
3. Our commercial objectives
4. How we will deliver these objectives

NATIONAL DRIVERS

Local Authority Funding Gap

Even prior to COVID 19 LAs have become increasingly reliant on new forms of income and/or new practices/delivery models as a necessity to bridge the gap between escalating demand led services and falling/static government grant.

National Audit Office

Pledged to discuss the rise in commercialism in local government with CIPFA and the relevant government departments.

[Source: Public Finance August 2019]

PWLB Consultation regarding borrowing restrictions –

(<https://www.dmo.gov.uk/responsibilities/local-authority-lending/lending-arrangements>

)

LOCAL CONTEXT

Funding Pressures

Wokingham Borough has been the lowest funded Unitary Authority in England for many years so has already embarked on many activities aligned to Commercialisation. The funding pressures will however continue, exacerbated by COVID 19, so being 'commercially minded' must remain a key priority.

Innovation

The Council has a strong record of being Innovative, which is one of the four values in the Council Plan. Furthermore, our staff have demonstrated tremendous feats of innovation in our response to COVID 19 We will need to build on this to develop and deliver on a more ambitious commercialisation strategy.

WHAT 'COMMERCIAL' MEANS TO US

Due to the drivers described in this strategy, commercialisation is something every council is looking at. However, the focus and definition of what that means is different from one council to the next.

It is important therefore, to define what we mean by being commercial.

Commercialisation is NOT just about making money.

Working commercially is about using assets and capabilities to deliver outcomes in the most efficient and effective way to deliver a net benefit to bottom line finances. It is as much about avoiding costs through early intervention and prevention as it is about developing new projects.

This means 'commercialisation' at Wokingham Borough Council includes all of the following:

Preventing costs arising in the first place (e.g. self sufficiency and resilience)

Creating social value to enable delivery of excellence in services to our communities

Early intervention to prevent a cost escalating

Redesigning our staff structures and process to be most efficient and effective

Reviewing the service delivery model (e.g. outsourced, shared service, company) to be most efficient and effective

Effective management of contracts

Identifying new sources of income

Commissioning the right outputs/outcomes

Enhanced Financial Management

Maximising existing sources of income

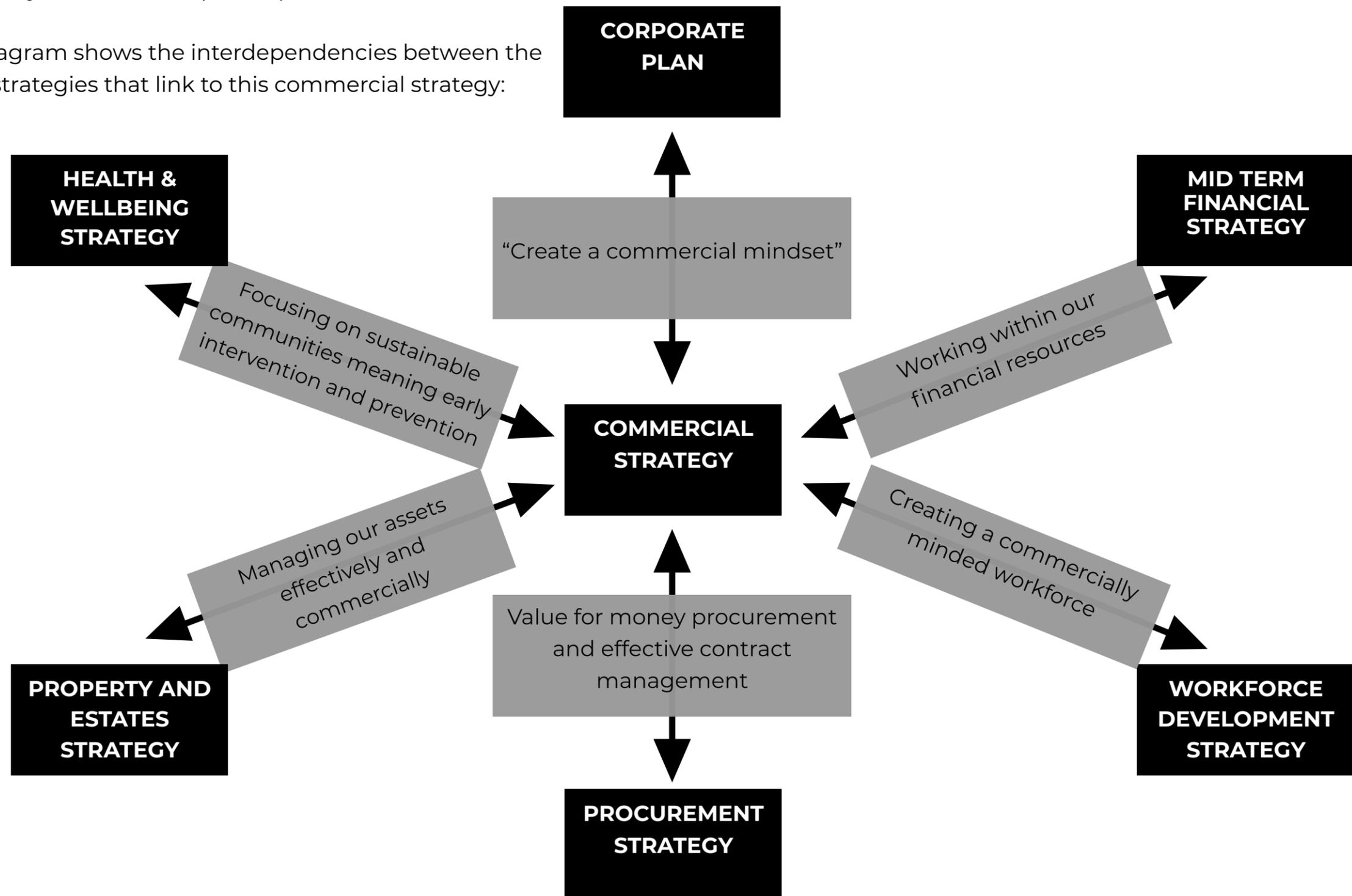
Eliminating unnecessary demand and work

Insight and Intelligence to make good choices

THIS STRATEGY

This strategy doesn't operate in isolation and is part of a hierarchy of key strategies and plans that work together to ultimately deliver the corporate plan.

The diagram shows the interdependencies between the main strategies that link to this commercial strategy:



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

This commercial strategy is built on a number of guiding principles. These principles set the context and the scope for the commercial strategy as well as providing a high level evaluation test for commercial opportunities.

1. Ultimately about creating social value, as money is only ever for the Community - the purpose of commercialisation is to increase our ability to deliver excellent services for our communities.

2. Applies to all Council Services - our definition of commercial is purposefully broad. This means it applies to all services. Whilst the financial impact services can make through commercial working won't be the same, all services can contribute to objectives by applying a commercial approach to their thinking, planning and action.

3. Cultural as much as anything else - a broad definition of 'culture is 'the way we do things round here'. If commercialisation applies to all services then we need a culture where thinking and acting commercially is the norm.

4. Well managed risk taking - operating commercially will mean doing new things, this means there will be risk. Risk doesn't mean opportunities won't be pursued, but risk will be well managed to reduce the likelihood of objectives not being met.

5. Business Cases with ROI (including social value) for investment - there will be a robust approach to investment

based around solid commercial businesses cases that identify the return on investment and the social value created.

'Knits' together Commercialisation activities rather than replace or duplicate existing arrangements - there are already many commercial activities happening across the council. This strategy won't replace them or duplicate activity, but will outline a system for more effectively managing commercial activity in order to achieve better outcomes.

7. All discretionary services to be self funding or make a contribution - to meet the financial objectives and the principle that this approach is for all council services, all discretionary services are expected to be self funding or at a minimum to make a financial contribution or cost avoidance.

OBJECTIVES

PRIMARY OBJECTIVE

The primary objective is to use our limited resources as effectively and efficiently as possible in delivering the Council plan.

SECONDARY OBJECTIVES

Achievement of the primary objective will come in part through the following secondary objectives:

- Development of a commercial culture
- Clear Governance – responsibilities, authorities, processes, templates, funding
- Appropriate performance management framework for commercial initiatives

The overarching aim of this strategy is to deliver a financial return which contributes to the Council's efficiencies and additional income targets, helping to safeguard and develop frontline services that the Council currently provides.

Given the scale of financial challenge facing the council, doing nothing is not an option. It is incumbent on all staff and stakeholders to explore all forms of commercialisation. This will help us to work towards becoming self financing.

The successful delivery of the Commercial Strategy will mitigate some of the savings that the Council will have to make. We will look to carefully manage and control any risks associated with the implementation of this strategy.

It is important to note that the benefits of pursuing the Commercial Strategy are not purely financial. Becoming a commercially focused organisation means putting the customer at the heart of everything we do. We will actively encourage creative thinking to develop more effective ways to deliver our services.

We will empower our staff to take business-like decisions, manage risk and seize new opportunities. This will help to improve the quality and speed of decision making, thereby improving the services we deliver to customers. An empowered workforce means more engagement, higher customer satisfaction, increased productivity and also better business intelligence. The result of this is that the Council's ability to attract and retain top talent is enhanced.

Through growing the commercial activity of the Council we are looking to benefit the people of Wokingham, ensuring that wealth generated in Wokingham stays in Wokingham. In turn this will help to attract businesses, professionals and entrepreneurs to the area. It is anticipated that increased prosperity within the borough will positively affect the household income of residents, helping to reduce the barriers to social inclusion.

CULTURE

Developing a commercial culture is an important part of this strategy. To achieve the ambitious objectives outlined in this strategy requires all of us to play our part.

Whilst large commercial projects will be important, we are looking to develop a commercial culture across all service areas where thinking in a business-like way and making business like decisions is the normal way of working.

An embedded commercial culture will enable all our services to reach their potential and unlock new and innovative ways of delivering services to residents and businesses in Wokingham. A commercial culture will encourage us to be creative and entrepreneurial, finding ways to add value to the way we serve residents.

A culture can be defined as ‘the way we do things round here’ and the way we operate across our service areas will ambitious and bold, working in new ways to steward the resources we have in the most effective way to deliver the priorities highlighted in the Council Plan.

These competencies and skills are within the “HR Plan” - workforce strategy

GOVERNANCE

To ensure the effective and joined up delivery of the strategy a Commercial Board will be formed. This is a member and officer led group comprising of managers from the main commercial initiatives of WBC and managers from support services. It is led by the Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Financial Officer. The Lead Member for Finance will also sit on the board to provide a political steer to the board and the link between the officers and members for commercial activity.

The aim of the Commercial Board is to oversee the operation of commercial activities in WBC and provide CLT and Cabinet with assurance that commercial initiatives are in line with this commercial strategy.

Specific duties of the Commercial Board include:

- Developing and maintaining the Commercial Framework which provides the basis for all of the Council's commercial activity
- Overseeing commercial performance
- Providing advice to Service Managers on the development of commercial opportunities
- Assisting with commercial business plan writing and financial modelling
- Holding the commercial projects register
- Providing analysis of the performance and impact of projects and the contribution towards efficiencies and additional income targets
- Providing recommendations and advice to Members and the

CLT on the approval of commercial business plans

- Highlighting any potential commercial conflicts of interest to the CLT for direction
- To implement KPI's and measure success of commercial projects
- To ensure an exit strategy has been defined

This board will monitor and manage commercial performance of existing initiatives and be the forum to discuss business cases for investment in new opportunities.

The board will also create a forum for the identification of commercial opportunities between and across departments.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AND THE COMMERCIAL FRAMEWORK

A Commercial Framework will be introduced across WBC. This is a process, with associated documentation, that teams can quickly work through to assess new and existing commercial initiatives.

This enables teams to:

- apply the commercial thinking needed to assess an idea
- creates a common approach and language across WBC
- provides a standard framework for the Commercial Board to evaluate different opportunities.

The process provides an easily accessible business case template. For high risk initiatives a more detailed business case may also be needed after successfully passing through the commercial framework stage.

The stages of the framework are as follows:

STAGE 1.

Determine the vision and strategic objectives

STAGE 2.

Understand the operating environment

STAGE 3.

Identify market expectations

STAGE 4.

Understand customer value

STAGE 5.

Analyse the competitive environment

STAGE 6.

Determine costs and pricing strategy

STAGE 7.

Identify risks

STAGE 8.

Calculate Return on Investment

CHALLENGES

It is important to recognise some of the challenges that exist in achieving the objectives laid out in this strategy. Some of the main challenges are:

Staff capacity to deliver - it is recognised that capacity is an issue and that new ways of freeing and creating capacity will be needed to deliver against this strategy.

Identifying meaningful performance measures including social value - the way commercial performance is measured and managed needs to look different to other council services. New measures need to be identified and the right system for monitoring and managing commercial performance needs to be put in place.

Commercial is not for the Public Sector - the focus on commercial is different for many staff members and for our communities. This can create resistance to change. Our challenge is to communicate the reason for operating commercially - that is to protect front line services and benefit the community. The same mission, but with a slightly different operating model.

Political environment - national and local politics set the context for our work. We need to work closely with national and local politicians to ensure our commercial approach.

Risk appetite across all stakeholders - working in new ways involves risk, however without taking risks we will continue

working in the same way which won't meet the financial challenge we are facing. We need to work closely with stakeholders to understand the risks including the risk of not trying new things. We also need to manage risk very well.

Investment to support initiatives - investment will be needed to realise commercial opportunities that are identified. The landscape for finding investment at preferential rate is changing and becoming more challenging. We need to work in new and different ways to find investment and we need to analyse options in a robust manner before committing to investing.

CURRENT ACTIVITIES

Working commercially isn't new to Wokingham. We already have a number of activities that are set up to either operate commercially or to improve the commercial working of the council.

This strategy is aimed to connect these areas rather than to duplicate them. To provide focus and a system for working that creates synergies between our existing commercial services as well as and effectively identifying new opportunities and implementing them successfully.

Some of the current commercial activities are:

- Wokingham Housing Ltd
- Optalis Ltd
- Continuous Improvement Group
- ASC Impower
- Contract Review Board
- CFO Insights
- Designing Our Neighbourhoods
- Town Centre Regeneration
- Grant Finder
- Housing 1-4-5
- Financial Management Review
- Climate Emergency Investment Board
- Shared Services and Trading Services

OUTPUTS - PAST & FUTURE

	OBJECTIVES	ACHIEVED TO DATE	MTFP
WOKINGHAM HOUSING LTD	Solely owned housing development, operations and management companies set up to deliver affordable and social housing across the borough based on sound financial business cases that allow them to operate with no or minimal costs to the local taxpayer.	Interest received on loans to date is £3.4 million	Interest charge on loans and dividend income
OPTALIS LTD	A company operated in partnership with RBWM to provide care provision for the ASC market to Wokingham residents – commercially viable as enables WBC to manage demand and quality of care in the local area market. Therefore influences increasing volumes and costs associated with Adult Social Care. Operates under ‘Teckal’ status.	Savings achieved in 2019/20 of £400k, has been operating since 2011.	Target of £1m of savings over the MTFP 2021-23
83 COMMUNITY INVESTMENT GROUP	This is a group formed to assist the Deputy Chief Executive in investing up to £200 million of capital funds into commercial acquisitions that support the economic development, regeneration, protection of employment and assets within the borough whilst being based on sound business case that allows the assets to be acquired at no cost to the local taxpayer and make a return above financing costs that contributes to Council services.	Over £85 million invested in a portfolio that returns over %5 p.a. gross.	Target of £1.9m in 21/22 and £2.6m in ongoing net of debt financing costs
CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME	A service improvement programme of activities across the Council that will drive efficiencies and service benefits over the next few years. Utilises one-off (Special Item) funding in the MTFP.	Work is focussed on future cost prevention and cost containment so will not deliver cashable savings outside of service budgets.	Special Item of £1.1m in 21/22
DESIGNING OUR NEIGHBOURHOODS	Long-term objective of maximising prevention and early intervention through a better understanding and response to community health needs.	In progress	Savings within service targets.

OUTPUTS - PAST & FUTURE

	OBJECTIVES	ACHIEVED TO DATE	MTFP
ASC TRANSFORMATION	<p>Transformation programme focusing on demand management which will deliver efficiencies through: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening the Voluntary Sector and Community offer • Redesigning the Front Door to ASC • Increasing access and effectiveness of short-term support <p>Targeted strength-based review programme</p>	<p>Projects have been slightly delayed due to covid however changes are now starting to be made and embedded into practice from which savings will start to flow</p>	<p>Demand management savings target of £3m over the MTFP 2021-23</p>
CONTRACT REVIEW BOARD	<p>A CLT commissioned report from CIPFA looked into the procurement and contract management of Wokingham Borough Council. Report findings are positive around procurement and have highlighted some areas for development in our contract management</p>	<p>The outcome of this report has recommended a number of actions which include a revised procurement strategy and development of a “centre of excellence” for managing and supporting procurement and contracts across the major spending services.</p>	<p>Better contract management will reduce further pressures for contractor inflation within the medium term plan.</p>
CFO INSIGHTS	<p>This is a benchmarking tool developed to assist the council in its performance management and comparison with similar authorities. It has been acquired and multiple licences exist within the council. The licences are held and controlled by Finance.</p>	<p>This project will not deliver cashable savings, but will highlight where other councils may have a better provision of service or cost efficiencies which WBC can learn from.</p>	<p>No budget implications</p>
TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION	<p>The Wokingham town centre regeneration programme was developed to refresh and improve the user experience of the town centre. The programme is self-financing through lettings of commercial properties and residential accommodation through a combination of leasehold and freehold private market sales.</p>	<p>This project has completed the build phase and is now being actively marketed. Over 85% of the commercial floorspace has now been let</p>	<p>£2 million on completion and rising to £6 million once debt repaid.</p>

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OUTPUTS - PAST & FUTURE

	OBJECTIVES	ACHIEVED TO DATE	MTFP
GRANT FINDER	<p>This is a project that would allow council officers and counsellors to search for and apply for various grants that will either fund existing projects and service delivery schemes or allow the council to attract funding for new schemes</p>	<p>There are about 20 officers signed up as Grant Finder users. There is a requirement to recruit a support officer however this has been unsuccessful to date</p>	<p>Where there is the ability to find extra funding for existing projects this will deliver windfall savings</p>
HOUSING 1-4-5 plus 100	<p>A scheme to deliver 1,000 houses over the next four years at a return rate of over 5%. This is being managed by the council</p>	<p>In progress - sites being identified</p>	<p>In excess of £10 million pa across revenue/companies and HRA</p>
FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT REVIEW	<p>This is a review of the Council's financial management services with a target operating model being developed. It is moving to a finance business partnering model with the services to allow more effective and more accurate budget monitoring, budget management and forecasting.</p> <p>This will also develop a better understanding of the Council's cost base to allow enhanced benefit identification in business cases and ensure any commercial activities have the ability to cover direct and indirect costs when moved forward for approval.</p>	<p>Financial Target Operating Model developed and service structure enhanced</p>	<p>Better service budget management will assist in achieving cashable efficiencies.</p>
CLIMATE EMERGENCY INVESTMENT BOARD	<p>The council will seek to invest in projects that address the council's declared climate emergency agenda. Projects will seek to cover costs where possible from income streams generated or by accessing grants from government and private sector.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solar farms • Electricity • Trees 	<p>Schemes in progress that have accessed matched funding from Salix.</p>	

OUTPUTS - PAST & FUTURE

	OBJECTIVES	ACHIEVED TO DATE	MTFP
ALTERNATIVE DELIVERY MODELS	<p>The council has a number of shared services and trading service arrangements with other Berkshire authorities. Some of these are in the process of being reviewed to assess the quality of service and also the financial viability going forward. The council will always consider entering into shared services or operating trading services if there is a sound business case and demonstrable value for money to the council.</p> <p>The council will assess traded services on a commercial basis and always seek to recover direct and indirect costs to the council whilst remaining commercially competitive and avoiding distortion of competition in the local markets</p>	<p>The original shared service arrangements have delivered financial benefits to the council over their period of operation; this needs to be measured with a cost benefit analysis of the quality of service provided.</p>	<p>Benefits are achieved in service budgets.</p>

PRIORITIES

	SHORT TERM 2021/22	MEDIUM TERM by end of 2023	LONG TERM by end of 2026
Approach to Commercial Development	<p>Adoption of Commercial Strategy</p> <p>Establish Commercial Board</p> <p>Commercial Framework adopted</p>	<p>Continue to develop commercial and investment opportunities to impact on annual targets</p> <p>The Board drive commercial growth across the council</p>	
Commercial Focus 87	<p>Drive commercial growth through pilot - Social Care Market Management</p> <p>Drive commercial growth through pilot - Land Assets</p> <p>Drive commercial growth through pilot - Trading Register and Customer Account Management</p> <p>Drive commercial growth through pilot - Dinton Country Park</p> <p>Demand management work in Adults and Children's is reducing cost in the service</p>	<p>The four pilot areas are developing a commercial return</p> <p>All service areas identified how they can start and/or improve commercial performance</p> <p>A series of 'large commercial projects' identified, business cases developed and are beginning to be implemented</p>	<p>All service areas operating in a commercial manner with commercial results (both income and savings) leading towards self sufficiency</p>
Developing a Commercial Culture	<p>Staff training on 'commercial awareness' including the commercial framework</p>		

PRIORITIES cont.

	SHORT TERM 2021/22	MEDIUM TERM by end of 2023	LONG TERM by end of 2026
<p>Developing a Commercial Culture</p> <p>88</p>	<p>An 'intelligent client' approach is developed to improve the management of our contracts</p> <p>A pipeline of contracts for review to provide potential savings</p> <p>Create a plan to develop a commercial culture</p> <p>All service areas start to become more business-like in their thinking and decision making</p> <p>Increase and formalise our capacity to continually develop commercial ideas through horizon scanning of sector innovations and transferring appropriate lessons from peers.</p>	<p>We have staff highly skilled in contract management and negotiation and we see that reduce the cost we are paying and quality we are receiving from contracts</p> <p>A commercial culture becomes more normal across the council</p> <p>Ensure we understand the real cost associated with service delivery and the correct fees are set and are only ever subsidised intentionally</p> <p>Service areas work more efficiently and effectively as staff become more business minded in their decision making</p> <p>Determine the most effective service delivery models across WBC</p>	<p>We 'sweat our contracts' so they are working to our benefit and delivering savings</p> <p>Our culture is commercial and working commercially is normal across all service areas</p>

COMMUNICATING THE STRATEGY

Throughout the course of this strategy it is important the vision and aims are communicated well internally and externally. The Communications Team will develop a plan to mitigate this risk which:

- Informs our residents about this strategy, and why it is being implemented.
- Informs the elected members, officers and key partners about this strategy and why it is being implemented.
- Sets out criteria which can be applied during the planning of a particular commercial project in order to measure the impact on the perception of the Council.
- Includes a communications strategy to highlight any commercial successes to promote achievements both internally and externally.
- Includes a communications strategy to deal with any commercial failures or sudden interest in the Commercialisation Strategy from the press or any other interested party

MANAGING RISKS

Risk management is embedded in all of the decision making processes within the Council. Effective risk management requires an informed understanding of relevant risks, an assessment of their relative priority and rigorous approach to monitoring and controlling them. All risks associated with any commercial activity will be managed through the Council's Risk Management Framework.

A key part of the Council's Risk Management Framework is the Strategic Risk Register which contains all risks that may have an impact on core services and both strategic and operational objectives. As such, commercialisation has been added to the Strategic Risk Register which is monitored by the Corporate Leadership Team and Audit Committee..

In any commercial venture there will always be an inherent element of risk. The presence of risk is not always entirely negative as it can be a driver of innovation and a motivator to staff.

Given the potential risks involved it would be easy to take a risk adverse approach, however this approach would hinder potentially highly beneficial opportunities or innovation. We will look to identify risks early in the strategic planning phase and implement approaches to mitigate or manage these risks where possible.

Agenda Item 23.

TITLE	Procurement Strategy
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 29 July 2021
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Finance and Housing - John Kaiser

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

This report is to allow the adoption of a Procurement Strategy in accordance with the use of best practice and following recommendations from the recent CIPFA review.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive:

- 1) agree the adoption of the Procurement Strategy attached at Appendix 1 to the report;
- 2) delegate to the Chief Finance Officer authority to revise and update the Strategy as required to ensure legislative compliance and delivery of best practice in procurement and commissioning.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Best practice is that the Council should adopt and maintain an appropriate Procurement Strategy.

Appendix 1 is the strategy proposed for adoption.

Background

During December last year, the Deputy Chief Executive, supported by the AD Finance commissioned CIPFA to carry out a review of procurement, contract management and commissioning across the Council. The outcome of the review led to an action plan for improvement being developed; one of the key actions was that the Council develop, adopt and maintain a Procurement Strategy.

A Procurement Strategy has been developed in consultation with CLT, based on the best-practice template provided by CIPFA drawn from their own knowledge and studies of best practice across a number of other local authorities. **The new strategy is attached at Appendix 1.**

The proposed Strategy is intended to enable the Council to continue its relentless pursuit of value for money through becoming more cost-effective, delivering efficiency targets and the better achievement of quality outcomes by approaching competition in its procurement and commissioning positively and managing its contracts proactively for the benefit of residents and on a sound commercial basis.

The strategy will also allow the Council to take full considerations of the opportunities for innovation and genuine partnerships that are available from working with others in the public, private and VCSE sectors, whilst reinforcing the social value and equality aims of the Council and supporting its ability to deliver on its declared climate emergency initiative.

The Strategy will also introduce a governance structure through a Strategic Procurement Board that will provide challenge to all procurements to ensure that best value and quality is achieved and also monitor the in-service management of major contracts; this will also inform the Council's Procurement Regulations and supporting policies and documentation.

A secondary contract management support and learning working group will also be established to provide support and guidance to contract managers, share best practice around contract management and draw on any lessons learned from procurements of major contracts.

In order to deliver the required outcomes of this Strategy there will be a requirement to implement changes and improvements to our ways of working and ensure that close partnerships exist within the services and teams across the Council.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

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

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	No direct savings or costs- see other financial information	State Yes or No and provide further explanation as appropriate	
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	As above	Yes or No	

Following Financial Year (Year 3)	As above	Yes or No	
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Other Financial Information
Best practice in procurement and contract management as outlined in this strategy will enable services to achieve efficient and effective contracting within their own budgets and will support their individual efficiency targets.
Cost reduction and efficiency targets may not be achieved if the Council fails to approach competition positively.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation
This is an internal strategy and has been agreed by Corporate Leadership Team

Public Sector Equality Duty
The strategy recommends that Equalities is a mandatory assessment in all procurements.

Climate Emergency – <i>This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030</i>
The strategy recommends that Climate Emergency considerations are a relevant assessment in all procurements

List of Background Papers
Appendix 1 – Procurement Strategy

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Corporate Strategy for Procurement, Commissioning and Contract Management within Wokingham Borough Council



Version	Date	Description
1.1	April 2021	Procurement Strategy 2021 – draft for comment
1.2	May 2021	Procurement Strategy 2021 – working draft
1.3	June 2021	Procurement Strategy 2021 – CLT first review
1.4	July 2021	Executive Briefing
1.5	July 2021	Executive
Document Approvals		
Author:		AD Finance
Deputy Chief Executive:		CLT June 2021
Chief Executive:		CLT June 2021

Introduction

This strategy provides a council-wide approach and ownership of procurement (including contract management). It sets out the Council's aspirations and strategic approach to procurement. It is not intended to be a procurement manual, however, the principles should be applied to all procurements and commissioning completed on behalf of the Council.

The National Procurement Policy Statement (NPPS) was published in June 2021 which sets out information and guidance for contracting authorities. This will require contracting authorities to have regard to national strategic priorities for public procurement and as such some of the principles are set out in this strategy.

The over-riding aim of the Council is that in all procurement, contracting and commissioning the Council will seek value for money, defined as "the best mix of quality and effectiveness for the least outlay over the period of use of the goods or services bought" and that procurements, commissions and contract management will reflect the aims of this strategy. This strategy will ensure the intelligence remains with the client and not the supplier, and all contracts are Council-led.

Effective cost control and efficiency targets are dependent on the Council approaching competition in procurement positively, whilst taking full account of the opportunities for innovation and genuine partnerships that are available from working with others in the public, private and VCSE sectors.

This strategy should be read in conjunction with the Council's Procurement and Contracts Rules and Procedures (PCRP) (Section 13 of the Constitution) and all supporting policies and documentation [*which will be developed following approval of this strategy.*]

The objectives of this strategy are:

1. To ensure procurement practices achieve true competition, best value for money and that customer and client needs are met.
2. To encourage the effective planning, monitoring and review of current and future procurement activities, including identifying opportunities for collaboration with private and public sector bodies as well as the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sectors.
3. To reduce the level of "non-contract spend" – orders placed with no formally tendered contract in place, mindful of a suitable risk-based cost benefit analysis.
4. To promote and maintain a culture of electronic procurement (e-procurement); this will provide for a more efficient flow of information between the Council and its supply chain, better record of procurement activities, consistency in procurement processes and best practices.
5. Development and maintenance of the Council's Contracts Register, required to meet statutory transparency obligations and to ensure effective and timely contract renegotiation and retender.
6. To ensure proper in-service management of Council contracts and effective termination and exit strategies and procedures.
7. To ensure examples of best practice in procurement and contract management are identified and communicated across the Council and adopted wherever practical.
8. Support the Climate Change Emergency.
9. Support and facilitate economic development within Wokingham Borough.
10. Assess, where needs be, the Social Value aspect of any procurement.

The benefits of this strategy are:

In taking this corporate strategy forward, the Council expects to realise the following benefits:

- ✓ Demonstrate continuous improvement and achieve value for money through the efficient procurement of goods, services and works.
- ✓ Development of a Procurement Centre of Excellence promoting:
 - More efficient procurement processes, better risk management and strategic procurement planning.
 - Proactive contract management aimed at continuous improvement and effective management of the quality of the services we provide to the end client/user.
 - Compliance with applicable legislation and the Council's Constitution.
 - Improved collaboration with other local authorities, local businesses and the VCSE sector.
- ✓ Develop relationships between the Council, the business community and the broader voluntary sector which create mutually advantageous, flexible and long-term relations.
- ✓ Greater use of the Council's e-tendering software.

The Procurement Process

The Council will require that all:

- procurement,
- contracting
- commissioning,
- construction of the specification for goods, services or works

will be evaluated and subsequently awarded against **mandatory** and **relevant assessments** that have been designed to test and ensure that the goods, services or works being acquired represent both value for money to the Council and reflects the objectives of this strategy listed above.

Initial considerations of the mandatory assessments is to be made in the procurement business case which for each contract should demonstrate alignment with the Corporate strategies (Climate Emergency, Social Value, Equalities); adequate risk assessment; appraisal of alternative options to meet the identified need and a recommended approach. Procurement business cases are to be presented for a review by the Strategic Procurement Board in a standard format (template to be developed by the Procurement and Contracts team).

In addition to this, the tender evaluation will be based on a set of suitable awarding criteria incorporating the below listed mandatory and relevant assessments.

Mandatory Assessments

- **Financial:** does the tender submitted conform to the Council's budget sustainability over the life of the contract or commission, and fit within the Medium Term Financial Plan? The default standard weighting in assessing tenders is based on a 70% price and 30% quality. Any deviation from this is to be highlighted in the procurement business case and agreed by the Chief Finance Officer (or nominated deputy) and presented through the Strategic Procurement Board (see below).

- **Contract Management:** does the tender submitted allow the Council to ensure adequate management of the performance of the supplier/contractor and also for the quality of the goods, services or works over the life of the contract or commission? Are there sufficient remedies available to the Council, should the supplier not deliver?
- **Risk Assessment:** does the tender submitted allow for identification and mitigation of the key risks to the Council?
- **Exit Strategy:** does the tender submitted contain clear details of any exit strategy in response to any mid-term termination and also at the end of the contract period. This should include termination for non-performance and *force majeure*.
- **Social and Economic Value to the Local Community:** does the tender submitted meet the needs of the Wokingham Borough community and add social and/or economic value to that community through the use of local supply chains through small and medium enterprises or offers other community and economic benefits to the Wokingham community without compromising the principles of transparency, fairness and equal treatment?
- **Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion:** does the tender submitted fit within the Council's Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion policies and agenda?
- **Climate Emergency:** does the business case take into account relevant Climate Emergency actions?

Relevant Assessments

- **Innovation:** does the bid provide innovation in goods, services or works?
- **Use of Council Assets:** does the bid use or enhance the assets of the Council.
- **Use of Community Assets:** Does this bid make use of and enhance local voluntary, charitable and social enterprises?
- **Digital delivery:** are the goods, services or works delivered digitally to the Council and/or to the local community?

Responsibilities for Procurement and Contract Management

The Council will require all officers undertaking procurement, contract management and commissioning to construct specifications and evaluations that will be appropriate to the goods, services or works being acquired and will reflect the aims of this strategy.

A key tenet of this strategy is that procurement is supported centrally and contract management is devolved to the relevant services with support from the Centre of Excellence. However, each department is still accountable for procurements and/or commissioning needed to deliver the services within their remit, to the outcomes for which they are responsible, and to meet their service plan.

Each department will be responsible for the preparation of the tender documentation and take all business decisions in relation to the procurement, including:

- that the approach followed complies with all statutory legislation and the Council’s Constitution and, where necessary, the relevant specialist advice (e.g. Legal, Procurement, Finance etc.) is sought and obtained in a timely manner to ensure compliant procurement process;
- that the procurement or commission supports their objectives and service plan and all mandatory and relevant assessments have been considered in the procurement business case and as part of the tender evaluation/contract award;
- ensuring there is sufficient budget available to be allocated to the contract over its lifetime including any costs of exit or decommissioning;
- ensuring the correct governance process is followed to obtain approval for the procurement or commission;
- recommend contract award to the supplier offering best value bid according to the award criteria set out in the tender documents and the strategy agreed in the procurement business case;
- that the contract is recorded on the Council’s contract register.

The department will be accountable for the whole-life ownership of the contract including initiating, mobilising, in-service management and subsequent termination, disengagement and/or re-procurement of the contract. It will be the department’s responsibility to review existing contracts early enough to allow for sufficient time to extend or re-procure, should that be the case.

The main role of the Procurement Centre of Excellence will be to provide procurement and contract management support to the departments across the Council to ensure that all procurement options are considered and appraised and the most appropriate approach is recommended. Advice on the compliant route will be offered but the final decision on the specific approach in each case will sit with the department. Deviations from the recommended approach will need to be highlighted in the procurement business case and approved by the Strategic Procurement Board.

Governance

With all decisions that involve the disbursement of public funds, there should be proper governance and oversight of Council procurements, commissioning and contract management. For Procurement and Commissioning, this oversight would be undertaken by a Strategic Procurement Board and contract management will be supported through a Contract Management Learning and Support Working Group. As with all financial matters, overall governance remains with the Council’s Section 151 officer (or nominated deputy).

Headline Terms of Reference for the Strategic Procurement Board. The remit of the Board is to provide a check point and gateway for all procurements for the Council; this checkpoint will include the validity of future procurements based on need and corporate priorities, clearly demonstrated in a business case. All procurements will require sign-off by this Board prior to the procurement process being commenced. The Board will comprise of senior officers (Tiers 2 and 3):

- Deputy Chief Executive (Chair)
- Director Place and Growth
- AD Finance (vice Chair)
- AD Place
- AD People Commissioning

The Board will be supported by other officers as follows:

- Subject matter expertise and professional support from the Procurement Service
- Administrative support from the Procurement Service
- As required the relevant officer/service representative who has developed the business case
- Climate Change Board representative, if required

The Board can delegate approval for low value and low risk procurements to the AD Finance in consultation with the relevant service AD; this will allow the Board to focus on the more significant procurements based on financial, commercial and reputational risk.

The Board will also require updates on the ongoing contract management of the significant and prime contracts within the Council. This will include a joint briefing from both the Council's contract manager and the client manager within the supplier/provider. These may be subject to review by Overview and Scrutiny.

The Chair/Vice Chair will provide regular updates to the Executive Lead Member for Finance and Housing on the outcome of Board meetings and any potential strategic procurement issues and concerns.

Full Terms of reference for the Board will be published as an appendix to this strategy.

Headline Terms of Reference for the Contract Management Learning and Support Working Group. The Group is to provide a forum of best practice around the management of the key contracts within the Council and a support group for all officers who have a remit to manage contracts in the Council. The Chair of the Group will report regularly to the Strategic Procurement Board. The Group will comprise of officers who have a large number of contracts under their control or single contracts of high value (Tiers 4 and 5):

- Head of Procurement, Contracts and Commercialisation (Chair)
- Lead Specialist Place Clienting
- Lead Specialist Highways and Transport
- Lead Specialist People Commissioning
- Lead Specialist Finance Business Partnering
- Procurement and Contracts Manager (vice Chair)
- Subject matter expertise and professional support from the Procurement Service

The Group will share and publish any lessons learned and examples of best practice on a regular update through Sharepoint and internal communications.

The Chair and/or vice Chair will provide regular updates to the Deputy Chief Executive and Assistant Director Finance on the outcome of Group meetings and any significant procurement and contracting issues identified.

Full terms of reference for the Group will be published as an appendix to this strategy.

Role of Internal Audit: Internal Audit will be responsible for the investigation of any mal-practice in procurement. The Procurement service will be responsible for highlighting any examples of an improper or inappropriate procurement practices to the Internal Audit service and reporting such to the Council's Section 151 Officer or nominated deputy.

Policies and updates

This strategy is designed to give an overarching strategic view of procurement commissioning and contract management. This will be supported by Section 13 of the Council's Constitution and a number of policy and guidance publications that will set the various parameters and templates for successful procurements and ongoing contract management and reporting.

TITLE	Investing in our Community
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 29 July 2021
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Finance and Housing - John Kaiser

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

To refocus the current Property Investment Strategy approved by Executive in September 2017. This will enable us to continue to invest in our community for service delivery, housing, regeneration and preservation action.

RECOMMENDATION

The Executive is recommended to:

- 1) note the refocusing of the existing Investment Strategy and criteria as set out in Appendix A;
- 2) note the delegated authority already given to the Deputy Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader, Executive Member for Finance and Housing and the Executive Member for Business and Economic Development, applies to this refocused policy;
- 3) agree the changes to the delegated authority with regard to investment criteria as set out in Appendix A.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is presented to Executive (as opposed to Audit Committee) because it refers to a refocusing of the Investment Strategy approved by Executive in September 2017. This report considers two types of Community Investment namely:

1. Developments on Council-owned land which will be brought back to Executive unless managed under another delegated authority elsewhere
2. The purchase of and/or development of property assets primarily to deliver policy objectives other than yield in accordance with the delegated authority set out in this report.

The report describes proposals for implementing a Community Investment strategy to improve resources available to the Council by acquiring property assets that will enhance WBC policy delivery in borough.

To fund purchase opportunities the Council will utilise debt including Public Works Loan Board borrowing of up to £100m in addition to the £100m approved in 2017 in accordance with the current MTFP and/or the proceeds of any asset disposals if/when they arise.

BUSINESS CASE

Background

- 1) In September 2017 the Executive approved a new £100m Property Investment Strategy designed to build up a brand new income stream to replace declining government grant funding. So far, during the three years 2018 – 2021 WBC has invested c. £85m and acquired 10 property assets which produce headline rental income in excess of £4.0m p.a. After deductions for debt and repayment costs this contributes over £1.0m p.a. to Council revenue which supports front line service delivery.
- 2) Since 2017 the successful delivery of the Investment Strategy has been subjected to rigorous scrutiny and approval by officers, members and external professional advisors. The most recent findings of an independent audit by Ernst and Young are reproduced here:

Value for Money - What are our findings? (draft report February 2021)

- a) The Authority's key strategic documents are well aligned, with both the Investment and Capital strategies showing planned increases to future investment. The Authority's investment portfolio is well developed, with a portfolio of £79m returning a net yield of 5.25%. The overall aims of the Authority with regards to commercialisation are consistent, with targets clearly outlined.
- b) Property purchases are supported by clearly defined process, utilising desktop appraisals, Property Investment Group (PIG) review, purchase proposals, and cost & yield analysis.
- c) In addition to this, the Authority also has a Treasury Management Strategy. This strategy highlights the potential risks and market fluctuations, delivering insights in relation to any considerations that need to be made around external borrowing. The Authority obtained reputable external advice to generate this strategy, which facilitates more robust and accurate decision making.
- d) Additionally, external legal and property advice is sought throughout the purchase process to supplement the due diligence undertaken.
- e) There is a clear governance structure in place for key decision making.
- f) The 2017 Investment Strategy provides the Deputy Chief Executive and S.151 Officer with the authority to make investment decisions, and he is supported by key individuals within the Authority, who all attend PIG meetings throughout the year. This ensures the involvement of the Leader, Executive Member for Finance & Housing, Executive Member for Business & Economic Development, Lead Specialist Finance & Deputy S.151 Officer, Assistant Director of Commercial Property and the Head of Investment in all decisions in respect of property acquisitions pursuant to the Investment Strategy, irrespective of value.
- g) The acquisition of the Denmark St Car Park investment property was supported by detailed information, including desktop appraisals and purchase proposal documents. Detailed financial analysis was prepared by external

parties providing the PIG with valuable information, allowing for informed decisions.

- h) We were also provided with internal workings by the Head of Investment, whose high level calculations to determine the yield were in line with the work done by external parties. The Denmark St property was returning a 4.69% net yield based on the November PIG statement, slightly below the average for the wider portfolio.
 - i) The Authority has a Treasury Management Strategy that assesses the requirements of the Prudential Code, and provides necessary information to address these requirements, ensuring compliance with the statutory investment guidance and the Code. This allows the Authority to comply with the guidance and make informed decisions on financial investments, which in turn allows for sustainable resource deployment.
 - j) As above, the Authority obtained reputable external advice and insight in relation to the Treasury Management Strategy, allowing it to make any necessary considerations around external borrowing. Obtaining external advice allows for more robust and accurate decision making. The Authority is prudent and puts aside MRP of 10% of the value of the asset over 15 year to cover any reduction in value if needed.
 - k) We suggest that the Authority should consider formalising its process for analysing decisions to retain or sell properties, to manage the risk of any loss in market value of the investment. The Authority should also establish a risk register for the new Community Investment Group to review as part of its Terms of Reference and highlight and record any issues that need to be considered at a strategic level in the Corporate Risk Register.
- 3) Although not highly publicised the original 2017 Commercial Property Investment Strategy has been pursued with the intention of delivering multiple policy wins wherever possible, not just yield. Two notable exceptions were acquired out of borough specifically for the purpose of achieving income security and risk diversification to ensure the Council was not over exposed to locational risk within borough.
- 4) Apart from these two pure Treasury Investments the other eight assets were acquired in borough in pursuit of dual policy objectives and are held as Operational Property. This focus on dual policy delivery of the 2017 Investment Strategy has been particularly evident under the current membership of the group (since October 2019) that advises the Deputy Chief Executive in delivery of the Strategy. PWLB debt has been drawn down at various times to support the purchase of the 8 in borough dual policy assets.
- 5) Following the government's recent PWLB Review published 26th Nov 2020 and Circular 162, WBC will no longer be able to invest afresh "primarily for yield" and continue to have access to PWLB debt for any purpose. This is because any new PWLB application must confirm that in the three year period following the PWLB application the borough will not invest primarily for yield.
- 6) WBC acknowledges that the PWLB reform prevents the continued acquisition of property primarily (i.e. solely) for yield. Accordingly the original Investment Strategy approved by Exec in 2017 needs to be refreshed to reflect the current

regulatory environment, hence this recommendation to Executive to pursue dual policy community investment – for example: the acquisition of a property to be redeveloped in the medium term to provide affordable housing that in the short term provides income from an existing commercial occupier whereby the combined return on total costs meets the Councils minimum investment criteria.

- 7) However, WBC acknowledges that the 2017 Investment strategy has delivered many properties into the Council's ownership that promote the delivery of valid non-yield policies and it is important that WBC should be able to continue to acquire opportunistically for this purpose. WBC needs to continue to identify in borough opportunities to acquire assets that will deliver socio-economic policy benefits subject to also meeting prudent financial thresholds.
- 8) Due to the competitive nature of the property market it is essential that any acquisition is able to proceed swiftly and decisively. Otherwise potential sellers will not be willing to engage with a Local Authority if bogged down in red tape and time consuming approval processes. Therefore, just like the 2017 Investment Strategy, it is essential that Executive approves a renewed delegation process to enable swift decisions to acquire assets once a suitable opportunity has been identified.
- 9) Therefore WBC needs to reaffirm the existing delegated authority to acquire, manage and dispose of property assets for this purpose subject to meeting similar financial thresholds as originally approved in 2017. There is the balance of the original £200 million capital budget agreed at Council in two tranches of £100 million in 2018/19 and 2019/20 respectively. The balance left for the new focus on Investing in our Communities is £115 million.
- 10) The new delegation must perpetuate the existing delegation to manage and potentially dispose of the 10 assets already acquired under the 2017 Investment Strategy. In the event of any disposals the funds realised shall be re-invested in accordance with this Investing in our Community Strategy.
- 11) The financial criteria approved in the 2017 Investment Strategy need to be enhanced to suit the nature of the assets to be targeted.

Analysis of Issues

- 1) It is proposed that there will continue to be two types of investment – development on our own land and/or other development and property-related opportunities via acquisition of assets.
- 2) The approvals for development on our own land will be in accordance with the current approvals process i.e. through Executive unless suitable powers have been delegated elsewhere.
- 3) It is proposed that governance for the acquisition or disposal of other opportunities will be in accordance with the additional criteria set out in Appendix A. These criteria are based on the criteria previously approved by Executive in 2017 for Property Investment, plus additional financial criteria previously approved by Executive for the Council's town centre Regeneration projects.

- 4) Any form of investment is not without risk since its value may rise or fall. But this effect tends to soften over time and can be more accentuated in just the short term depending on the precise timing of market entry and exit.
- 5) The primary purpose of Investing in the Community is to enhance policy delivery rather than to deliver pure financial return. This means that every property acquisition must be justifiable on policy grounds first and foremost. Sound financial performance in accordance with approved criteria will remain a crucial but secondary consideration.

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)	£100m budget already allocated in MTFP	Yes	Capital
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	Balance of above	Yes	Capital
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	Balance of above	Yes	Capital

Other Financial Information

Some acquisitions are likely to provide short or long term income in addition to delivering socio-economic policy goals

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

Returns generated from the assets will assist in the continued provision of Council services in addition to the policy contribution of each asset

Public Sector Equality Duty

Due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty is taken when considering each individual property project or acquisition in accordance with this strategy.

Climate Emergency – This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030

Properties acquired for potential repurposing may provide additional opportunities to promote the Council's carbon neutral agenda

List of Background Papers

None

Contact Damon Emes	Service Commercial Property
Telephone 0118 9746000	Email damon.emes@wokingham.gov.uk

INVESTING IN THE COMMUNITY – STRATEGY AND CRITERIA

1 Context

- a) The government’s PWLB review and Circular 162 of 26th November 2020 confirms that Local Authorities may continue to borrow from PWLB to acquire property but only for specific permitted policy objectives:
 - (i) Service delivery
 - (ii) Housing
 - (iii) Economic regeneration
 - (iv) Preventative action
 - (v) Treasury management.
- b) The schedule at Appendix B identifies the ten property assets acquired by WBC so far and the policies they support. WBC needs to continue to acquire property using debt (including PWLB) to deliver these permitted policy objectives. These objectives align with many of the Council’s Priorities set out in the Wokingham Borough Community Vision 2020-2024, for example:

	Priority	Detail
(i)	ENRICHING LIVES	Support growth in our local economy and help to build business
(ii)	SAFE STRONG COMMUNITIES	Nurture communities and help them to thrive
(iii)	CHANGING THE WAY WE WORK FOR YOU	Work with our partners to provide efficient effective joined up services which are focused around you
(iv)	A CLEAN GREEN BOROUGH	Protect our borough, keep it clean and enhance our green areas
(v)	RIGHT HOMES, RIGHT PLACE	Build our fair share of housing with the right infrastructure to support and enable our borough to grow
(vi)	KEEPING THE BOROUGH MOVING	Enable safe and sustainable travel around the borough with good transport and infrastructure

- d) Many of these priorities depend upon the Council being able to acquire and control suitable land and buildings. This can be achieved either by direct development or by indirect development via swapping or relocating uses to enable onward provision of suitable infrastructure, facilities, services and accommodation.
- e) The new Investing in our Community strategy will continue to target all property types just like the 2017 Strategy. But the current emphasis is towards delivery of properties that will eventually provide or support additional housing and regeneration of our town centres via the second £100m funding tranche approved in the MTFP.
- f) WBC will acquire in borough only. It will not acquire out of borough unless via a joint arrangement where cross border intervention is desirable to achieve WBC policy objectives or where a specific in borough property straddles a boundary encroaching into a neighbouring borough.

- g) The “Property Investment Group” will cease to operate once the new delegation has been approved and the Deputy Chief Executive will appoint a new advisory group of officers and members to support the delivery of the new Strategy. The new advisory group is likely to operate under the title “Community Investment Group” (CIG).
- h) The investment strategy approved in 2017 includes many features and criteria that remain valid under the new policy focus. However new criteria need to be set to complement the original criteria to enable a wider scope of property acquisition for redevelopment and resale as opposed to holding for income return.
- i) This is especially relevant to acquiring properties where the current use is to be replaced by an alternative use in the future and where that future use is likely to result in an onward sale of the property in a different form or parts. Relevant criteria have already been approved by Executive in respect of the Council’s regeneration projects.
- j) Properties may be bought as income producing assets in the short or medium term. Income will enhance feasibility while alternative asset plans are prepared and delivered. This means that the criteria need to provide benchmarks for assets that start as income producing assets but transform into different assets to be sold for a one off capital gain.

2 Current Criteria

These are the criteria already approved by Executive that will continue to apply to the Investing in our Community strategy:

a) Objectives

- (i) Invest up to £200m as set in the capital programmes agreed in the 2018/19 and 2019/20 budget setting.
- (ii) Purchase freehold interests although in special circumstances long leasehold will be considered too.
- (iii) Finance purchases through debt (including Public Works Loan Board) or asset disposals

b) Acquisition

- (i) The purpose of the investment will be identified and agreed by way of an asset strategy related to permitted policy goals per DMO circular 162 – service delivery, housing, regeneration, preservation action.
- (ii) Where property is income producing leases and tenant covenants will be suitable for the asset strategy (for example, if acquiring for imminent redevelopment purposes, it should not be encumbered with a long lease).
- (iii) Properties will not be considered if associated with adverse public relations, reputational risk, ethics, excessive financial or practical risk.
- (iv) Lot sizes will vary to balance risk.
- (v) Property condition shall be considered carefully having regard to the asset strategy and any need for further investment to deliver alternative policy objectives.

- (vi) The risk/reward ratio will depend upon the timeframe and certainty of policy objective but will seek an income margin of at least 2% net above the borrowing rate across the portfolio. This will be measured at the point of appraisal.

c) Process

- (i) External acquisition advisers will be appointed for commercial purchases with core expertise retained in-house.
- (ii) External managing agents will be appointed for commercial property while retaining in-house expertise.
- (iii) In order to complete the purchase of commercial acquisitions in an efficient and speedy manner, Shared Legal Services may be used if they have capacity, otherwise external solicitors will be appointed.
- (iv) The Council will hold the property assets directly, although if converted to housing for rent they may be transferred to relevant Council owned and controlled companies for management and compliance purposes.
- (v) If relevant a dedicated contingency, refurbishment or redevelopment budget will be established for each property to provide for delivery of the relevant policy objective at the relevant time and this shall be reflected in the initial appraisal.
- (vi) The Council's Commercial Property Department supplemented by specialist external advisors will provide ongoing fund management advice including exit strategy advice as required.

Disposal

- (i) Generally speaking, the purpose of Investing in our Community is to acquire and hold assets in accordance with the specific asset strategy approved for each property at the time of acquisition.
- (ii) Disposal is unlikely to be a deliberate feature of an individual asset strategy other than by way of rack rented short leases of individual lettable units, or the long leasehold (or freehold) disposal of component parts of the whole in the event of a residential conversion of a larger building previously in a different use.
- (iii) Nevertheless, the possibility of a strategic disposal of any income producing asset is kept under constant review in light of evolving economic and market circumstances and events at the property itself. A specific review is undertaken at each year end when all assets are independently valued by external specialist valuers.
- (iv) The annual review considers the value and likely future performance profile of each asset. It also considers the likelihood of being able to reinvest the same funds in keeping with the investment strategy.
- (v) If a disposal is identified as a prudent course of action, the asset will be prepared for sale following a mirror image of the acquisition process. Independent advice will be taken from a suitable expert to agree a disposal plan and target price. Then the asset will be prepared for sale and transacted in line with normal market practice.
- (vi) Following any disposal, a key challenge will be to identify an alternative opportunity to reinvest the proceeds of sale to maintain a similar level of investment income to support the Council's expenditure needs. Subject to market conditions, this may

require investing a lesser sum at a higher riskier yield or investing a higher sum at a lower safer yield.

e) Governance

- i) The overall budget for the programme is set by Council and contained within the capital programme.
- ii) In order to make necessary quick decisions on the acquisition or disposal of commercial assets, delegated powers to approve them within this framework will be granted to the Deputy Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader, the Lead Member for Finance and the Lead Member for Business, Economic Development and Regeneration.
- iii) Members of the Executive will be advised of purchases and disposals.
- iv) The Executive will approve decisions relating to the development of our own land in the normal manner unless formally delegated via another route.

3 Additional Criteria:

The refocusing of the policy increases the likelihood of needing to acquire property that either has no immediate rental income or an inadequate level of income to cover all holding costs in the short term until the property has been repurposed for policy objectives. In this situation the viability of the acquisition and repurposing will be measured not on initial yield but on overall profit or life cycle return.

To accommodate this broader approach the Strategy will need to embrace a broader range of financial models. Therefore, in addition to the existing investment criteria (as re-stated above) the Strategy will need to work to additional criteria required to meet national criteria and local requirements to make financial return as follows:

- a) The objective of Investing in our Communities is to acquire property to support delivery of permitted policy objectives, service delivery, housing, regeneration and preservation action. This may involve direct policy delivery at the property to be acquired. It may also involve swapping uses to another property, assembling a larger site or providing essential infrastructure or access to enable another property holding to deliver policy objectives.
- b) Investments will be located wholly or partly in Wokingham Borough (including in association with its existing land and buildings and properties that may straddle the borough boundary).
- c) Where a property is purchased for redevelopment it may be vacant and non - income producing (or income producing for only a short period). In this situation the vacant holding costs prior to redevelopment will be included in the overall appraisal to determine the total project return on cost.
- d) Where a property is purchased with a view to long term redevelopment where the end result is uncertain or speculative it will be desirable to manage an income from the property until it is ready for redevelopment. In this situation the income will be required to provide the minimum rate of return (see current criteria section above).

- e) Property purchased specifically for defined redevelopment either as an individual site or as part of a larger composite site or project must show (either individually or in the aggregate context as appropriate) a minimum return on cost including finance costs equal to the rate adopted for the Borough's regeneration projects. This rate is effectively a minimum break even target plus a prudent risk margin.
- f) The original Investment Policy criteria included an individual lot size cap based on 20% of the initial £100m fund. The purpose of this cap was to ensure risk diversification across multiple assets. This has already been achieved having purchased 10 lots in the first £100m phase. Now that the total target fund has been increased to £200m the lot cap should be increased as well. The need to diversify remains but the risk is already much reduced due to the existing portfolio spread. Therefore in the context of the increased overall fund budget the max individual lot size shall be capped at £30m which actually reduces the individual lot size relationship from 20% to 15% of total the fund.
- g) Properties purchased for short to medium term redevelopment may be less likely to provide sufficient income to cover holding costs. In this situation (just like the Wokingham Town Centre Regeneration project) any income will be ring-fenced to the asset to support viability and not released to the general fund. But once the redevelopment is finished and either sold or fully let at an enhanced level of rental income then the ring-fence will be withdrawn once income or receipts have cancelled all or a substantial element of the debt.
- h) Property purchased for longer term redevelopment that cannot be adequately defined at point of purchase should aim to comply with the current minimum income return on cost for at least the period leading up to the proposed redevelopment.

4 Conclusion

- a) Government guidance confirms that it is acceptable for local authorities to act knowingly and advisedly to take managed risks with public funds to make property acquisitions to deliver policy objectives. This is clearly reinforced by DMO Circular 162. Risk must be managed carefully by competent staff and members applying suitable techniques and resources.
- b) Local authorities have been making property investments in the name of economic regeneration for many years. Many have done so deliberately in full knowledge that the project will not make a conventional commercial return. Instead they have focused on primarily delivering socio economic policy objectives at a defined cost.
- c) This strategy intends to achieve first and foremost socio-economic policy delivery, supported by sound commercial judgement and financial performance in accordance with the criteria set out.

APPENDIX B

WBC INVESTMENT PROPERTIES 2017-2021

	Property	Policy
1)	Barclays, 31 Market Place Wokingham	Regeneration
2)	Cox Plastics, Fishpond Rd Wokingham	Protection
3)	Mulberry Business Park Wokingham	Protection
4)	Alexandra Court, Wokingham	Regeneration
5)	Waitrose London Rd Twyford	Regeneration
6)	Twyford House London Rd Twyford	Regeneration
7)	Denmark St Car Park Wokingham	Protection
8)	Waitrose Crockhamwell Rd Woodley	Regeneration
9)	Wickes Churchill Way Basingstoke	Treasury
10)	Stapletons Club Way Peterborough	Treasury

Agenda Item 25.

TITLE	New Contract for Heating Services
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 29 July 2021
WARD	None specific
LEAD OFFICER	Place and Growth - Steve Moore
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Finance and Housing - John Kaiser

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

The purpose of this report is to seek approval of the procurement business case (attached) for a new contract to provide the range of heating services required for the Council's housing stock in compliance with our statutory duties.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive approves the business case to enable the Housing Service to procure a suitably qualified, experienced, and competent contractor for the delivery of heating services required for the Council's housing stock.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Council is required, as part of our statutory duties to maintain our housing stock to appoint a suitably qualified heating services contractor. As the total value of the contract will be in excess of £500,000 the business case requires the approval of the Executive. A new contract is expected to be awarded and mobilised in advance of autumn 2021.

Procurement Business Case

BACKGROUND

The Council has statutory responsibilities for the maintenance of its housing stock of 2768 properties. Most properties have traditional gas central heating or electrical heating installed. As a registered social landlord, we have a legal duty to inspect the gas installations in our housing stock on an annual basis and ensure that gas and electrical installations are regularly serviced, maintained, and repaired.

Currently we have a small estate of low carbon heating assets installed in some properties and inspection, maintenance and repair of these assets is also included in scope of the contract. We feel our existing heating contractor does not offer any added value to our low carbon asset and because we wish to transition from a largely gas based to a largely low carbon heating infrastructure, we will not extend our existing contract, preferring to identify a new contractor that we feel can better assist with our low carbon ambitions. Our estate of renewable heating assets is anticipated to increase during the term of the contract as we acquire more new build properties, and where practicable and affordable, we replace traditional heating systems with renewables.

A small number of the Housing stock already have solar panels, batteries, heat recovery systems and air source heat pumps and we are undertaking pilot studies to help identify the cost of installing these systems but just as importantly their ongoing repair and servicing requirements. This will help Wokingham Borough Council meets its climate emergency agenda.

BUSINESS CASE

Housing services need to appoint a suitably qualified, experienced and competent contractor for the range of heating services required to help manage and maintain our housing stock. There are health and safety risks associated with the safety of gas installations, and as a registered social landlord we must ensure the council meets its legal obligations under the 'Landlord Gas Safety Record (LGSR)'. The scope of services includes annual LGSR certifications, gas and electrical servicing, maintenance and repairs, along with replacement of heating systems that are beyond economical repair. The scope also includes maintenance and repair of our current estate of renewable heating assets installed in our housing stock, e.g., Air Source Heat Pumps (ASHP's), Solar PV and Mechanical Ventilation with Heat Recovery (MVHR's).

We recommended the new contract is procured via an established public procurement framework provider, due to their subject matter knowledge and expertise. Using this route of procurement also significantly shortens procurement timescales. A new contract will be awarded before autumn 2021 in readiness for the peak winter heating season.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

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

Year	How much will it Cost	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	Finance Year 2021/22 circa £500k	Yes, there is sufficient funding	Housing Revenue Account - Revenue and Capital expenditure
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	circa £500k	Yes, there is sufficient funding.	Housing Revenue Account - Revenue and Capital expenditure
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	circa £500k	Yes, there is sufficient funding	Housing Revenue Account - Revenue and Capital expenditure
Following Financial Year (Year 4)	circa £500k	Yes, there is sufficient funding	Housing Revenue Account - Revenue and Capital expenditure.
Following Financial Year (Year 5)	circa £500k	Yes, there is sufficient funding	Housing Revenue Account - Revenue and Capital expenditure

Other Financial Information

The Contract will assist the Council in delivering its statutory responsibilities as a landlord; breach of these responsibilities can lead to unlimited fines and considerable reputational damage to the Council which could affect its good standing generally.

The Council needs to achieve best value for money and protect the investment in its housing stock. If the Council does not maintain its housing assets adequately, the rental income received may potentially diminish.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

Quarterly procurement report submitted to the Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel (TLIP) provides a summary of our main contracts for maintaining our housing stock, including the heating services contract. In addition, the requirement also forms part of the monthly report to the involved tenant's Repairs and Maintenance Group (RMG).

Public Sector Equality Duty

The services of the contractor will be procured via the contract framework set up by South East Consortium (SEC), a not for profit organisation. The SEC complies with the government's agenda to achieve efficiencies through the adoption of good practice in the procurement of goods and services, including compliance with the equality act.

Climate Emergency – *This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030*

Housing Services are committed to identifying and working with contractors that share the Council's vision and values. During the life of the contract, the contractor will be expected to work collaboratively with us to deliver continuous improvements that will

assist with realising the Councils objective of achieving a Carbon Neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030.

List of Background Papers

Procurement business case – heating services.

Contact Martin Forster	Service Housing, Income and Assessments
Telephone 0118 974 3774	Email martin.forster@wokingham.gov.uk



In accordance with the Procurement and Contracts Rules and Procedures (PCRP) (see section 3.1.1): a formal business case is required for any procurement with a total value above £50,000. The level of approval required for the Business Case depends on the type of procurement and total ascertainable value of the contract, as indicated in the table below:

1. Level of Approval

State “YES” in the applicable box at either Level 1, Level 2 or Level 3:

Type of Procurement	Level 1		Level 2		Level 3	
	Assistant Director & Director Approval		Executive Approval		Full Council Approval	
Goods and Services	£50k – £500k		> £500k	✓	Annual Value >£5m or TAV >£25m (if capital >£15m)	
Schedule 3 Services	£50k – £663k		> £663k			
Works	£50k – £4,733k		> £4,733k			

NOTE:

Executive meetings (Level 2) are held each month, but the submission of papers is strictly controlled, resulting in a cycle of at least 6-weeks – speak to Democratic Services for assistance.

Full Council meetings (Level 3) are held every second month and submission of papers is controlled as per Executive meetings – speak to Democratic Services for assistance.

2. Project Information

Project / Contract Title	Heating Services Contract
Project / Contract Description	<p>The contract scope covers domestic and commercial heating services, including annual statutory requirements for completion of Landlord Gas Safety Record (LGSR) inspections, and maintenance / servicing and repair of all gas and electrical heating installations in our housing properties.</p> <p>The contract also includes the installation of new heating systems as needed to replace any existing systems that are beyond on-going economical maintenance and repair.</p> <p>The scope also includes the service requirements for our estate of renewable heating technology assets.</p>
Expected Start Date & Duration (months)	Expected Start Date: 1 st September 2021 Initial Contract Term: 24 Months
Any Extension/s Allowed (months) <i>(e.g.: 1 x 24m / 1 x 12m + 1 x 12m)</i>	Optional Contract Extension: 1 x 36 Months Total Contract Duration Available: 60 Months

Total Ascertainable Value	Annual Value: Circa £500k p.a. Total Ascertainable Value (TAV) for 60 Month Total Contract Term: Circa £2.5m
Procurement Advice <i>Provide a short summary of the advice or attach/append any written advice you have obtained, including the type of procedure, Brexit considerations and if the BC is for setting up of DPS or framework agreement.</i>	Central Procurement will be notified of the procurement project as per internal guidelines for procurements. The new contract will be procured via a public procurement framework to ensure compliance with Public Contracts Regulations (PCR) 2015.
Finance Advice <i>Confirm budget availability and add any comments relevant to the budget.</i>	N/A
Source of Funding <i>(revenue or capital or specified other)</i>	Housing Revenue Account; split between Revenue and Capital. Estimated annual values: Revenue: £250k; Capital: £250k.
If procurement is for software, specify outcome of your consultation with IMT and/or Business Change	N/A

3. Project Justification

Link to Service or Corporate Objectives:

This section is intended to demonstrate that the project aligns with the Council's Corporate Delivery Plan and Community Vision. It should provide an overview of how the project is relevant to the Council's objectives and illustrate how the project supports the directorate's business plan and key strategies, as well as considerations about:

- *Equality Impact*
- *Social Value*
- *Sustainability*
- *Climate Crisis*

The new contract will assist the Council with achieving its objectives against key strategic priorities:

Safe, Strong Communities.

A Clean and Green Borough.

The contract will assist with delivering the Housing Asset Management main objective: through effective, active asset management to have a high quality, well maintained, sustainable housing stock that meets a locally determined standard, provides the type of accommodation our tenants want, in the locations and environments they would like to live.

The contract will also assist the Council with delivering against its commitments in the Corporate Delivery Plan 2020-2024, Supporting our Community Vision for Wokingham Borough to be:

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

Project Specific Objectives, Appraisal of Options and Project Timetable:

Use this section to list the business goals and objectives that are to be delivered by the project and how the project will address them. Provide justification of any decision to outsource the services/works as opposed to deliver them in-house. The analysis should include an appraisal of any alternative options that have been considered, including the option not to proceed or not to utilise an existing contract, and the reasons for selecting the current course of action. An outline of the expected project timescales, including all key events, should be provided.

The Service manages 2768 properties with heating systems that require regular inspections, maintenance and servicing. It is the Council's intention to retain these properties for the foreseeable future and maintenance and repair of the properties, including their heating systems will maintain the value of the stock as well as providing the appropriate comfort and convenience for our tenants.

The current heating services contract is approaching the end of its initial contract term and the Housing Asset team have decided not to exercise its option to extend the contract, preferring to end the contract at a natural break point. With the Council declaring a climate emergency and announcing their objective to be a carbon neutral Borough by 2030, it is the belief of the Housing Asset team that the current contractual arrangements, and the existing contractors current lack of in-house expertise and experience for installing, maintaining, servicing and repairing renewable heating technology assets is inadequate to facilitate the service requirements in line with the anticipated growth of our estate of renewable heating assets. Therefore, the Housing Asset team has decided to retender the contract to ensure that our estate of traditional heating systems and the full range of renewable heating technologies are placed with a suitably qualified and competent contractor.

The new contract will maintain the existing traditional heating systems in line with the Council's statutory requirements as a landlord; provide new boilers and heating installations when the existing installations reach the end of their economic life, meeting the statutory obligation on the Council to provide a form of heating in its residential properties; and meet statutory requirements regarding Landlords' obligations for annual gas safety inspections for those properties that have gas heating. For reference, a table showing the details of properties with gas heating and other heating asset types is provided below.

Property Estate	Total No. Properties	Heating Assets by Type				
		Gas Heating	Mechanical Ventilation Heat Recovery (MVHR)	Solar PV	Air Source Heat Pump (ASHP)	Electric Heating
Berry Brook Homes	95	95 (100%)	95 (100%)	58 (61.05%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Loddon Homes	75	16 domestic, 5 plants	1 (1.33%)	10 domestic 3 block	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
HRA (domestic only)	2598	2517 (96.88%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.03%)	28 (1.07%)	53 (2.04%)

As renewable heating technologies is an emerging sector that is expected to grow rapidly in the next five years, the Housing Asset team believe our renewable service requirements need to be placed with relevant subject matter experts at the soonest opportunity, to maximise the remaining timeframe to assist WBC with meeting its climate objectives by 2030. The service arrangements for renewables with our existing contractor does not add value, with the contractor sub-contracting the services for an admin cost. If the Housing Asset team extends the existing contract, an opportunity will be missed until the current contract is rebid again in 2024.

The new contract will be procured via a public procurement framework, and the new contract is expected to be in place for September 2021 in advance of the peak heating period in the winter.

Cost Benefit Analysis:

Use this section to illustrate the costs of the project and compare them with the benefits and savings to be delivered to determine if the project is worth pursuing. Capital Works business cases should include a financial feasibility assessment in terms of investment payback, return on investment or discounted cash flow value.

As specified above, the contract is required to ensure that the Council meets its statutory requirements as a Landlord, so a cost benefit analysis is not applicable for this business case.

Contract Management:

Use this section to explain the level of contract management that will be required, which Service will be managing the contract, what percentage of FTE hours will have to be dedicated of the management of the contract, name of the contract manager, if known at this stage.

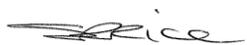
The senior specialist (Senior Building Surveyor) will act as the contract administrator and will be the principal decision maker for all technical matters. The Compliance Manager from the Housing Asset team will be responsible for overseeing the regular operational activities. A pre-start meeting will be held with the contractor before commencement of the contract and during the contract mobilisation period, update meetings / conference calls will be as required to ensure a smooth implementation and to establish working relations. Service performance review meetings will be held on a monthly basis until such time as the contract administrator is satisfied the frequency can be moved to quarterly, or another frequency at the discretion of the contract administrator. The main quorum for service performance review meetings will consist of the administrator, Compliance Manager and the contractors contract manager and technical representatives (as required). Regular service performance updates will be provided to key stakeholders, e.g., Assistant Director; Neighbourhoods and Communities, and our tenants that are represented by the Repairs and Maintenance Group (RMG) and the Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel (TLIP).

4. Approval

Please fill in the applicable fields according to the level of approval required.

Note: If Level-2 or 3 approval is required, the document should be signed by Assistant Director and Director at Level-1 first, and then presented to the Executive (and Full Council where appropriate) for final approval.

Level 1

Position	Name	Department	Signature
Assistant Director	Simon Price	Neighbourhoods and Communities	
Director	Keeley Clements	Communities, Insights and Change	

Level 2

NOTE: Level 1 approval must be completed first.

Please state the date of the relevant Executive meeting or Individual Executive Member Decision at which the Business Case has been approved.

Date of Executive meeting / approval	Item No
Executive Approval	

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TITLE	Home to School Transport Policy (inc. SEND)
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 29 July 2021
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Children's Services - Carol Cammiss
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Children's Services - Graham Howe

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

The purpose of this report is to:

1. Enable Members to review and approve the proposed new Travel Assistance Policies, noting the changes made following outcomes from Public Consultation carried out in Autumn 2020
2. Enable Members to agree any final amendments required prior to implementation of the new Policies from academic year commencing September 2022
3. Enable Members to review some of the ways in which the new proposed Travel Assistance aim to more effectively address key legal and statutory duties relating to Home to School Transport / Travel Assistance, whilst contributing to long-term financial viability and sustainability of the service
4. Provide Members with an overview and the supporting detail of outcomes from the public consultation on the proposed new Travel Assistance Policies, and updates to the proposed new Policies in the light of consultation feedback

The benefits to the community from effective Travel Assistance policies include:

1. To help enable all children and young people to fulfil their potential by facilitating and enabling access to learning and education, making an important contribution to the "Enriching Lives" strategic priority in the Wokingham Community Vision
2. To enable the Council to fulfil its legal and statutory duties to provide Travel Assistance to eligible children and young people in the borough

In addition, new policies for Travel Assistance aim to make an important contribution to the strategic priority "Changing the Way We Work For You" in the Wokingham Community Vision, by:

3. Putting in place policies and criteria which are clearer and easier for parents, carers and professionals to follow
4. Contributing to the substantial portfolio of work which aims to improve the long-term sustainability, quality and financial viability of Travel Assistance
5. Setting out an offer of Travel Assistance which is in line with best practice in local government

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive:

- 1) approve the two Travel Assistance policies (statutory school age, and Post-16);

- 2) approve implementation of the new Travel Assistance Policies from the academic year commencing September 2022

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

All Councils are required to periodically review their policies in relation to Home to School Transport (also known as “Travel Assistance”).

In the Spring and Summer of 2020, Wokingham Borough Council reviewed its current Home to School Transport (HST) policy, and approaches to provision of Travel Assistance for eligible children and young people in the Borough.

Further to engagement with a cross-party representative group of elected Members and key stakeholders including representatives from the Parent Carer Forum SEND Voices Wokingham in Spring 2020, and from a review of practice and policies in other local authority areas, a review of Wokingham’s current HST policy was carried out.

Over the course of the Summer 2020, two Travel Assistance policies were drafted as potential updates to the current Home to School Transport policy: one covering Travel Assistance for statutory school age children, the other for young people aged post-16 including young people with SEND.

The Policies were drafted following extensive consultation with professionals across relevant service areas, and engagement with parents and carers of children and young people with SEND through focus groups in the Summer of 2020.

A formal public consultation on the proposed new Travel Assistance Policies was carried out between 18th September and 6th November 2020 in order to get views from service users, professionals working across different services for children, young people and families in Wokingham, and Wokingham residents, on the proposed new policies and how best to make affordable improvements to the service.

This report:

- Enables Members to review the proposed new Travel Assistance Policy for Statutory School Age Children (Appendix 1) and Travel Assistance Policy for young people post-16 including young people with SEND (Appendix 2)
- Summarises how the Travel Assistance Policies have been developed in the light of relevant legal and legislative constraints; the review undertaken at the start of the Policy development process; and consultation with professionals and elected Members
- Provides a summary of the key points from the public consultation on the proposed new Policies, with the full Public Consultation Report (Appendix 3)
- Summarises how the Travel Assistance Policies have been updated in the light of outcomes from formal public consultation
- Provides Members with an Equality Impact Assessment relating to the proposed new Travel Assistance Policies (Appendix 4)

BACKGROUND

The Council is committed to ensuring it continues to meet its statutory responsibilities for Travel Assistance, enabling children and young people to access their place of education safely and ready to learn. The Council acknowledges that without this service some of the borough's children and young people would be unable to access their school or college, especially those who have significant additional needs, or deemed extremely vulnerable.

Prior to the development of new proposed policies for HST and Travel Assistance for young people aged 16+ with SEND, the Council has received feedback on the provision of its home to school transport and travel assistance services. It is clear from this feedback that whilst many receive a very good service, there are some areas for improvement which the Council have an opportunity to address by updating its policies in these areas.

At the same time, the costs of providing home to school transport and travel assistance are extremely high and have increased significantly in recent years, and much of this cost has to be met by the Council's core budget. This affects the Council's ability to provide high quality services to all Wokingham residents, and creates significant additional pressures on its budget.

Throughout the process of reviewing and developing proposed new policies for Travel Assistance, the Council has taken into account statutory guidance and legislative requirements, and the consultation on statutory guidance for local authorities on home to school travel and transport for children of compulsory school age published by the Department for Education.

The Council has also carried out an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) focusing on the proposals featured in the public consultation, attached as Appendix 4.

BUSINESS CASE

Analysis of issues: factors which drive the need for new Travel Assistance Policies

Legal and Statutory Duties in relation to Home To School Transport/Travel Assistance

Local authorities are subject to several legal and legislative requirements in relation to provision of Travel Assistance for children and young people to access places of education and learning, including those set out in the following legislation and statutory instruments:

- The Education Act 1996
- The Education and Inspections Act 2006
- The Equality Act 2010
- The School Admissions Code
- The School Travel Regulations 2007
- The Care Act 2014
- Education Funding Regulations
- The Children and Families Act 2014
- The School Standards and Framework Act 1998

- Statutory guidance from the Department for Education

By way of summary, the legal and statutory requirements around Travel Assistance relate to:

- Legal responsibilities and duties on local authorities to provide Travel Assistance
- Specifics relating to eligibility criteria as described in law, relating to factors such as walking distances from home to places of education and how these are to be calculated; criteria relating to assessment of the safety of walking routes; responsibilities around safeguarding children and young people in receipt of Travel Assistance (which extend to responsibilities of the local authority in terms of relationships with providers); and specific duties and eligibility criteria relating to Travel Assistance for children and young people with SEND
- Terms and conditions under which discretionary Travel Assistance can be provided, and circumstances under which local authorities are able to apply charges for Travel Assistance (e.g. for young people post 16).

This means that local authorities' provision of Travel Assistance is subject to several complex legal, legislative and statutory drivers and constraints. The work undertaken to develop new Travel Assistance Policies has been carried out in the light of these; the Policies aim to provide creative but fair and lawful solutions to the need to meet legal obligations relating to Travel Assistance, whilst laying the foundations for a new approach to providing Travel Assistance which will improve the sustainability and long-term financial viability of the service (see further detail in the Demographics and Demand section below, and the Financial Implications section towards the end of the report).

Demographics and Demand

Demand for Travel Assistance for children and young people to access places of education has increased in recent years, largely as a result of demographic changes such as local population growth.

The Office of National Statistics and Public Health Berkshire data Observatory estimate the population of Wokingham to be approximately 168,000-170,000 currently (compared with 165,000 in 2018), and growing at a rate of just under 1% per year.

Wokingham is a young borough: estimates show that approximately one third of Wokingham's population (over 50,000) is aged 0-24.

The proportion of children and young people in Wokingham with Special Educational Needs and or Disabilities (SEND) has grown significantly in the past three years and continues to grow more significantly than the overall rate of population growth. Research carried out as part of the Wokingham SEND Strategy showed the population of children and young people with SEND is growing at a rate of approximately 8% annually, compared with an average 4% increase in the child and young person population.

The same research showed that SEND needs are increasing, particularly in relation to Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Social and Emotional Mental Health (SEMH), and complexity of needs is also increasing. During the 2019-20 Academic Year there was a 21% rise in the number of children and young people with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) compared with the previous year, and numbers of children and young

people with SEND who require SEND support but do not require an EHCP have also grown substantially (a greater than 8.5% increase between 2017 and 2020, with numbers of children and young people with SEN Support in state-funded Wokingham schools rising from approx. 2,200 in 2017 to 2,400 in 2020).

These increases in the numbers of children and young people with SEND and in need of SEN support have driven significant increases in demand for Travel Assistance and, as a result, expenditure on Travel Assistance. The historical lack of sufficient in-borough provision for children and young people with SEND, combined with growth in demand for SEND services and support, has driven increases in expenditure on Travel Assistance for children and young people with SEND travelling to out of borough educational placements. Approximately 70% of the FY21-22 net opening budget for Home to School Transport / Travel Assistance of £3.8m is indicatively allocated to children and young people with SEND.

Steer from cross-party representative group of elected Members

Initial engagement with a cross-party representative group of elected Members in the Spring of 2020 provided officers with a clear steer on areas which new policies for Travel Assistance could look to address.

Members asked officers to consider the potential for clarifying the policy wording and eligibility criteria; explore opportunities for strengthening Wokingham’s approach to independent travel; and ensure that the Council’s provision of Travel Assistance was in line with its legal responsibilities and statutory duties, whilst also being financially viable and sustainable.

These considerations helped to inform the development of the consultation draft versions of the Policies, and also the questions put forward to the public in the consultation document to assist with further work to develop and complete the Policies.

How the proposed new Travel Assistance Policies respond to these drivers

Table 1 below sets out some examples of legal/statutory requirements and constraints affecting the Council’s approach to Travel Assistance, alongside examples of how the proposed new Travel Assistance Policies aim to address these to ensure statutory duties will be met more efficiently and effectively in future.

Table 1

Examples of legal and statutory requirements	Examples of how the proposed Travel Assistance Policies address these more effectively
Local authorities must apply and adhere to Travel Assistance eligibility criteria described in legislation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The new Policies set out eligibility criteria clearly, for the benefit of parents and carers making Travel Assistance applications, and to assist professionals in carrying out fair, legal and appropriate assessments of Travel Assistance applications
Local authorities are permitted (and in some circumstances legally obligated) to review Travel Assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Both Policies state that Travel Assistance will be reviewed on an annual basis, in order to ensure that Travel Assistance provided for any given academic year is appropriate to a child and/or young person’s needs, and that

<p>arrangements, in order to ensure that these are appropriate to a child/young person's circumstances and needs.</p>	<p>provision of Travel Assistance continues to be subject to satisfaction of appropriate eligibility criteria. The statutory school age Policy makes it clear that one potential outcome of annual reviews of Travel Assistance could be that parents/carers would need to reapply for Travel Assistance. The post-16 Travel Assistance Policy makes it clear that "all post 16 students need to re-apply for travel assistance each year, even where they are on a continuing or multiple year course. Please note that provision of travel assistance in a previous year is no guarantee of entitlement to ongoing provision of Travel Assistance"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Two Policies (one for statutory school age children, one for young people post-16) have been developed to help parents, carers and professionals to more easily identify and apply the relevant eligibility criteria to applications and assessments. This approach reflects feedback undertaken during the initial review of the current HST Policy that eligibility criteria were sometimes hard to identify within a single Policy that aimed to cover children and young people at all ages
<p>Local authorities are prevented by law from insisting that all children and young people make their own independent travel arrangements to access places of education and learning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Policies make a clear commitment to supporting children and young people to become independent, self-reliant travellers as far as possible, whilst accepting that what is possible in terms of "independent travel" will be different for all children and young people according to their needs and abilities - The Policies clarify what is meant by Independent Travel and provide details of the kind of support potential available to children and young people through Independent Travel Training (ITT) - The Policies clarify circumstances under which the Council has no legal duties to provide Travel Assistance
<p>Local authorities are legally prevented from charging for Travel Assistance for eligible children below the age of 16</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The post-16 Policy clarifies that young people aged 16+ eligible for Travel Assistance will have a charge applied as a contribution towards costs of provision, with discounts for low-income households - The Policies clarify the terms under which Travel Assistance can be purchased for children and young people who do not meet eligibility criteria - The statutory school age Travel Assistance Policy also clarifies the definition of

	Independent Travel and options in relation to Independent Travel Training (see row above)
The Local Authority must formally review its Policies relating to Travel Assistance and consult with the public on any proposed changes to Travel Assistance Policies	- Sections 3 and 4 below set out the details of the Public Consultation carried out on the proposed new Policies and outcomes from this consultation (Section 3), and how feedback from the Public Consultation have been incorporated into the draft Travel Assistance Policies presented in this report for discussion and approval (Section 4).

Outcomes from Public Consultation

Consultation Drafts of the proposed new policies for Travel Assistance for statutory school age children and for young people post-16 including young people with SEND, were made available to the public via the Council's public consultation webpage on September 18th 2020 for a 7-week consultation period. Members were previously presented with these Consultation Drafts in a report to the Executive in March 2021.

The purpose of the public consultation was to enable Wokingham residents, professionals, families and current service users, to read the proposed new Travel Assistance policies and give their views on any or all aspects.

To assist in this process, a Consultation Document was also prepared. This consultation document set out several questions for respondents, which focused on:

- The most significant differences between the proposed new Travel Assistance policies and the current HST policy
- Questions and prompts designed to help the council understand public attitudes and perspectives on various elements of Travel Assistance provision
- Questions designed to help the Council understand public opinion around opportunities to improve its Travel Assistance offer, and improve the long-term sustainability and financial viability of the service

The consultation document also enabled respondents to feed back any views they had on any aspects of the consultation drafts of the two Travel Assistance policies.

The full consultation report showing details of responses from all 76 respondents is attached as Appendix 3.

About the respondents to the public consultation

76 members of the public responded to the formal public consultation on the Council's website between 18th September and 6th November 2020.

Ahead of this date, schools and current service users were notified of the consultation, given appropriate links to the consultation page, and notice of the closing dates. Officers also raised awareness of the consultation through e-newsletters and flagged the consultation in meetings with key stakeholders in the build up to the consultation.

The consultation was promoted through the Council’s social media platforms, professional networks including schools, the Parent Carer Forum (SEND Voices Wokingham) network, and the Children with Additional Needs (CAN) Network.

The Council directly contacted service users and sent reminder communications throughout the consultation period.

89% of these were parents of school age children. 77% of respondents reported that their child/children had transport/travel assistance provided by the council; 36% of respondents have transport/travel assistance provided by a parent or carer.

In addition to responses via the public consultation portal, the Council have also received feedback from:

- SEND Voices Wokingham (Wokingham’s Parent Carer Forum), Additionally, two focus groups with parents and carers were facilitated by SEND Voices Wokingham (in August and November 2020) and attended by officers developing the consultation drafts of the Travel Assistance Policies
- A formal written response from the Liberal Democrat Group (submitted previously to the Executive as part of the March 2021 report on Travel Assistance Policies)

Feedback from Consultation on options to change discretionary Travel Assistance

A **headline summary** of the key questions and responses relating to options to change discretionary Travel Assistance is set out in Table 2 below:

Table 2

Theme	Summary of questions	Summary of responses
Ceasing discretionary transport for children under the age of 5	The council has the option to cease to provide free HST to an infant or primary school for a children under the age of five, where a child is deemed as eligible once they turn 5 years of age – to what extent do you Agree or Disagree with this approach?	64% of respondents Disagreed with ceasing to provide discretionary transport to under 5s who are deemed as eligible once they turn 5. 66% of respondents said they Agreed that the Council should provide discretionary transport to under 5s deemed eligible for transport at the age of 5.
Ceasing discretionary transport for a child turning 8 years	Wokingham has the option to cease to provide HST at the end of the term in which a child turns 8, where the child has been eligible due to living more than 2 miles but less than 3 miles from their nearest school. To what extent do you Agree or Disagree with this Approach?	81% Disagreed with this approach, and 78% said they Agreed that the Council should continue to provide HST to the end of the academic year in which a child turns 8, where the child has been eligible due to living more than 2 miles but less than 3 miles from their nearest school.
Continuing provision for young people aged 17-18	The Council could continue to provide home to school/college travel assistance for young people ages 17-18 who meet	72% Agreed provision should continue under these circumstances; 75% Disagreed that the Council take up the

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

In addition to giving members of the public, service users and professionals the opportunity to give views on specific options as set out in the table above, the consultation also gave respondents an opportunity to give their views on a small number of key issues relating to home to school or college transport, in order to help with further development of the policies and to enable the Council to understand public opinion and perspectives on opportunities to help strengthen the service and improve its overall sustainability and viability.

These subjects included:

- Independent travel
- Collection points
- Use of travel allowances
- Reasonable steps to limit spend on the service
- Existing benefits being taken into account during the assessment process

A summary of the feedback received in response to these thematic areas is set out below:

Feedback on Independent Travel

Questions were asked in the consultation document around Independent Travel, in order to better understand the opportunities, barriers and support required to enable children and young people to be as independent as possible and travel independently to their place of learning where it is possible for them to do so.

A summary of responses to these questions showed:

1. In terms of a child's aspiration to travel independently, 51% said that their aspirations for independent travel included sharing school transport with other children and young people; 48% reported aspiring to being able to carry their own bags and board and alight a vehicle on their own; 45% reported their aspiration as being to travel without a parent or carer in attendance, and 42% reported an aspiration to access transport from a collection point. 31% reported an aspiration to undertake a single journey/route independently using public transport.
2. The greatest benefits to a child or young person who is successfully supported to travel independently were reported as being increased self-esteem and confidence (81%), reduced reliance on family members to assist with travel needs (53%), and improved access to employment or vocational opportunities (43%). The biggest benefits to the family of a young person who is successfully supported to travel

independently on public transport were reported as being family members having time to do their own thing (58%), less need for adults to accompany the young person (49%), reduced dependency financially (47%) and opportunities to access community services (41%).

3. The greatest barriers to independent travel via public transport were reported as limited awareness of danger or being unable to keep safe (54%), not being able to manage situations that aren't planned (44%), risk of getting lost or missing the stop (26%) and being able to access services due to poor public transport links (25%).
4. When respondents were asked if a child or young person has the potential to become an independent traveller and would benefit from independent travel training, should they be expected to undertake that training, a total of 59% agreed with this (42% Strongly Agreed, 17% Agreed). 26% Disagreed.
5. 73% of respondents thought that collection points for some children and young people would be beneficial; when asked how far it is reasonable to ask a child or young person to travel to a collection point, accompanied by an adult as necessary, 46% said the distance should be based on an individual needs assessment. In terms of suitable collection points, Bus Stops were reported as being the most suitable (67%), followed by suitable road-side locations (44%) and local points of interest e.g. local shops (34%) and near to local schools and nurseries (33%).
6. When asked about whether the Council should encourage more young people and families to use a travel allowance to make their own arrangements to travel to school or college, 31% neither agreed nor disagreed with this approach. 38% disagreed, and 28% agreed. The biggest benefits of travel allowances were cited as flexibility to access after school activities (48%), ability to arrange travel around work commitments (43%), ability to arrange travel around family/caring responsibilities (37%) and greater control over travel arrangements (32%). The top three barriers to use of a travel allowance were reported as public transport links not being suitable (69%), distance to school or college being too far (48%) and the value of the travel allowance being too low (38%).
7. It is worth noting that feedback received during the focus group sessions with parents and carers also included points relating to the potential for and challenges around independent travel. From these sessions it was clear that "independence" means different things for different children and young people according to their needs and the challenges they face; independence is an aspiration for many children, young people, their parents and carers, but support to children young people and families is needed if those aspirations are to be realised – both in terms of training, some forms of travel assistance, and a partnership/coproduction approach to ensuring that children and young people with SEND are able to access their place(s) of learning.

Feedback on taking reasonable steps to limit spend on the service

The consultation document flagged the level of expenditure on home to school or college transport for children and young people with special educational needs or disabilities and asked respondents whether they agreed that the Council should take reasonable steps to limit spend on this service. 66% disagreed with this approach, and 12% agreed.

However, the full consultation document report attached as Appendix 3 sets out several suggestions from respondents about how the Council could take reasonable steps to limit spend on this service.

Feedback on taking account of existing benefits into account when assessing transport needs

The consultation document proposed the question:

“Children and young people may be receiving Disability Living Allowance, a Personal Independence Payment, or another form of travel benefit or concession. Ordinarily the purpose of this benefit is to provide support with travel and access to services and activities. With this in mind, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following: “Existing travel benefits or support should be one of the factors taken into consideration when assessing if a young person over the age of 16 needs additional support with travel to their education placement.” 41% agreed with this approach, 41% disagreed.

Updates to Travel Assistance Policies following formal consultation

Table 3 below provides an overview of the key changes to the Travel Assistance Policies following the formal public consultation:

Table 3

Feedback on Policies from consultation	Amendments and updates made to the Policies as a result
Some sections of the Policies appear to be duplicated / in an inappropriate section of the Policy	Duplications have been removed; structure of the Policies have been updated to ensure the Policies are easier to navigate
Links to points of contact for the Travel Assistance Team should be included in the Policies	Links and appropriate contact details will be included in the published version of the policies
The timetable for applications needs to be clarified and confirmed in the Policies	A web link to the timetable for applications and process for review of allocations of Travel Assistance will be included in the published versions of the Travel Assistance Policies
Clarification is required around eligibility criteria for young people post-16 with SEND in relation to Travel Assistance	Travel Assistance eligibility criteria for young people post 16 with SEND has been set out in a clear Section in the post-16 policy; clarifications have been made around eligibility at sixth form (aged 16-18) and post-19
Consultees requested that the final Policies make it easier for parents, carers and professionals to identify the appropriate eligibility criteria for Travel Assistance	Two Policies (one for statutory school age children, one for young people post-16) have been developed to help parents, carers and professionals to identify and apply the relevant eligibility criteria to applications and assessments. Eligibility criteria is set out in clear sections of each of the proposed new Policies. This approach also reflects feedback

	<p>undertaken during the initial review of the current HST Policy that eligibility criteria were sometimes hard to identify within a single Policy that aimed to cover children and young people at all ages</p>
<p>Consultees were not in favour of withdrawing discretionary Travel Assistance for children under the age of 5, or at the end of the term in which a child turns 8, where the child has been eligible due to living more than 2 miles but less than 3 miles from their nearest school.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposed new policies retain the option to provide discretionary Travel Assistance under these circumstances, but stress that the Council does not have legal obligations to do so • Work undertaken on the Equality Impact Assessment (see Appendix 4) showed that Policy terms which withdrew completely the option for this discretionary Travel Assistance could have a negative differential impact on the Equality Act 2010 protected characteristic “Age” • Additionally, data modelling showed the numbers of children and young people who would be adversely affected by the decision to withdraw completely this discretionary provision are small; costs of provision under these specific circumstances are <£4k (according to current service user data)
<p>Further clarification required about what is meant by Independent Travel and potential support available to support Independent Travel</p>	<p>Definitions of Independent Travel and examples of support in the form of Independent Travel Training are now included in the updated Travel Assistance Policies</p>
<p>Some consultees disagreed that the Council should take into account other benefits (such as provision of a motability vehicle) when assessing eligibility for Travel Assistance for young people with SEND post-19.</p>	<p>The post-16 Policy wording clarifies this point as follows:</p> <p>“Where there is a 'Motability' vehicle available to the student, but a decision has been made not to use the 'Motability' vehicle to support the student to reach their education placement, we would normally expect the carer/student to make their own appropriate alternative arrangements. If this is not possible/reasonable, further details will need to be provided to inform the decision-making process.”</p> <p>The Policy also clarifies:</p> <p>“Please note that we would not generally consider work or childcare commitments</p>

	as an exceptional reason for travel assistance to be provided for young people with SEND aged 16+.”
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Timeline for implementation

The timeline for implementation of new Travel Assistance Policies needs to reflect statutory requirements to have Home to School Transport/Travel Assistance Policies in Place at least 6 weeks before the closing deadline for applications for School Places.

In the light of this requirement, it is recommended that, subject to Member approval, the new Travel Assistance Policies apply to all applications for Travel Assistance taking effect from the start of Academic Year September 2022, in order to ensure that Policies are in place to align with statutory timescales for school place applications, and to give parents and carers appropriate time to consider the terms of the new Travel Assistance Policies in the context of any applications for school places.

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.

Expenditure on Home to School Transport / Travel Assistance

Table 4 shows the profile of HTST usage (*financial year 2021-22*), and identifies that the largest customer group is Secondary mainstream, followed by children and young people with SEND. It is relevant to note that although children and young people with SEND account for just under 40% of HST/Travel Assistance customers, this utilisation accounts for approximately 70% of the total budget for HST/Travel Assistance. It is also relevant to note that in terms of any modelled/forecast budget pressures, the potential for increased demand relating to SEND Travel Assistance is by far the most significant driver.

Table 4:

	Primary	Secondary	SEND	Total
Numbers	80	363	294	737

The Council is undertaking modelling as part of its Community Transport Programme to work through scenarios relating to expenditure on Travel Assistance in the current financial year and across the lifetime of the current MTFP. The Programme is also progressing several strands of work relating to Travel Assistance procurement, administration and operations, in order to ensure a quality service is provided and costs are controlled and reduced. As part of this work it is estimated that £50k efficiency savings arising directly from implementation of the new Policies.

Efficiency Savings arising directly from the proposed new Policies

In terms of the £50k efficiencies arising directly from implementation of the Policies, these relate to:

- More effective adherence to Policy eligibility criteria, terms and conditions

- Systematic annual reviews of Travel Assistance support to ensure that Travel Assistance is appropriate and arrangements do not automatically “rollover” across academic years without regard to eligibility criteria

Members are asked to note that validation work is being carried out as part of the delivery of the Community Transport Programme. This validation work will progress and is monitored through the governance arrangements of the Community Transport Programme and will be informed by updates on delivery of the SEND Innovation and Improvement Programme. In terms of ensuring the validation work and progress with delivery is monitored effectively, the co-sponsor of the SEND Innovation and Improvement Programme is also a workstream lead for the Community Transport Programme, and the sponsor of the Community Transport Programme will be a member of the SEND Innovation and Improvement Board from its first meeting in September 2021.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£0		
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	(£50k)		Revenue
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	(£50K)		Revenue

Other Financial Information

The efficiencies identified form part of the Community Transport Review arrangements within which other savings and efficiencies are identified. The policy changes contained within the proposed Travel Assistance Policies provide the foundation for other activity and/or actions that both enhance the offer to children & young people and deliver savings. An example of such is that the proposed policies provide the ability to offer Independent Travel Training as appropriate to young people with SEND in order to meet both their Home to School or Post 16 Transport needs, but also their skills in relation to their transition to adulthood whilst achieving savings against the Home To School Transport budget.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

The work on developing new Home to School Transport and Travel Assistance Policies forms part of the broader work on the Community Transport Programme.

The policies have been developed with input from stakeholders across Council Departments and services, in order to work through the interdependencies between these proposed new policies, and other council policies and services, and assess the impact of the new policies on a range of council services and processes.

Service areas engaged in work to date include:

- School admissions policy and practice
- The Council’s SEND team
- The Corporate Transport Unit
- Finance
- Democratic Services

- Commissioning
- Children’s Services: Learning, Achievement and Partnerships
- Members of the Community Transport Programme team

The wording of the consultation draft policies, consultation document and recommendations to Members in this report reflect best endeavours to assess the implications of the proposed new policy terms for services across the Council.

As set out in the Financial Implications Section on this report, the proposed new Travel Assistance Policies have been developed in the context of the Community Transport Programme, but also relate to the SEND Innovation and Improvement Programme. In practical terms, this means that development of these Policies has been shaped, informed and steered through engagement with stakeholders of each of these two major programmes – including professionals working across education, health, social care, children’s and adults services, the Corporate Transport Unit, finance and corporate planning and transformation

Public Sector Equality Duty

A full Equality Impact Assessment has been developed in parallel with the Travel Assistance Policy for children aged 5-16, and Travel Assistance Policy for young people aged 16+ with SEND. This work has been done to ensure that the Policies have been developed with appropriate regard to the public sector Equality Duty throughout the policy development process. An initial Equality Impact Assessment was carried out on the consultation draft versions of the new policies; outcomes from this Assessment also helped to inform the consultation document and questions put to the general public, in order to better understand the likely impact on equality and diversity issues that may arise if the policies were to be taken forward into implementation. The Full Equality Impact Assessment is attached as Appendix 4 to this report.

Climate Emergency – This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030

The Travel Assistance policies aim to make a positive contribution to the Council's efforts to tackle the climate emergency and achieve its ambition of becoming a carbon neutral Borough by 2030. Examples include:

- The detailed references to "Independent Travel" and Independent Travel Training (ITT) as a possible option for Travel Assistance aim to help enable children and young people to travel to school or college independently as far as possible - for example being supported to make their way to school other than by car (e.g. walking/cycling, potentially with assistance), which has the potential to reduce the need for individualised transport by car
- The Travel Assistance Policies sit within the Community Transport Programme and are key enablers of several strands of work which have the potential to make a positive contribution towards carbon neutrality. For example, the potential use (where appropriate) of "collection points" and optimising route mapping (to find the most efficient transport routes and reduce the amount of transport by motor vehicle, and therefore reduce carbon emissions), and procurement (including options around more carbon-friendly modes of transport including electric vehicles)

- Fare-paying options and discretionary sale of un-filled spaces is designed to maximise utilisation of existing group transport, contributing to a reduction in individual transport by car and associated carbon emissions

List of Background Papers

- Appendix 1: proposed new Travel Assistance Policy for statutory school aged children
- Appendix 2: proposed new Travel Assistance Policy for young people post-16 including young people with SEND
- Appendix 3: Report on outcomes from formal public consultation on consultation drafts of the proposed new Travel Assistance Policies
- Appendix 4: Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) on proposed new Travel Assistance Policies

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**Home to School Travel Assistance Policy
for children resident in Wokingham aged
5 to 16, including children and young
people with Special Educational Needs
and/or Disabilities**

Academic year 2022/23

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1. Principles

It is the responsibility of parents to ensure that their children regularly attend school. This includes making any necessary travel arrangements, except where there is a duty on the local authority to do so.

This policy sets out Wokingham Borough Council's responsibilities and commitment to meeting the home to school Travel Assistance needs of eligible children and young people (including those with special educational needs and disabilities) who are resident in Wokingham Borough and of compulsory school age (5-16).

Arrangements for young people of sixth form age and above are set out in a separate policy. Parents are referred to the Post 16 travel assistance policy which can be found at:

[Link will be included in published version]

The Council is committed to promoting children and young people's independence, social, and life skills essential for their preparation for adulthood. These goals underpin our Home to School Travel Assistance Policy because, where possible, children and young people, including those with special educational needs and/or disability, will be encouraged and supported to travel independently.

This approach helps to deliver our Community Vision and Strategic Priorities:

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

Parents are legally responsible to ensure their child's regular attendance at school. However, for a small number of children who are classed as eligible children, as defined in Schedule 35B Education Act 1996, Wokingham Borough Council has a duty to ensure that suitable Travel Assistance is provided, where necessary, to facilitate their attendance at school.

A parent will have a defense in law against a prosecution by a local authority for their child's non-attendance at school in cases where the local authority has failed to meet its duty to provide Travel Assistance for children classed as eligible for support.

THIS POLICY SUPERCEDES ALL PREVIOUS POLICIES, and will be regularly reviewed to take account of statutory duties and any changes to legislation.

2. The Council's Statutory Responsibilities

The Council has the responsibility to:

- Promote the use of sustainable travel and transport.
- Provide suitable travel assistance for eligible children.

The Council also has **discretion** to make transport arrangements, to subsidise travel costs, and to make appropriate charges, for young people who do not meet the criteria set out in the Act.

2.1 The duty to promote the use of sustainable travel and transport

The Council has a general duty to promote the use of sustainable travel and transport. This duty applies to children of compulsory school age who travel to receive education or training within the area - journeys to and from institutions where education or training is delivered¹.

The Education Act 1996 defines sustainable modes of travel as those that the local authority considers may improve the physical well-being of those who use them, environmental well-being, or a combination of the two.

This may include walking and cycling, as well as other modes of travel.

2.2 The duty to provide suitable travel assistance for eligible children

The Council has a duty under the Education Act 1996 (section 508B) to ensure that suitable Travel Assistance is provided, for eligible children, to facilitate their attendance at school².

'Eligible children' are defined in schedule 35 B of the Education Act 1996 as those children of compulsory school age (5 -16) for whom free travel assistance will be required.

The criteria specified within the Act is set out in sections below.

2.2.1 Statutory Walking Distances

The Council has a duty to provide free Travel Assistance for pupils whose homes are outside the statutory walking distance to the nearest suitable school:

- More than 2 miles (if the child is below the age of 8); or
- More than 3 miles (if the child or young person is aged 8 to 16)

2.2.2 Extended Rights

A child is **also** eligible for free home to school Travel Assistance if they are eligible for free school meals or if a parent with whom they live receives maximum Working Tax Credit and:

- they are aged 8 to 10 years, attend their nearest suitable school and it is more than 2 miles from their home; or
- they are aged 11 to 16 years, and attend one of their three nearest suitable schools which is between 2 and 6 miles from their home; or
- they are aged 11 to 16 years, attend a school that is between 2 and 15 miles from their home that their parents have chosen on the grounds of their religion or belief and, having regard to that religion or belief, there is no suitable school nearer to their home.

¹ Section 508A of the 1996 Education Act

² Sections 508B and 508C of the 1996 Education Act.

The introduction of Universal Credit has not changed the way eligibility for extended rights to home to school transport is determined. It will remain the case that children will be eligible for extended rights if they meet the criteria set out above.

2.2.3 Definitions

- a) “**Home**” is defined as the place where the child is usually resident. Where parents are separated or divorced, entitlement is assessed in terms of the home where the child spends the majority of their time. Where a child spends equal amounts of school days with each parent, travelling from two addresses to school, entitlement will be assessed from both addresses. Evidence may be required to support this assessment.
- b) “**Distances**” will be measured from where the home meets the public street, for example from the front gate to the nearest gate or point of access to the school premises, and by the shortest route along which a child, accompanied as necessary, may walk safely. As such, the route measured may include footpaths, bridleways, and other pathways, as well as recognised roads. Distances for Extended Rights are measured in the same way. The upper limits for Extended Rights transport are measured via the shortest road route.
- c) “A **suitable school**” is defined in the Act as the **nearest qualifying school** with places available that provides education appropriate to the age, ability and aptitude of the child, and any Special Educational Needs and/or Disability that the child may have.
- d) “**Nearest qualifying school**” means the nearest available and suitable school;
- e) “**Nearest**” is determined by straight line distance;
- f) “**Available**” means a place is available to be allocated to the child or young person at the time an application is made.

The local authority is entitled to determine which schools are “suitable” under the definitions described above. This will normally include all Community, Voluntary Controlled and Voluntary Aided Schools, and Academies, unless a child has an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) which specifies a requirement for a specialist setting. This includes schools in other local authority areas but does not include independent (fee-paying) schools, except in the case of approved independent special schools for children with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities, **where this is named in the child or young person’s EHCP.**

2.2.4 Qualifying Schools and Parental Preference

Qualifying schools are:

- community, foundation or voluntary schools;
- community or foundation special schools;
- non-maintained special schools including residential (where deemed appropriate);
- pupil referral units; and
- Academies, including free schools and University Technical Colleges (UTC).

For pupils with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities an independent school can also be a qualifying school where this is named on the child’s Education, Health and Care Plan (EHC Plan), or where it is the nearest of two or more schools named.

Where a child is enrolled at more than one school their eligibility for Travel Assistance will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Parental Preference

In most cases parents are responsible for making arrangements for their child to get to school. When choosing which schools to apply for, parents should consider how their child will access that school, as **there is no guarantee that your child will be eligible for home to school travel assistance**. If there is a school with places available which could meet the needs of your child, and is closer to your home than the school or schools listed in your application and/or which offer your child a place, the placement will be classed as Parental Preference, and you are unlikely to qualify for travel assistance.

The Local Authority will provide transport where it is necessary to do so in order for a child to attend a local school, as set out in law and explained in this policy. Whilst it is a requirement that parental preference is respected wherever possible in allocating school places, this requirement does not extend to guaranteed provision of transport. Where parents select alternative schools to their designated or nearest schools, they accept responsibility for making their own transport arrangements for their children. Information about transport is published in the School Admissions Guides for parents. If transport costs are a significant factor in choosing schools, and it is not clear whether they would qualify for transport assistance to a particular school, further advice can be provided.

Additional points on Parental Preference and Eligibility

In Wokingham parents are entitled to express a preference for a place in **up to 4 schools**. Places are allocated after consultation with the various schools.

Where parents have made an application for a place at their preferred school but the local authority has been unable to meet this or any of their preferences, the local authority will allocate a place with the most accessible school with available places. In such cases the school will be treated as a qualifying school for transport assistance, unless this is unnecessary because the school is within safe walking distance.

If a parent/carer does not name the nearest suitable school in their original application this may affect their eligibility for travel assistance.

The relevant educational setting in relation to an eligible child will be either a qualifying school or the place, other than a school, where they are receiving education.

2.2.5 Safe Walking Routes

Safe walking route means a route which is safe for the child to walk accompanied if necessary (appropriate to their age and nature of the route).

The Council has a duty to provide travel assistance for children who cannot be expected to walk to the nearest suitable school where there is no safe walking route under the relevant statutory walking distance, even if accompanied by an adult.

Routes are assessed to be safe using nationally recognized road safety guidelines. The Council must consider a range of risks, including rivers, ditches, traffic speed, fields of vision for the pedestrian and motorist, and whether the route would be considered safe if the child were accompanied by their parent/carer/guardian.

Please note that working arrangements and childcare issues will not normally be considered for the purposes of assessment to be reasons why a child cannot be accompanied.

2.2.6 Travel Assistance during the school day and accompaniment

a) Travel Assistance only for the compulsory part of the school day

The duty to provide Travel Assistance to eligible children does not extend beyond the compulsory part (i.e. the start and finish) of the school day.

The Council is not required to provide Travel Assistance to facilitate a child's part-time attendance; a child's trial placement; the child's attendance at extra-curricular activities, including breakfast clubs and after school activities or to attend medical appointments.

There is no duty to provide free transport if suitable alternative arrangements are provided by another body or organization, e.g. the school.

b) Accompaniment

In deciding whether a child is eligible for Travel Assistance for reasons of Special Educational Needs, Disabilities or mobility, or unsafe route eligibility, the Council has a responsibility to consider whether the child could reasonably be expected to walk if accompanied by an adult.

The general expectation is that a child will be accompanied by a responsible adult, usually a parent, carer or guardian, where necessary, unless it is not reasonable to expect the parent/carer/guardian to do so. **Working arrangements and childcare issues will not normally be considered to be reasons why a child cannot be accompanied.**

The Council promotes equality of opportunity for parents with Disabilities. Where a parent's Disability prevents them from accompanying their child along a walking route that would otherwise be considered unsafe without adult supervision, a reasonable adjustment might be to provide free home to school Travel Assistance for the child in question.

2.2.7 Timing of assessment of eligibility

At the point when eligibility to home to school Travel Assistance is considered, the prospect of being able to secure a place in an alternative (usually nearer) school must be a real one. This will usually be at the point the Admissions application was made, and not necessarily at the time that the Travel Assistance application was made.

A smaller number of cases will need to be considered during the school year (e.g. as a result of families moving to a new area within the borough).

Where granted, travel assistance will normally apply for the whole of the school year of entry, unless there are significant changes, such as the family moving house or the child changing school.

Any entitlement to Travel Assistance is subject to review on an annual basis.

If a pupil ceases to be eligible any change to provision made by the Council will be considered in the context of the potential impact on the child, in order to avoid disruption as far as possible.

Any future changes to Travel Assistance or school Admissions policies that affect entitlement to free travel for future entry years will not be applied retrospectively to pupils deemed to be eligible for and entitled to travel assistance under the terms of this Travel Assistance policy.

3. Arrangements and eligibility for those with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and/or a Disability or mobility problems (including temporary medical conditions)

3.1 Provision for pupils aged 5-16 with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities

The Council has a duty to provide Travel Assistance for pupils with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities who are registered at their nearest suitable school which is **within** the statutory walking distance from their home, where the child cannot reasonably be expected to walk to school because of their mobility problems or because of associated health and safety issues related to their Special Educational Needs and/or Disability.

In order to be able to assess whether a child with Special Educational Needs, a Disability or mobility problems can reasonably be expected to walk to school, we will ask a parent (or other person requesting free travel for the child) to provide information about the child.

Eligibility is needs based - there is no automatic entitlement to Travel Assistance just because a young person has a Special Educational Need or Disability, even where an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) has been issued. Applications will be considered on a case-by-case basis, and regularly reviewed, taking into account the child's Special Educational Needs and/or Disability, mobility or medical needs, as well as any exceptional circumstances.

Professionals supporting an application for Travel Assistance for a child or young person with SEND should provide evidence in support of why, in their professional opinion, it is not reasonable to expect the child to be able to walk to school, even if accompanied. Arrangements for Travel Assistance will be kept under review (annually at a minimum), in order to ensure any arrangements for Travel Assistance are still appropriate; fresh relevant supporting professional evidence may be required at each review.

Please note the Council has responsibility to ensure children's needs are addressed, and this includes providing travel assistance which facilitates the best opportunity for developing independence. Further details on this can be found in Section 4.4, "Supporting independence and the development of self-reliant travelers".

3.2 Short Term medical conditions

Consideration will be given by the Council to provide home to school Travel Assistance for pupils with temporary medical conditions.

If a child suffers from a temporary physical or medical condition that means they are unable to walk to school or travel in their usual manner, then Travel Assistance may be provided. Applications for transport on this basis must be supported by appropriate evidence from the medical profession. This may include, but is not restricted to, a letter from the child's consultant or other medical professional involved in the child's medical welfare.

If the child attends a school outside their designated area, parents will normally be required to pay a contribution towards the Council's costs. Travel Assistance provided on this basis will be reviewed every half term and may require submission of further evidence on completion of a review.

4. Types of Travel Assistance provided

The type of travel assistance offered will be for the Council to decide, taking into account the needs of the young person and the nature of the journey to be undertaken.

The assistance offered might include, but is not limited to:

- A parent consenting to use their car in return for payment of a mileage allowance;
- A parent consenting to a walking escort or responsible adult to escort the young person on public transport;
- Training and support to travel independently (see Independent Travel Training section [XX] below for more details);
- Free passes for children on public transport;
- Provision of a seat on a dedicated school bus or minibus, or
- A seat in a taxi, usually shared with one or more other pupils, where a pupil's needs require more personalised arrangements.

Applications received during the academic year will be dealt with as quickly as possible with transport arrangements being confirmed within ten working days wherever possible.

The Council will determine the means of travel assistance to be provided, to ensure the appropriate Travel Assistance is provided to meet the needs of the child and young person, through the most efficient use of resources.

4.1 'Suitable' Travel Assistance arrangements

For Travel Assistance to be suitable, it must be safe and reasonably stress free, to enable the child to arrive at school ready for a day of study. It would not normally require that a child makes several changes on public transport resulting in unreasonably long journey times.

Government Guidance advises that 'best practice' is that a child of primary school age should not travel for more than 45 minutes each way, and secondary school age - a maximum of 75 minutes - including any walking time.

It is desirable that journeys to special/specialist settings for children with complex needs should be shorter, but it is recognised that this may not be possible, especially where a child's special educational needs can only be addressed in an out-of-borough placement.

4.2 Mileage Allowance

A mileage allowance may be offered to parents/carers/guardians who are entitled to free home to school Travel Assistance, where this offers best value for money and the parents/carers/guardians agree to this.

This option may be of particular interest to you if:

- the child/young person has complex needs and you wanted to make your own travel arrangements;
- you wanted to combine the council's contribution with your personal finances, and other benefits or bursaries to provide the young person with bespoke travel assistance to meet their needs and fit in with your family circumstances;

- The child/young person is attending a course, all or part of which is outside the normal school day

If you were offered this form of Travel Assistance, it would be your responsibility to ensure that your travel arrangements enable the young person:

- to travel safely;
- to attend college regularly and on time;
- to be effectively educated once they arrive at school/college.

Attendance levels will be monitored and money will be reclaimed for non-attendance at school/college.

4.3 Pick-up Points

Eligibility for Travel Assistance is assessed based on the pupil's registered home address, but any transport provided may not necessarily be door to school gate. Local Authorities are able to use reasonable pick-up and drop-off points in appropriate individual cases. This may be a bus stop or other place where young people can safely wait for their vehicle. The Council aims to ensure there are safe and appropriate pick-up points within reasonable distance from schools and centres of population. Pupils can be required to walk to and from a central pick up and/or drop off point. This will usually be within one mile walking distance from the child's home, and total walking distance will be within the relevant statutory mile walking distances according to age and ability, and in the light of any identified Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities.

4.4 Supporting independence and the development of self-reliant travelers

The Council is committed to supporting all children and young people to achieve their maximum potential, and become as independent as they are able to be. The Council has responsibility to ensure that children's needs are addressed, and this includes providing Travel Assistance which facilitates the best opportunity for developing independence.

Where it is safe, appropriate and reasonable to do so, pupils with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities will be expected to walk, accompanied as necessary by a responsible adult, to and from a common pickup point near their home.

In order to better support young people to travel independently, the Council may offer Independent Travel Training in their Travel Assistance offer. The training will support the child/young person to learn the necessary skills to allow them to effectively deal with and resolve a range of scenarios that they might encounter when travelling on public transport. Under these circumstances, a trainer will travel and work with the young person on a 1:1 basis to ensure that the skills taught are understood and put in to practice independently. Training may include:

- Timetables (including time management).
- Orientation.
- Road Safety.
- Accessibility (access to transport, exits and purchasing tickets).
- Communication.
- Personal Safety (including what-if scenarios).
- Travel planning and preparation.

Where the Corporate Transport Unit identify that a child/young person may have the potential to be supported to travel independently through a travel training programme, a formal assessment will be undertaken to help create a personalised travel plan and identify what

training would be required. Training programmes last on average 12 weeks, and the young person will only complete the training once the trainer and the young person, together with their family/carer agree that they have gained the necessary skills to travel on public transport on their own.

Once a child/young person is deemed capable of independent travel no further Travel Assistance will be offered except in exceptional circumstances.

5. Residential Schools

Where children with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) require a residential placement following assessment, Travel Assistance may be offered as follows:

- Weekly borders: Travel Assistance between home and school once each direction each week
- Termly boarders: Travel Assistance between home and school at the beginning and end of each term and half term
- 52-week placements: Travel Assistance between home and school for eight visits throughout the year

Travel Assistance will not normally be provided to and from respite placements.

6. Travel Assistance for those not eligible for Free Home to School Transport under this policy

6.1 Children below statutory school age

There is no statutory duty to provide Travel Assistance for those under the age of 5. The Council may exercise its discretionary power and provide home to school Travel Assistance for children under the age of five on a case-by-case basis.

6.2 Fare-paying options for non-eligible children

If a pupil does not qualify for free Travel Assistance under this policy, a surplus seat may be purchased on an existing contract vehicle where a seat is available, subject to certain conditions. If the seat is required at any time in the future by a pupil entitled to free Travel Assistance, then the parents of the fare-paying child (i.e. who have purchased discretionary Travel Assistance) may need to make alternative arrangements. In these circumstances a refund of fare for the unused portion of the year will be payable. Fare-paying seats are not normally made available if there is public transport operating over the same or very similar route.

7. Exceptional circumstances, change of circumstances and other assistance

The following are examples of exceptional circumstances and changes of circumstances. The Council will always consider a request to exercise its discretion in a particular case to provide free home to school travel assistance.

a) Change of address

Parents/carers/guardians must inform the Council in writing of any change of address as soon as possible, as eligibility for Travel Assistance will need to be reviewed.

In exceptional cases, pupils may remain at their current school with Travel Assistance provided, for example if a school move is at a crucial time in their studies and it is not in their interests to change schools. Each case will be considered on an individual basis.

b) Pupils living in temporary accommodation

If a pupil is of statutory school age and the family are placed in Temporary Accommodation by the Council, consideration will be given to the provision of education Travel Assistance for a limited period. This period will be determined by taking the individual circumstances into account (e.g. reasons for the displacement, age of the child(ren), likely timescales, parent/carer/guardian's circumstances etc).

c) Change of child's needs

From time to time a child's needs can change during the year. If the current Travel Assistance is no longer meeting the child's needs, parents should in the first place contact the Community Transport Unit to discuss the change in needs, and any reasonable adjustments that may be required. In some cases, further evidence or advice from professionals involved with the child may be required.

d) Changing Schools

Where a parent decides to change their child's school after they have started, the child's eligibility for Travel Assistance will have to be reconsidered. This may include the need to make a completely new application.

e) Transport to a Pupil Referral Unit or other education provider

Although the Council offers Travel Assistance in cases where eligibility criteria are met, it is still the responsibility of parent/carers/guardians in all circumstances to ensure their children get to school. This includes attendance at a Pupil Referral Unit and any other places where education may be provided.

Parents/carers/guardians should be aware that there is no automatic transport entitlement to and from the Pupil Referral Unit or similar education provider at any other time. This also applies to pupil exclusions.

Even where Travel Assistance is provided, parent/carers/guardians still have a responsibility for the behaviour of the child and will need to play a part in the process.

Transport to a Pupil Referral Unit and to other places where education may be provided will only be provided in accordance with the child's general entitlement. If a child has been placed temporarily in a Pupil Referral Unit, they may be eligible for Travel Assistance if eligibility criteria are met.

Any requests for exceptional assistance will need to be supported by documentary evidence from the Pupil Referral Unit e.g. Medical Certificate or a Court Order.

Travel Assistance may be withdrawn from pupils who regularly fail to attend the PRU – responsibility for transportation to ensure regular attendance will then pass to parent/carers/guardians.

f) Pupils Excluded From School

A pupil permanently excluded from a school will be provided with Travel Assistance to his or her new school provided it is both the nearest suitable school, as agreed by the Council and is outside the statutory walking distance from home.

g) Temporary Attendance at Alternative Provision

Where a pupil is registered at a school but is attending a place other than that school as a result of temporary exclusion, eligibility for Travel Assistance will apply to the other place for the temporary period.

h) Elective Home Education (EHE) and Education Other Than At School (EOTAS)

Where parents have made the choice to educate their child at home no assistance will be available from the Council in connection with any transport need(s) arising.

Where the Council arranges for a pupil to have education other than at school, the Council will provide Travel Assistance subject to normal eligibility rules on home to school Travel Assistance.

i) Travel Assistance provided in error

Where free Travel Assistance has been provided in error, or, where there have been material changes to the route to school, provision will be withdrawn. However, Travel Assistance will continue until the end of the term in which the error was notified, in order to allow parents/carers/guardians time to make alternative arrangements.

8. Behaviour on School Transport

Parents, schools, pupils, transport contractors and the Council, working in partnership, all share responsibility for ensuring that acceptable behaviour is maintained to ensure safe and stress-free school transport for all.

In particular we expect all young people to:

- Be ready for their transport in good time,
- Behave in a safe and responsible way whilst travelling,
- Follow all instructions from the driver (or Passenger Assistant where one is provided) especially in an emergency,
- Wear seatbelts or appropriate safety harnesses at all times whilst on the vehicle, where these are provided.

Bullying, including the use of hate speech, will not be tolerated, and will be reported to parents and school/college. We will not tolerate abuse of any sort, whether from a young person or from their parents and carers.

Children and young people with SEND are expected to behave in a safe and appropriate manner whilst on transport. The Council will work with schools, parents, and the child to help

manage behaviours to ensure the ongoing safety and comfort of all passengers including drivers and any passenger assistants.

Should a pupil misbehave whilst being transported to or from school, the provision of transport may be withdrawn either for a period of time or permanently. Normally a warning letter will be sent to parents/carers/guardians prior to transport being withdrawn. However, in the event that any incident is considered serious enough, following an investigation by the Transport team, the withdrawal of transport may be immediate. In this instance the responsibility for ensuring attendance at school will remain with the parent/carer/guardian of the child.

As part of its responsibilities to ensure that children and young people in Wokingham are safe, the Council will engage with transport operators and providers in the local area to ensure that drivers are aware of and carry out their safeguarding responsibilities appropriately. If parents and carers have any issues or concerns around the safeguarding of their or other children whilst being transported to or from a place of education or learning, they should contact the Travel Assistance team without delay.

9. How To Apply

Starting school and transferring to secondary school

Pupils without an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP)

Application Forms are available online at:

<https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/schools-and-education/school-information-and-services/school-and-college-transport/>

When to Apply

Parents and carers who wish to apply for Travel Assistance should do so as soon as the offer of a school place has been accepted. For parents and carers who file an appeal against a placement, the application should be made as soon as possible after the appeal outcome is known.

Those wishing to be considered for Travel Assistance under the extended rights criteria should include evidence of income and/or entitlement to free school meals with their application.

If Applications for Travel Assistance are made as soon as the offer of a school place has been accepted, applicants will be notified of outcomes from their application as soon as appropriate Travel Assistance has been secured, and at least 21 days before the start of the Academic Year.

Travel Assistance arrangements will be reviewed on an annual basis, to ensure that any Assistance provided during the Academic year remains appropriate and that eligibility criteria for the forthcoming Academic year are met. Reviews will be carried out in the Spring of each academic year. One possible outcome of these reviews is that Parents/Carers may be asked to re-apply for Travel Assistance support. Applications will need to be submitted and assessed before the end of the Summer term in the Academic Year.

In year transfers or newcomers to the area

Applications for Wokingham Borough schools are considered half-a-term in advance of the school place being required. Parents and carers should apply for travel assistance as soon as they have a school place confirmed.

Pupils with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP)

Parents will still have to complete an application form, but they should include evidence of additional needs, including why they believe it is unreasonable for them to accompany their child to school, where this is appropriate.

Completed application forms should be sent to the SEND Team [*appropriate contact email address to be included in published version*]

If Applications for Travel Assistance are made as soon as the offer of a school place has been accepted, applicants will be notified of outcomes from their application as soon as appropriate Travel Assistance has been secured, and at least 21 days before the start of the Academic Year.

Travel Assistance arrangements will be reviewed on an annual basis, to ensure that any Assistance provided during the Academic year remains appropriate and that eligibility criteria for the forthcoming Academic year are met. Reviews will be carried out in the Spring of each academic year. One possible outcome of these reviews is that Parents/Carers may be asked to re-apply for Travel Assistance support. Applications will need to be submitted and assessed before the end of the Summer term in the Academic Year.

10. Complaints and Appeals

What is the difference between an appeal and a complaint?

Complaints arise when you are unhappy about something, for example, you may feel you have not been dealt with properly or in a professional manner, that information given to you was incorrect or that there has been an unacceptable delay.

In the first instance please contact the Corporate Transport Unit (CTU) via email to **Schooltransport@wokingham.gov.uk**. If further to this your issue has not been resolved, please follow the Complaints Procedure.

With an appeal, you may be perfectly happy with the way that you have been treated but feel that the wrong decision has been made and would like it re-examined. For these issues, please follow the Appeals Procedure.

10.1 Complaints Procedure

Complaints about the provision of Travel Assistance will be investigated in accordance with the Council's Complaints Policy.

The complaints policy can be found at:

<https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/contact-us/complaints-and-compliments/>.

This does not apply to complaints about a refusal to grant transport, which will be dealt with through the Transport Appeals procedure (see below).

10.2 Appeals procedure

Parents/guardians/carers or a young person are entitled to challenge the decision of the Council to refuse to provide assistance with transport as set out in this policy or when the parents/guardians/carers or young person consider that the Travel Assistance, offered by the Council, is unsuitable.

A decision may be challenged on the following grounds:

- eligibility
- distance measurement; and/or
- safety of the route
- suitability of transport arrangements offered

Stage 1 – Review of decision

You have 20 working days from the receipt of the transport decision to make a request for a review of the original decision.

The request should detail why the decision should be reviewed and give personal and/or family circumstances, which you believe should be considered during the appeal process.

How to make a Stage 1 appeal

You should make your appeal in writing, either by letter or email. Please provide us with the following information:

- Confirmation that you are the legal parent or guardian of the child
- the date you received our transport notification
- Child's first name and family name
- Child's date of birth
- Your full name and address
- Your email address
- Your phone/mobile number
- Reasons for the appeal (i.e. eligibility, distance, route safety or transport assistance) and your reasons for challenging the Council's decision
- Any additional evidence you wish to present to support your request for travel assistance.

and then email your appeal request to:

Corporate Transport Unit, Wokingham Borough Council, Shute End, Wokingham, RG40 1BN or email to Schooltransport@wokingham.gov.uk

A Senior Officer from the Council will review the original decision and will send you a letter, detailing the outcome of the review within 20 working days of the receipt of the written request.

This will set out the following information:

- the nature of the decision reached
- how the review was concluded
- information about other departments and/or agencies consulted as part of the process
- what factors were considered

- the rationale for the decision reached
- Information about escalation to Stage 2, if appropriate.

Stage 2 Appeal

If you are unhappy with the decision made at Stage 1, you will have 20 working days from the receipt of the Council's decision to make a request to escalate the matter to Stage 2 appeal.

How to make a Stage 2 Appeal

Please send your written request to:

Corporate Transport Unit, Wokingham Borough Council, Shute End, Wokingham, RG40 1BN or email to Schooltransport@wokingham.gov.uk

Your stage 2 appeal will be heard by an independent appeal panel which will be convened to consider the appeal within 40 working days.

No member of the appeal panel will have been involved in the original decision to decline Travel Assistance. This panel will consider verbal and written representations from the parent/guardian/young person involved in the request.

You may request to attend the hearing to present your case in person if you wish.

The Senior Officer involved in the review of the decision at Stage 1 may also be invited to attend.

You will receive a letter, detailing the outcome of the appeal hearing, which will set out the following information:

- the nature of the decision reached
- how the review was concluded
- information about other departments and/or agencies consulted as part of the process
- what factors were considered
- the rationale for the decision reached
- information about escalation to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) if appropriate

Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

You have a right of complaint to the LGO if you feel that there was a failure on the part of the Authority to comply with procedural rules or there was an irregularity in the way the appeal was handled.

The LGO can be contacted at:

Local Government Ombudsman
PO Box 4771
Coventry
CV4 0EH

Helpline: 0300 061 0614.
www.lgo.org.uk

11. Key Contacts

CORPORATE TRANSPORT UNIT (CTU):

[Appropriate email and contact numbers will be added in published version]

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES (SEND) TEAM:

[Appropriate email and contact numbers will be added in published version]

Travel Assistance Policy for young people resident in Wokingham post-16, including young people with SEND

Academic Year 2022/23

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Introduction

This policy covers Travel Assistance to help young people with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND), who may have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and who are over statutory school age specifically to access appropriate education and training.

This assistance is available to all young people who satisfy the eligibility criteria aged 16 to 18 entering further education, and to continuing learners aged 19 to 25 with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

This document is Wokingham Borough Council's Transport Policy Statement which the statutory guidance issued in 2014 (as updated in January 2019) for Post 16 transport to education and training requires every local authority to publish each year. We are required to identify what travel assistance is available to support young people aged 16 - 18 and learners aged 19 -25 with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities, who access school or further education institutions. The legislation and guidance for Travel Assistance to education is different for those of 16 - 18 and those over the age of 19. As a result, and for clarity, the two age groups have been separated in this policy.

There is no automatic entitlement to free home to school or college Travel Assistance once a young person is over compulsory school age. However, in support of the Raising of the Participation Age (RPA) and Preparation for Adulthood (PfA) the Council offers a discretionary service to young people meeting the agreed eligibility criteria. This ensures that the Council supports and encourages young people to continue with their education and training where this is appropriate and suitable to their needs. This will enable young people to acquire the knowledge, skills and experience necessary for their personal development, to support preparation for adulthood, and wherever possible progression into employment or Higher Education.

This policy applies to all students participating in the scheme and supersedes all previous transport arrangements and entitlements.

The Travel Assistance Policy Statement will be reviewed annually. This version covers the academic year from 1 September 2022 to 31 August 2023.

General Principles

This policy is based on the following principles:

Independence and wellbeing

Our commitment is to support and prepare every young person for adulthood, including those young people with Special Educational needs or disability through the development and promotion of individual independence, facilitating opportunities for social inclusion as well as supporting the physical well-being for all young people. Travel assistance, and the form this takes, is a key contributor to achieving these goals.

Sustainability

The council will favour environmentally sustainable forms of travel, including walking, cycling and the use of public transport. The council will also promote those options which make the most effective use of public resources.

In order to support a young person's needs and assisting them to develop greater independence for adulthood, a range of travel options will be explored when deciding what form of travel assistance will be offered. All pupils should be encouraged to follow a healthy lifestyle including walking a reasonable distance to college/sixth form, where possible.

Section 1: Travel Assistance Offered by External Organisations

The Council seeks to support all Post 16 students to continue with their education and training by negotiating preferential rates of travel with some rail and bus operators. Through running this scheme and providing information about the Bursary funding available to support student access to education through their Post 16 education provider (FE Colleges and school 6th Forms), the Council considers it has met its statutory duties with regard to the majority of students.

Concessionary fares schemes available

For public transport routes, the Council negotiates favourable terms (in conjunction with the other 5 Berkshire Unitary Authorities) with local transport providers. This ensures that students can buy passes at agreed rates, including those for travel to establishments outside the Borough and/or the County. These include, rail passes throughout the County and beyond, travel on Reading Buses and Courtney Buses, as well as access to a wide range of dedicated school and college routes within the borough and peripheral areas.

The parent/young person should check for themselves the cost of season tickets and compare the rates that the Council can obtain before selecting the best value for their own travel arrangements.

If, having purchased an annual ticket for transport it is then decided that your child no longer wishes to attend this setting, refunds will be available on the following basis:

- Notification received by the Corporate Transport Unit in writing prior to the end of the Autumn Term – refund of 2 terms
- Notification received by the Corporate Transport Unit in writing prior to the end of the Spring Term – refund of 1 term

Bursaries available from your Education Provider

Students should contact their school, sixth form college, or further education college to find out about financial and other support available, for example help with Childcare or other costs. Alternatively contact the Learner Support Helpline on 0800 121 8989.

Below is a summary of some of the main financial support available.

The 16-19 Bursary Fund

The 16-19 Bursary Fund, administered by individual education providers, is available to support any young person who faces genuine financial barriers to participation in education, including transport costs. All education providers must make available a copy of their 16-19 Bursary Fund Policy. Applications should be made directly to the education provider.

For further information on the 16-19 Bursary Fund visit: www.gov.uk/1619-bursary-fund. Key Local providers and contact details are listed in Appendix B or on the Council Local Offer website.

There are two types of 16-19 bursary available.

Vulnerable Student Bursary

Those in most need are eligible for a vulnerable student bursary of up to £1,200 per year. To qualify, the young person must meet at least one of the following criteria:

- The young person is in or recently left local authority care
- The young person gets Income Support (or Universal Credit in place of Income Support) in their name
- The young person is disabled and gets both Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) (or Universal Credit in place of ESA), and either Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independent Payment (PIP) in their name

To receive the maximum bursary the programme of study must last for 30 weeks or more. If the programme is shorter than 30 weeks, the young person may receive less.

Discretionary Bursary

The young person could be eligible for a discretionary bursary if they do not qualify for the vulnerable student bursary. Education providers may, at their discretion, distribute any remaining funds to a young person in ways that best fit the needs and circumstances of the young person. This is targeted at young people facing financial barriers to participation, including transport costs.

Residential Support Scheme

The Residential Support Scheme is for young persons aged 16-18. If the programme of study being followed is not available locally and is more than 15 miles from the home, or more than two hours return journey away, the young person can apply for help with the cost of term-time accommodation.

How much assistance the young person receives will depend on household income and where the education provider is based.

Please note that different terms apply if a residential placement has been agreed through a young person's Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP). For more details see Section 2.

For further information on the Residential Support Scheme, including eligibility criteria, visit:

www.gov.uk/residential-support-scheme

Residential Bursary Fund

Young persons aged 16-18 may be able to get a bursary towards the cost of accommodation from some specialist residential colleges. This is different from the Residential Support Scheme.

Most of these colleges are 'Specialist Residential Centres' for subjects like agriculture, art and design or horticulture. Each has its own eligibility criteria, often including parental income. To apply for assistance you should contact the college directly.

Discretionary Learner Support

If the young person is aged 19 or over, on a further education course and facing financial hardship, they could get Discretionary Learner Support (DLS). This is similar to the 16-19 Bursary Fund.

The young person must apply directly to their learning provider (e.g. your college) for DLS. How much the young person receives will depend on their circumstances. The money can help with learning costs, including transport.

For more information visit www.gov.uk/discretionary-learner-support

Local providers and contact details are listed in Appendix B or on the Wokingham Borough Council Local Offer website.

Care to Learn

You can get Care to Learn if all of the following apply to you:

- you're a parent under 20 at the start of your course
- you're the main carer for your child
- you live in England
- you're either a British citizen or have a legal right to live and study in England
- your course qualifies
- your childcare provider qualifies

Care to Learn is only available for publicly funded courses in England. This includes courses that take place in:

- schools
- sixth-forms in schools
- sixth-form colleges
- other colleges and learning providers, including Foundation Learning
- your community at Children's Centres

Your learning provider can tell you if your course is eligible.

Care to Learn will pay towards your childcare costs

To qualify, your childcare provider must be registered with Ofsted.

They can be a:

- childminder
- preschool playgroup
- day nursery
- out of school club

You cannot get Care to Learn if:

- you're an apprentice who gets a salary
- you're doing a higher education course at university

You can find more information at:

<https://studentbursary.education.gov.uk/w/webpage/student-bursary>

or email: caretolearn@studentbursary.education.gov.uk

Other support and advice

Special educational needs and disability information advice and support service (SENDIASS)

give help, support and information to children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities up to the age of 25.

- Call: [0118 908 8233](tel:01189088233)
- Email: sendiass@wokingham.gov.uk

Section 2: Travel Assistance for Sixth Form (academic years 12 and 13, young people aged 16-18) including young people with SEND

2.1 Statutory duty and definitions

There is no legal requirement for local authorities to provide travel assistance beyond the completion of Year 11. The Council will only consider providing support and assistance with transport costs in exceptional circumstances. Therefore, parents and carers should ensure that they are aware of the cost of transport and take this into account when making choices for their young person's Post 16 education.

Cases will be decided on an individual case and the Authority will consider any supporting evidence provided as part of a request together with a completed transport application form. If eligible, Travel Assistance will only be provided to the nearest suitable education and /or training provider for learners, and is subject to funding in relation to the published eligibility criteria outlined below.

Travel Assistance will not be provided if it is deemed that suitable provision is available at a closer learning provider as measured from the home address.¹

Those who are eligible for travel assistance, whether from home or from a pick-up point, will be charged a fee each academic year as a contribution towards their travel arrangements. Fees for the academic year 2022-23 are [*will be included in published version*].

This charge will be reduced for those who meet low income criteria. Eligibility for free school meals will continue to be the primary means of determining low income. Evidence of low income will be required; this will usually be a letter from HMRC or the Benefits Agency.

Travel assistance arrangements will only be provided upon receipt of payment of the relevant charge or on receipt of evidence of low income.

2.2 Eligibility Criteria

A young person may be eligible for travel assistance under the Sixth Form duty if all the following statements apply to them:

- a) The young person is a resident within the Wokingham Unitary Authority area and is over 16 and under the age of 19 years of age or, if they are over 19, are continuing with a course that they started before their 19th birthday
- b) They have a special educational need or disability, which may be identified in an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP), or other exceptional circumstances which impacts on their ability to use public transport arrangements, and fall into **one** of these categories:
 - (i) Have an offer of a place at a local Post 16 provider which the Local Authority agree can make the appropriate educational/training provision and are not able to travel independently or safely.
 - (ii) Be able to demonstrate a need for additional time in education to complete education and training at their current educational establishment and are not able to travel independently or safely.
 - (iii) Have entitlement based on the criteria as a Low Income Family

¹ The nearest suitable learning provider is defined as the closest school or college to the home address able to meet the young person's educational needs. If parents choose to send their young person to a school or college which is not the nearest suitable, assistance with transport will not be provided by the Council. These distances are measured by the nearest available walking route, and verified by the Council, or its agents, by appropriate means which might include the use of computer generated mapping systems. The Council views these distances as an exact measure and they cannot be considered as marginal. The measurements are taken from the curtilage (the front edge of a property) of the home to the main entrance of the learning provider.

- c) Show that their learning provider is the **nearest** provider that can meet their needs including those specified in a Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP), and that the provision requested is not available at an establishment closer to home
- d) Their study programme is full-time – equivalent to minimum of 12 hours per week, usually across at least 3 days per week for the duration of the course
- e) Their chosen study programme takes place at one of the following:
 - A school (including Academies).
 - A further education institution.
 - An Authority maintained or assisted institution providing higher or further education.
 - An establishment funded directly by the YPLS (e.g. Independent Specialist Providers) for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
 - A learning provider that is funded by the Local Authority which leads to a positive outcome (this could include colleges, charities and private learning providers).

A young person can apply for council travel assistance in addition to the options provided by other organisations, but any support received from other sources will be taken into account when assessing what form of travel assistance is most appropriate.

Please note, travel assistance will not be provided under this section for young people who have left education and are returning after the age of 19. Those re-starting education after their 19th birthday will be assessed as adults.

2.3 Exclusions

A young person will not be eligible for travel assistance if any of the following statements apply:

- a) Their chosen study programme takes place at a privately-funded organisation and is not supported by the Local Authority;
- b) The young person is employed and starting or continuing an apprenticeship.
- c) The young person's study programme is at Level 4 or higher, including a foundation degree. Education levels are explained on the government website.
- d) The travel assistance required is for the purpose of accessing work experience and/or work placements.
- e) The young person is over the age of 19 and is returning to education having previously left education (as stated in the section above, those re-starting education after their 19th birthday will be assessed as adults).
- f) The required travel charge is not paid.

2.4 Assessing Applications for Travel Assistance

Following careful and thorough assessment, the Council will decide whether a young person is eligible for travel assistance or not. They are also responsible for deciding what form of travel assistance should be offered based on individual needs, promoting independence, encouraging social inclusion and efficient use of resources.

The following will be considered when deciding which form of travel assistance to offer:

- Whether the young person has a physical or medical disability that rules out the use of suitable public transport - for example students who require specialist seating, harness, head restraints or other specialist facilities.

- If the young person is currently in receipt of travel assistance support from other sources, e.g. mobility allowance, direct payment and awards under the 16-19 bursary fund.

Priority will be given to young people who have no other forms of transport or travel assistance available to them.

Existing sources of support must be identified at the point of application. These will be taken into account when making a decision about the level and type of travel assistance that may be provided.

A decision may be taken that additional travel assistance will not be provided.

2.5 Payment

If you are assessed as eligible under the Council's policy, a charge towards the cost of Travel Assistance will be applied. Details of the charge for the Academic Year can be found at the following link:

[Link will be inserted in published version of the Policy]

There will be a discount of 50% for young people who are eligible for free school meals.

The payment can also be made in 10 monthly instalments.

Payment will be taken by Direct Debit from your Bank Account. The Direct Debit mandate is attached to the application form, and must be completed before the application can be processed. If you do not have a bank account you should contact the Corporate Transport Unit to discuss how payment can be made.

2.6 Low Income Entitlement

The Education and Inspections Act 2006 defines low income as those eligible for free school meals or whose parents/carers are in receipt of the maximum level of Working Tax Credit.

In April 2018, the criteria used to determine which pupils are eligible for free school meals were updated to reflect the introduction of Universal Credit and the phasing out of other income-based benefits. Working Tax Credit will gradually be phased out as recipients are transferred to Universal Credit. However, until such time as all recipients have transferred, receipt of maximum Working Tax Credit can still be used to determine low income.

The law makes provision for young people of the families on low income to receive transport assistance, subject to the payment of the appropriate contribution, in the following circumstances:

- Applicants will be required to provide relevant documents to prove their eligibility to assistance with transport.
- Once eligibility on income grounds has been confirmed the young person will be considered eligible (on these grounds) for the school year for which the assessment has been made. However, if other circumstances change, for example they move house, then eligibility will be re-assessed. It is parent's responsibility to inform the Transport Team of any change of circumstances.
- Income assessments will be carried out on an annual basis.

Those students who are over 19 years and receive benefits in their own rights will be assessed as an individual on the grounds of low income.

Further information about eligibility for free school meals can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/apply-free-school-meals>

2.7 Refund Process

If you no longer require travel assistance from the Council you may be able to apply for a refund of part of the parental contribution. You must tell the Corporate Transport Unit in writing what date you want your travel assistance provision to stop. Refunds will be calculated based on the length of time you were in receipt of the provision, using the date of ceasing transport or the date the cancellation was requested in writing, whichever was the later.

A refund of the full term's charge will only be considered if cancellation of provision is received in the office prior to the start of a term.

No refund will be made if you withdraw during the summer term.

The following table shows how refunds will be calculated for part of a term.

Length of time in receipt of provision/from beginning of term	Refund Due
Up to 4 weeks	75%
4 to 8 weeks	50%
Over 8 weeks	0%

Section 3

Eligibility for Travel Assistance for young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), between 19 and 25.

This section clarifies the Council policy regarding travel assistance for students with SEND who are starting a new educational course after their 19th Birthday.

Eligibility for Post 19 SEND Travel Assistance

When a student with an Education, Health and Care Plan who is above the age of 19 and below the age of 25 years, starts a new course of education, an assessment is made (reflecting the Council's obligations under both the Care Act 2014 and the Education Act 1996, s 508F,) to determine whether it is necessary for the council (rather than the student/family) to make their travel arrangements.

In the most exceptional cases, students with learning difficulties or disabilities may be eligible for Travel Assistance where there is no other way for them to access their educational placement.

Each case will be considered under this policy and Travel Assistance will only be considered if the following criteria are satisfied:

1. The student is normally resident within the Wokingham Unitary Authority area
2. The student is attending a full-time educational course (12 hours per week or more over at least 3 days per week) at the nearest suitable or most accessible college to their home. If a similar suitable course is offered by a FE provider nearer to their home the student will not be eligible for assistance
3. The placement must be supported and named in their EHCP
4. The course must be at Level 3 or below. Those commencing a course at Level 4 or above, including Foundation Degree and Degree, would normally be expected to utilise Student Loans, grants and other student benefits to facilitate their transport requirements
5. The course will start on or after the student's 19th Birthday, and may continue no later than the academic year in which the young person reaches 25 years-old
6. The young person together with their family or carers have actively and positively engaged with supporting the young person towards being able to travel independently, where appropriate
7. The young person is over the age of 19 and is starting a new course of study (in which case the Travel Assistance will be provided free of charge)

The Council will take into account the following factors when assessing whether travel assistance is necessary including:

1. The young person's age, ability, aptitudes and SEND, including the length and complexity of the journey
2. The purpose and intended outcomes of the education/training
3. What other arrangements you have considered or tried and why they are not suitable
4. Whether the student is unable to travel to their placement by public transport, either unaccompanied or accompanied by a responsible adult. Specific and up to date evidence of this from relevant health and/or appropriate educational professionals supporting the student will be required
5. Whether there is a family member/carer who is able to transport or accompany the student. If the decision has been taken not to accompany the young person please provide details of why this would not be a reasonable arrangement to make

6. What other efforts have been made to financially support the young person to access education, e.g. grants, bursaries and other benefits and allowances
7. Whether the student is in receipt of higher rate mobility component of the Personal Independence Payment or Disability Living Allowance, the purpose of which is to assist those who have mobility problems, with severe difficulty walking or who need help getting around outside. We would expect this benefit to be fully utilised to meet their transport needs and this includes transport to their educational or training placement; if there are any factors limiting its use you should provide details of them to help inform appropriate decision-making about Travel Assistance
8. Where there is a 'Motability' vehicle available to the student, but a decision has been made not to use the 'Motability' vehicle to support the student to reach their education placement, we would normally expect the carer/student to make their own appropriate alternative arrangements. If this is not possible/reasonable, further details will need to be provided to inform the decision-making process
9. Any other exceptional circumstances that you consider need to be taken into account, together with any recent supporting evidence that you provide

Please note that we would not generally consider work or childcare commitments as an exceptional reason for travel assistance to be provided for young people with SEND aged 16+.

Based on the assessment, if the student has alternative means to support transport to educational provision the Council is unlikely to provide travel assistance.

However, if the assessment identifies that a student does not have any other way of getting to the educational provision the Council will continue to provide Travel Assistance.

Students undertaking a work-based learning programme such as an apprenticeship should apply for Access to Work funding to support their transport needs, using the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work>

Section 4: Further Details on Travel Assistance Which Apply to All Age Groups

4.1. Limitations for travel assistance

1. Where transport is provided, the journey will be limited to the start and end of the standard college/sixth form day. This may mean that the young person will need to arrive earlier than their first lesson, or to wait at the end of their timetabled day for other young people
2. Where a young person's timetable does not fit with the times of other pupils attending the same provision, a mileage reimbursement will be offered for all or part of the travel provision
3. The Council does not provide travel assistance for:
 - a. Work experience or work placements,
 - b. Medical appointments or other off-site visits
 - c. Transfer between sites or campuses during the college/school day
 - d. Before or after college/school activities and clubs
 - e. Return of a young person home early if they have been taken ill, or are unable to stay at college/school to the end of the day

Responsibility for Travel Assistance in these situations will remain with the parents/ carers or the college/school to arrange.

4. Reimbursements for travel expenses incurred prior to the date of application will not be considered.

4.2 Young people attending residential schools

For those young people with special educational needs and disabilities who attend residential colleges on a termly basis and are eligible for Travel Assistance, the council will support:

- one journey at the start of each term; and
- one journey at the end of each term

The council will usually offer a mileage reimbursement of direct payment for the young person to travel in a parent or carer's vehicle. There may however be exceptional cases where specialist transport or other travel patterns may be considered.

4.3 Multiple home addresses

When assessing a young person's application, the Council will use the young person's 'main residence' for assessment purposes. The "main residence" is the address at which the young person spends most school nights. Where a young person has two home addresses then entitlement will be assessed from their 'main residence' only. Where parents are separated or divorced, entitlement is assessed from the home where the young person spends the majority of their time. Where a young person spends equal amounts of school/college days with each parent, travelling from two addresses to school/college, entitlement will be assessed from both addresses. Evidence may be required.

4.4 Review of eligibility

If a young person is assessed as not eligible for Travel Assistance, the Council will not be obliged to re-assess the individual for the remainder of that academic year, unless the place of residence or education changes, except where an appeal is lodged in line with the Appeals procedure.

All Travel Assistance offered is subject to annual review, in line with Education Funding Agency Guidelines, and it is at the discretion of the Council.

4.5 Duration of provision

All post 16 students need to re-apply for Travel Assistance each year, even where they are on a continuing or multiple year course. **Please note that provision of Travel Assistance in a previous year is no guarantee of entitlement to ongoing provision of Travel Assistance.**

Details of how to apply, and closing dates for applications for academic year Sept 2022-August 2023 can be found in [*a link will be provided to an Application Process Flowchart, which will be published online at the same time as the Policy. The same link will also provide information around fees/charges for the year.*]

Travel Assistance arrangements will stay in place for the academic year in which they were assessed as eligible, unless the award was specifically for a shorter period or there are significant changes, e.g. change of home address.

Where specialist transport is provided, whilst the form of travel assistance will not change, sometimes during the year collection/drop off times and/or the route on which the young person travels may change. We will endeavour to keep change to a minimum, but where a change is required we will aim to inform you with as much notice as possible.

If the young person changes college, (including college site), course, or home address, or their needs change, you will need to re-apply for Travel Assistance. Alterations will not be made to your current provision until the re-assessment has been completed.

4.6 Forms of Travel Assistance offered

Where the Travel Assistance is offered by the Council, it may take one of the following forms:

- Independent Travel Training to help the young person learn to travel independently including by public transport. This is usually a 10 to 12-week programme of one-to-one assistance and support which is tailored to the young person's needs;
- Mileage reimbursements or direct payment for young people, or their parents or carers, to arrange their own transport, or use a combination of options including topping up bursary payments;
- A seat on a dedicated school bus or minibus where this is appropriate;
- Specialist Transport for those young people in exceptional circumstances with the greatest need and where there is no other transport or travel option available to them. This may be from a collection point or from near home and will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

In some cases we have also provided Travel Buddies and Walking Assistants, and we will continue to do so where this form of assistance is deemed appropriate.

You should be aware that we do not provide Passenger Assistants as standard for young people over the age of 16. If the young person is unable to travel without supervision and they are not attending a school or college on dedicated transport shared with younger pupils, for whom a PA is provided, you will be offered a mileage reimbursement or direct payment, and will be expected to make suitable arrangements for the supervision of the young person.

4.7 Independent Travel Training

The Council is committed to supporting all children and young people to achieve their maximum potential, and become as independent as they are able to be.

In order to better support young people to travel independently, the Council may offer Independent Travel Training (ITT) in their travel assistance offer. The training will support the young person to learn the necessary skills to allow them to effectively deal with and resolve a range of scenarios that they might encounter when travelling on public transport.

A trainer will travel and work with the young person on a 1:1 basis to ensure that the skills taught are understood and put in to practice independently. Training may include:

- Timetables (including time management).
- Orientation.
- Road Safety.
- Accessibility (access to transport, exits and purchasing tickets).
- Communication.
- Personal Safety (including what-if scenarios).
- Travel planning and preparation.

Where the Corporate Transport Unit identify that a young person may have the potential to be supported to travel independently through a travel training programme, a formal assessment will be undertaken to help create a personalised travel plan and identify what training would be required. Training programmes last on average 12 weeks, and the young person will only complete the training once the trainer and the young person, together with their family/carer agree that they have gained the necessary skills to travel on public transport on their own.

Once a young person is deemed capable of independent travel no further Travel Assistance will be offered except in exceptional circumstances.

4.8 Mileage reimbursements

This option may be of particular interest to you if:

- the young person has complex needs and you wanted to make your own travel arrangements;
- you wanted to combine the council's contribution with your personal finances, and other benefits or bursaries to provide the young person with bespoke travel assistance to meet their needs and fit in with your family circumstances;
- The young person is attending a course, all or part of which is outside the normal school day

If you were offered this form of travel assistance, it would be your responsibility to ensure that your travel arrangements enable the young person:

- to travel safely;
- to attend college regularly and on time;
- to be effectively educated once they arrive at college.

Attendance levels will be monitored and money will be reclaimed for non-attendance at college.

4.9 Specialist Transport

Wherever possible specialist transport is planned to collect several young people from agreed collection points into the same college/sixth form. Where appropriate, vehicles may also collect young people attending different educational establishments, for an effective use of resources.

You should be aware that as young people join or leave the college/sixth form your pick-up and drop-off times may change. We will try to keep these changes to a minimum, and to give you as much notice as possible of any changes.

We do not provide Passenger Assistants as standard on Post 16 transport although some routes to sixth form placements may have a Passenger Assistant where the route also carries younger children.

All staff, including the driver will be DBS checked and appropriately trained. Transport will be provided by a qualified, registered transport provider, working to contractual standards set by the Council.

4.10 Collection Points

The Council uses collection points to support the development of independence and preparation for adulthood in our young people. The use of Collection Points also assists the Council to keep journey times for young people to a minimum whilst also minimising timing changes.

The Council will aim to use an approved location near local points of interest as a collection point. This may include libraries, health centres, public Bus Stops, shops, or outside nearby schools or colleges. Collection points will be individually assessed for suitability to ensure they are safe and appropriate locations for the collection of 1 or more passengers.

If the young person's Travel Assistance offer requires them to walk to a collection point, then it is expected that an adult will accompany them where necessary. Collection points will be a reasonable distance from the young person's home address. We will aim to use collection points that are no more than ½ mile from the home and it is expected that most collection points will be significantly closer. The distance and location of the collection points for each young person will be individually assessed on a case-by-case basis.

If a young person is accessing a collection point a parent/carer will be responsible for ensuring that the young person gets safely to and from the collection point at the appropriate time. The parent/carer will also be responsible for them when they are waiting for transport, and when they leave the transport at the end of the day.

4.11 No-one at home/collection point

If you are not at home or at the collection point to meet your young person, the driver will wait three minutes after the scheduled set-down time and then continue the journey to drop off other passengers. The transport provider will then attempt to drop your young person off for a 2nd time after completing the remainder of the route. If there is still no-one available to receive the young person, then they will be taken to a place of safety, and you will be expected to collect them as soon as possible.

You will be responsible for the cost of any extra travel involved and supervision provided. If such incidents occur frequently Wokingham Borough Council may suspend provision of Travel Assistance and you will be responsible for travel arrangements to ensure that your young person attends school or college.

4.12 Emergency Contact details

Before transport can be provided, parents/carers need to provide email addresses and contact telephone numbers, including an alternative number in the event of the operator or Council being unable to contact the parent/carer. In the event of late running, or an emergency involving your child, the CTU or the operator will contact the latest number available on our records. It is therefore very important that you notify the CTU if you change your mobile contact number.

4.13 Withdrawal of Travel Assistance for non-attendance

Travel Assistance is awarded to support a young person to attend a place of education. If a young person persistently fails to attend, other than for ill health, or extenuating circumstances, the Authority reserves the right to withdraw the travel assistance provided. You may need to reapply for travel assistance if the young person later decides to attend again.

4.14 Withdrawal of Travel Assistance on Health and Safety Grounds

The Council has a responsibility to ensure the health and safety of all children and young people for whom Travel Assistance is provided. We also have an obligation to ensure the health and safety of drivers and passenger assistants.

Children and young people with special educational needs are still expected to behave in a safe and appropriate manner whilst on transport. The Council will work with schools, colleges, parents and the young person to help manage behaviours to ensure the ongoing safety and comfort of all passengers including drivers and any passenger assistants.

In particular we expect all young people to:

- Be ready for their transport in good time;
- Behave in a safe and responsible way whilst travelling;
- Follow all instructions from the driver (or Passenger Assistant where one is provided) especially in an emergency;
- Wear seatbelts or appropriate safety harnesses at all times whilst on the vehicle.

Bullying, including the use of hate speech, will not be tolerated and will be reported to parents and school/college. We will not tolerate abuse of any sort, whether from a young person or from their parents and carers.

If a young person behaves in a manner that places the health and safety of those on board a vehicle at serious risk, or presents an adverse risk to themselves, this may result in Travel Assistance being suspended or withdrawn with immediate effect.

The parent will be informed of any incident that has occurred involving their young person. The Council will work to find an alternative way for the young person to get to school/college safely but, during this process, the parent of the young person will be responsible for making suitable arrangements to get the young person to school/college.

Section 5: Applications, Complaints and Appeals

5.1 How to Apply for Travel Assistance

Complete an Application Form

If a young person believes they may be entitled to travel support they should obtain and complete a Home to School/College Travel Assistance Form from the link below. It is the same application form for both Sixth form and Post 19 applications. Please ensure that the age of the young person and their year group in September of the coming academic year are clear in the application.

<https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/schools-and-education/school-information-and-services/school-and-college-transport/>

You can submit your completed application form either by email or post using the following addresses:
Please send completed applications to: Corporate Transport Unit, Wokingham Borough Council, Shute End, Wokingham, RG40 1BN or by email to: Schooltransport@wokingham.gov.uk

You can also find more information about the Councils SEND Local Offer at the following address:

<https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/local-offer-for-0-25-year-olds-with-additional-needs/>

If you are unable to access the web page please contact [*contact details will be included in published version*] to discuss the options.

5.2 Notification of decision

The Corporate Transport Unit will assess your application for Travel Assistance. The team aims to let you know the outcome of their assessment within 10 working days of the date they receive your application. Where additional information is required from other professional or the Local Authority has yet to confirm a placement decision, then the assessment process may take longer. You will be kept informed of any delays.

5.3 Appeals and Complaints

What is the difference between an appeal and a complaint?

Complaints arise when you are unhappy about something, for example, you may feel you have not been dealt with properly or in a professional manner, that information given to you was incorrect or that there has been an unacceptable delay. For these sorts of issues, please follow the Complaints Procedure (link provided in section below).

With an appeal, you may be perfectly happy with the way that you have been treated but feel that the wrong decision has been made and would like it re-examined. For these issues, please follow the Appeals Procedure.

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

The Council is committed to ensuring that travel assistance provided is appropriate to the needs of the young person, is of a high quality and meets required safety standards.

Complaints about the provision of travel assistance will be investigated in accordance with the Council's Complaints Policy. This does not apply to complaints about a refusal to grant transport, which will be dealt with through the Transport Appeals procedure.

The complaints policy can be found at:

<https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/contact-us/complaints-and-compliments/>.

Appeal Procedures

Parents/guardians/carers or a young person are entitled to challenge the decision of the Council to refuse to provide assistance with transport as set out in this policy or when the parents/guardians/carers or young person consider that the travel assistance, offered by the Council, is unsuitable.

A decision may be challenged on the following grounds:

- eligibility
- distance measurement; and/or
- safety of the route
- suitability of transport arrangements offered

Stage 1 – Review of decision

You have 20 working days from the receipt of the transport decision to make a request for a review of the original decision.

The request should detail why the decision should be reviewed and give personal and/or family circumstances, which you believe should be considered during the appeal process.

How to make a Stage 1 appeal

You should make your appeal in writing, either by letter or email.

Please provide us with the following information:

- Confirmation of identity and the capacity in which you are making the appeal (e.g. as legal parent or guardian, or young person)
- the date you received our transport notification
- Child's first name and family name
- Child's date of birth
- Your full name and address
- Your email address
- Your phone/mobile number
- Reasons for the appeal (i.e. eligibility, distance, route safety or transport)

- assistance) and your reasons for challenging the Council's decision
- Any additional evidence you wish to present to support your request for travel assistance.

And then email your request to:

**Corporate Transport Unit, Wokingham Borough Council, Shute End, Wokingham, RG40 1BN
or email to Schooltransport@wokingham.gov.uk**

A Senior Officer from the Council will review the original decision and will send you a letter, detailing the outcome of the review within 20 working days of the receipt of the written request.

This will set out the following information:

- the nature of the decision reached
- how the review was concluded
- information about other departments and/or agencies consulted as part of the process
- what factors were considered
- the rationale for the decision reached
- Information about escalation to Stage 2, if appropriate.

Stage 2 Appeal

If you are unhappy with the decision made at Stage 1, you will have 20 working days from the receipt of the Council's decision to make a request to escalate the matter to Stage 2 appeal.

How to make a Stage 2 Appeal

Please send your written request to:

**Corporate Transport Unit, Wokingham Borough Council, Shute End, Wokingham, RG40 1BN or
email to Schooltransport@wokingham.gov.uk**

You will be expected to consider and offer evidence about:

- Details of how the young person currently travels around outside of college/sixth form
- Examples of incidents/concerns as a result of the Council's original decision
- Current Medical evidence from a consultant supporting the young person
- What efforts have been made by family and friends to support the young person with his/her travel assistance and attendance at college/sixth form
- Evidence that the alternative travel options have been explored, along with evidence why they are not suitable

Your stage 2 appeal will be heard by an independent appeal panel which will be convened to consider the appeal within 40 working days.

No member of the appeal panel will have been involved in the original decision to decline travel assistance. You may request to attend the hearing to present your case in person if you wish. The panel will consider representations from parent/guardian/young person, involved in the request.

The Senior Officer involved in the review of the decision at Stage 1 may also be invited to attend.

You will receive a letter, detailing the outcome of the appeal hearing, which will set out the following information:

- the nature of the decision reached
- how the review was concluded

- information about other departments and/or agencies consulted as part of the
- process
- what factors were considered
- the rationale for the decision reached
- information about escalation to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) if appropriate

Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

You have a right of complaint to the LGO if you feel that there was a failure on the part of the Authority to comply with procedural rules or there was an irregularity in the way the appeal was handled.

The LGO can be contacted at:

Local Government Ombudsman

PO Box 4771

Coventry

CV4 0EH

Helpline: 0300 061 0614.

www.lgo.org.uk

APPENDIX A

Eligible Learning and Training Providers

Your study programme or training must take place through a publicly-funded provider. This includes:

- A publicly-funded school or academy (including a free school or University Technical College (UTC));
- A publicly-funded further education institution, including further education college and sixth form college;
- A local authority maintained or assisted institution providing further or higher education;
- An independent specialist provider for learners with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities
- A learning provider that is funded by a local authority to deliver accredited programmes of learning which lead to positive outcomes (this could include colleges, charities and private learning providers)

What is NOT eligible:

- Training provided by a commercial trainer i.e. training for which the student or their employer pays directly
- Placements at independent or private fee-paying schools and colleges (unless adopted in the EHCP)
- Placements at any provider who does not provide accredited programmes of learning.

You can find more details at the Wokingham Local Offer

Go to <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/local-offer-for-0-25-year-olds-with-additional-needs/>

APPENDIX B

Useful Contacts

Providers with Post-16 Provision, who will supply information on 16-19 Bursary and Discretionary Learner Support (DLS) applications:

[CONTACT DETAILS WILL BE ADDED BEFORE PUBLICATION]

Corporate Transport Unit, Wokingham Borough Council, Shute End, Wokingham, RG40 1BN or by email to Schooltransport@wokingham.gov.uk

Office hours are 8.30am to 5pm, Monday to Friday, including school holidays.

Outside these hours please contact the service provider direct.

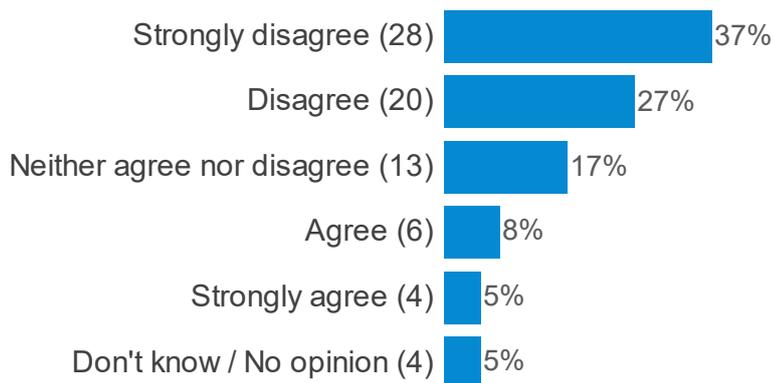
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Home to School Transport Survey

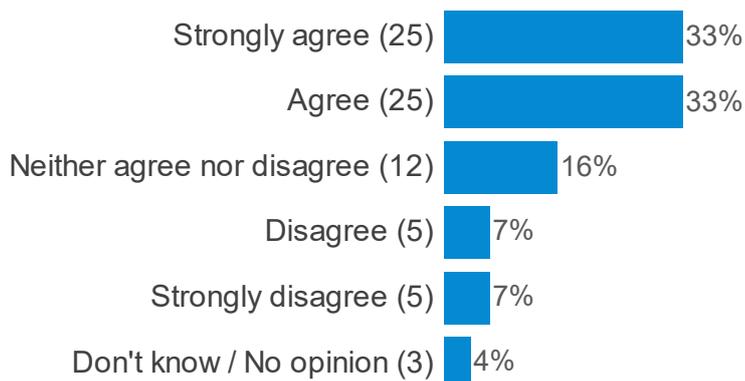
This report was generated on 13/11/20. Overall 76 respondents completed this questionnaire. The report has been filtered to show the responses for 'All Respondents'.

The following charts are restricted to the top 12 codes. Lists are restricted to the most recent 100 rows.

Option 1: The council has the option to cease to provide free home to school transport to an infant or primary school for a child under the age of five, where a child is deemed as eligible once they turn five years of age. To what extent do you agree with this approach?

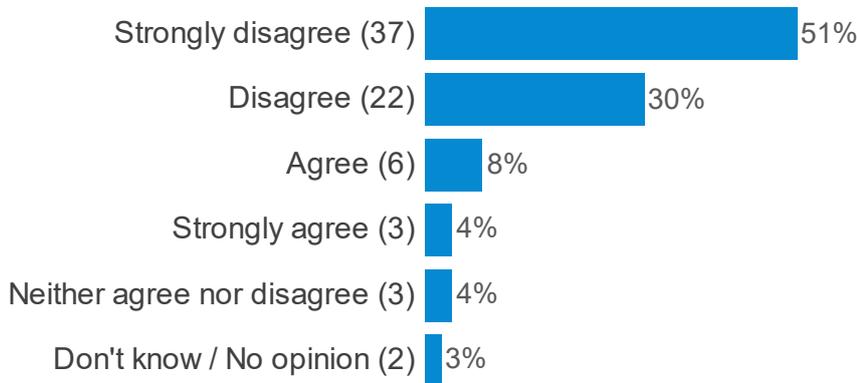


Option 2: Wokingham may continue to provide free home to school transport to an infant or primary school for a child under the age of five, where a child is likely to be deemed as eligible once they turn five years of age. Do what extent do you agree with this approach?

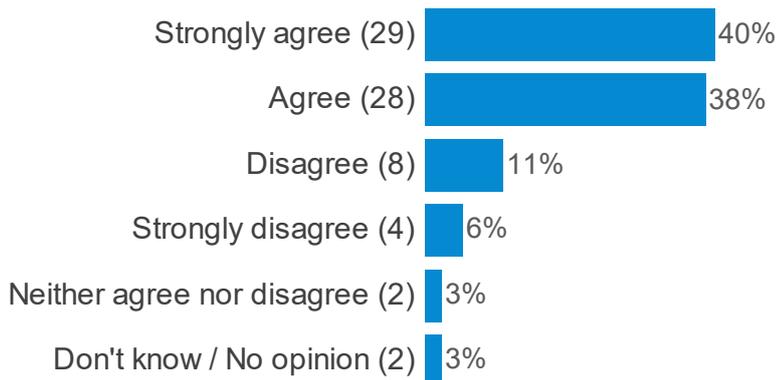


Home to School Transport Survey

Option 1: Wokingham has the option to cease to provide home to school transport at the end of the term in which a child turns 8 where the child has been eligible due to living more than 2 miles but less than 3 miles from their nearest school. To what extent do you agree with this approach?

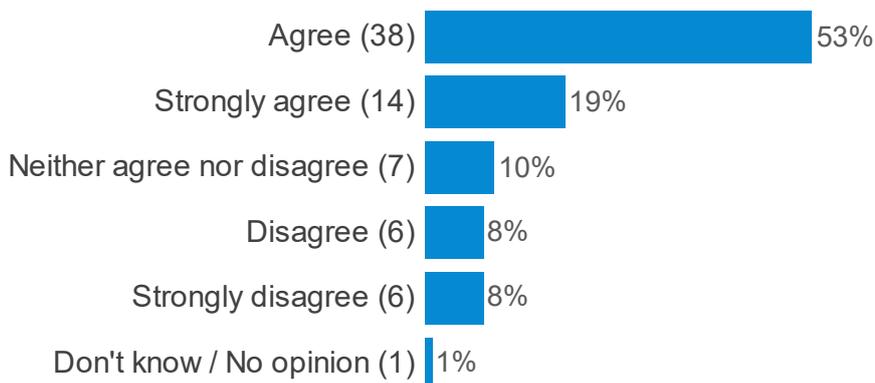


Option 2: Wokingham has the option to continue to provide home to school travel assistance to the end of the academic year in which a child turns 8 where the child has been eligible due to living more than 2 miles but less than 3 miles from their nearest available school. To what extent do you agree with this approach?

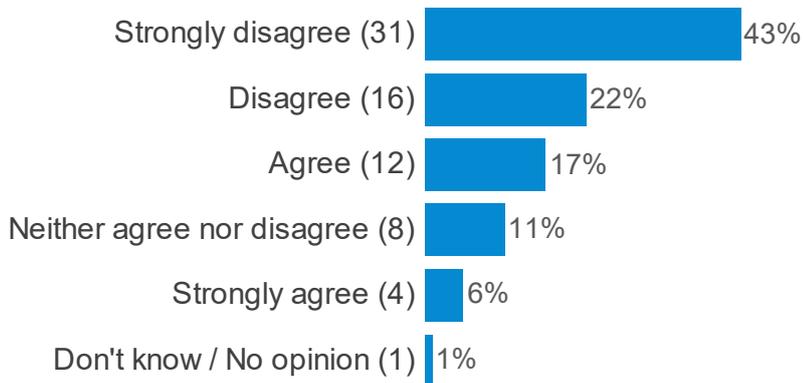


Home to School Transport Survey

Option 1: In line with its existing policies for post 16 home to school/college transport, the Council could continue to provide home to school/college travel assistance for young people ages 17-18 who meet the eligibility criteria under our existing policies. Students will be expected to travel by the most cost-effective means for which they are able which may be public transport or by way of a seat on a contract vehicle (coach, minibus or taxi) at the start and end of the normal school day. The provision of a travel allowance where the parent, carer or young person uses a private vehicle will only be agreed where this is the least expensive option. To what extent do you agree with this approach?



Option 2: In line with statutory responsibilities, the Council has the option to cease to provide ordinarily home to school/college travel assistance for young people ages 17 -18. The Council would continue to promote the use of the Student Fare Card Scheme, 16 -17 Saver and Disabled Person’s Bus Pass Scheme, which offer discounted travel on bus and rail services, to all post 16 year-old students. To what extent do you agree with this approach?



Are there any other comments you would like to make about the proposals or their likely impact?

It should be appropriate to the child/student’s capabilities and the families financial circumstances irrelevant of age.

Students should be able to safely walk to school - why does WBC ignore the Safety Report of April 2020 for Reading Road and not make safe provisions for students?

Perhaps if you didn't fund places at independent schools out of borough you wouldn't have this issue.

Home to School Transport Survey

Are there any other comments you would like to make about the proposals or their likely impact?

If you remove travel for SEND students you will not only effect them, but affect the ability of parents to work. As if it is not currently difficult as one parent most be home when they return from school, a parent would have to take their child to school giving them a very small window to work between 9:30/10 to 3pm. It would be crazy as if it is not difficult and expensive enough to bring up a special needs child you want to make it even worse and stressful!

It would be useful if the bus pass scheme could be adapted so our students can get a bus during peak times. Our students who travel by public bus with a bus pass often arrive as they are not allowed on the bus with the pass until after 9. This also impacts upon students moving into supported internships and paid employment. Without this change a greater number of parents will need to directly transport these young people who should be able to travel independently.

Until Wokingham has a public bus service that covers the whole area with frequent and affordable transport options, the Borough must continue to provide the means for students to travel to and from school/college. Putting the burden on parents is the worst option, both with regards to congestion and environmental impact.

In option 1 I see no reason to fund the use of a private vehicle as this will be used for work and domestic trips anyway. The additional journey does not warrant public funds being used. Unless there is a case for the impoverishment of the student. Car share with other students needs no funding from public money either. If they can afford a car, MOT and insurance plus lessons and test (s) they can afford the fuel to get to college.

You have to consider that some public transports routes just don't work for getting to some areas of the borough. For example my son goes to Forest so he would have to bus into Wokingham - get the train. Coming home do the same but the bus to NMR from station isn't frequent which would require him then to walk into the town! The public transport routes just aren't good enough.

All children's and young adults situations differ and changes to the statutory obligations will make reviewing individual cases that much harder as it will always be refusal 1st and then justify the case. Generally these children's and parents lives are hard enough and we pay taxes for the system to give back to those who need it the most.

I think when it comes to SEND, unguided/self guided transport should not be promoted as the primary solution

SEND pupils cannot be sent on public transport with no supervision if they are severely impaired. I strongly disagree that this could be offered as a viable option. I don't know if our £70 a month for the service is a subsidised amount as there is no transparency about the costs but the letter about it implied we were paying the cost. If that is true, I cannot see why you would stop the service of the minibus as one or more paying passengers must reduce your overall costs. A severely impaired child's parents would have no choice but to stop working if you could not provide suitable transport.

Home to school/college transport post 16 is essential to many families, not all teenagers with special needs can cope with travel training or public transport, the needs for those with severe anxiety must be considered

Option 2 sounds like there would not even be the current fare payer rate. Option 2 and current policy are at odds with raising participation. Option 2 has an adverse effect on those with the greatest need who are least likely to be able to access public transport or have to travel greater distances.. Students in this age range are unlikely to be able to get any of the qualifying benefits necessary for a student bursary

I have an autistic daughter, who is 18, she has a bladder condition and with her autism alone she would need to be picked up from our home by car, adding her bladder condition makes her life even harder. I am sure she is not the only 18 yr old with complex needs. There would be no way she could travel on a mini bus she would be even more isolated.

Re the last question, how would a child with a learning disabilities be expected to use public transport? This sounds discriminatory as it could effectively hinder such children accessing further education.

Home to School Transport Survey

Are there any other comments you would like to make about the proposals or their likely impact?

WBC should be continuing to provide home to school/college travel assistance for young people ages 17-18 who meet the eligibility criteria. There is concern that provision of a travel allowance for use of a private vehicle is based solely on financial cost without due regard for the environmental cost this would have. Private vehicle use is not a sustainable mode of transport and it should only be entertained in exceptional circumstances.

It's all about cost saving and not considering the benefit of having young people in education

As a single parent who works full time I know that I do not have the means to get my daughter to BCA. My daughter is a wheelchair user and is waiting for an ASD assessment and the thought of trying to get her to negotiate public transport independently fills me with dread. We deal with so much as it is knowing that transport is available for our children means so much.

This whole proposal is based around money saving and budgets with little thought put into the duty of care you have to these children who are vulnerable. The sustainable element is about political promotion disguised as caring for the development of these children. When the under lining theme as I have already stated and is very clear through out is that budgets are more important than these children. The fact that you state that working would not be something that would be considered when making decisions is absurd as this may impact a parent / carers ability to work or the level of their income that will then in turn impact the social economic state of that family adding to their vulnerability.

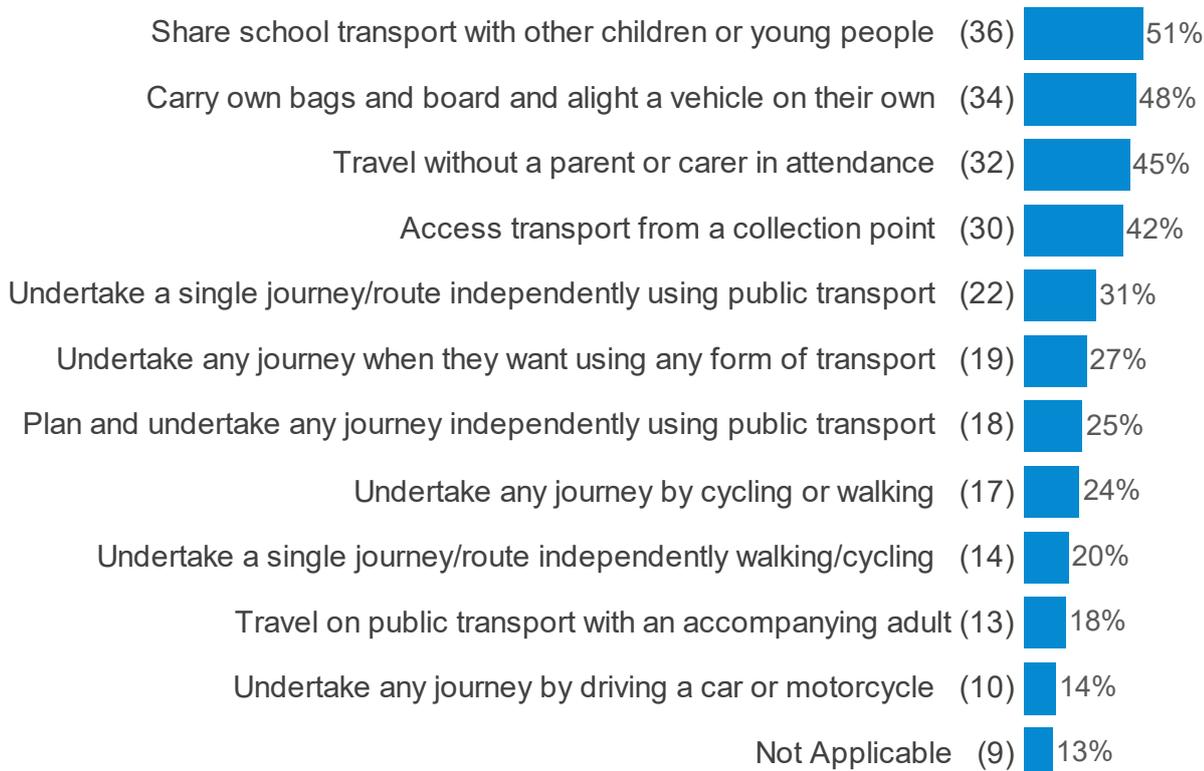
This option is appropriate if there is public transport provision for the required route

Yes my son is 16 next February and even when he is 17 will require school transport. He has down syndrome and autism and cannot talk. Any other form of transport is not suitable.

If an infant/ under 5 child has additional needs that will likely require transport provision from 5 then it seems sensible for continuity, parental support and routine that the transport is implemented at the earliest age it is required, rather than waiting to age 5. Regarding post 16 transport - many SEN students will still be unable to independently access public transport safely. Home/ school travel assistance provision will remain an essential service to them, in order to enable them to continue their education and life aspirations. Removing this service could result in isolation and limitation of their potential, with long term consequences.

Home to School Transport Survey

Being independent is different for everyone. In terms of travel and preparing for adulthood, what is your/your child’s aspiration in terms of how you/ they will travel in the future?



Other, please specify

Managing their finances to pay for the travel journeys and to understand timetables and planning journey times to and from college/home. Learning that you need to allow time to get to the station/stop, waiting time for a canx/late bus/train. Then the directions from the stop/station to College and how much time to allow getting to college and then to class.

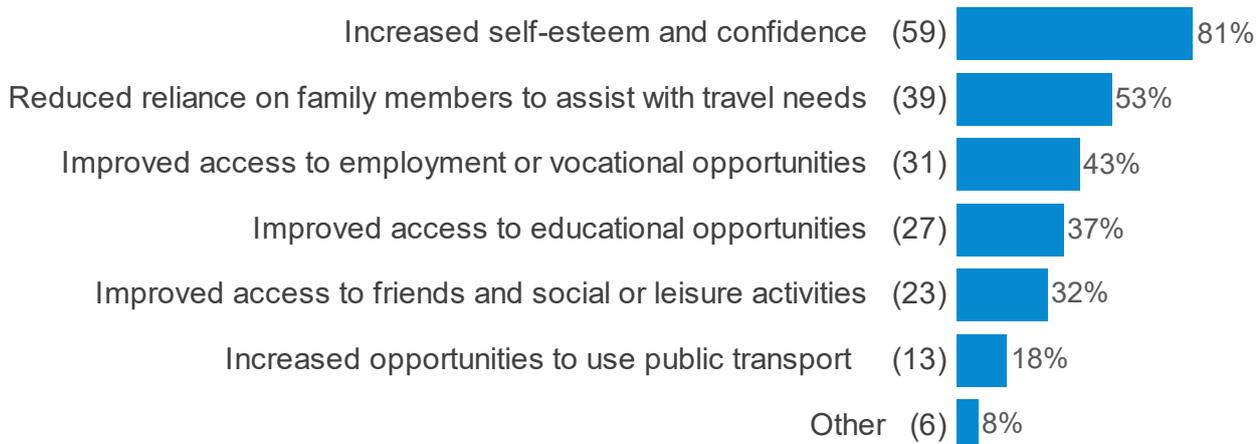
I can't see any of the above ever being an option for the foreseeable future.

be able to access transport which is wheelchair friendly

It should be noted that not all children will be able to travel independently those with Sen needs may always need support

Home to School Transport Survey

What are the three biggest benefits for a young person who is successfully supported to travel independently on public transport, which allows them to access services and activities in the community? Select up to 3



Other, please specify

Safety, Safety, Safety as per the report commissioned by WBC April 2020

My son is non verbal and has no idea of danger! He would just run into the road!! He cannot travel independently!!!

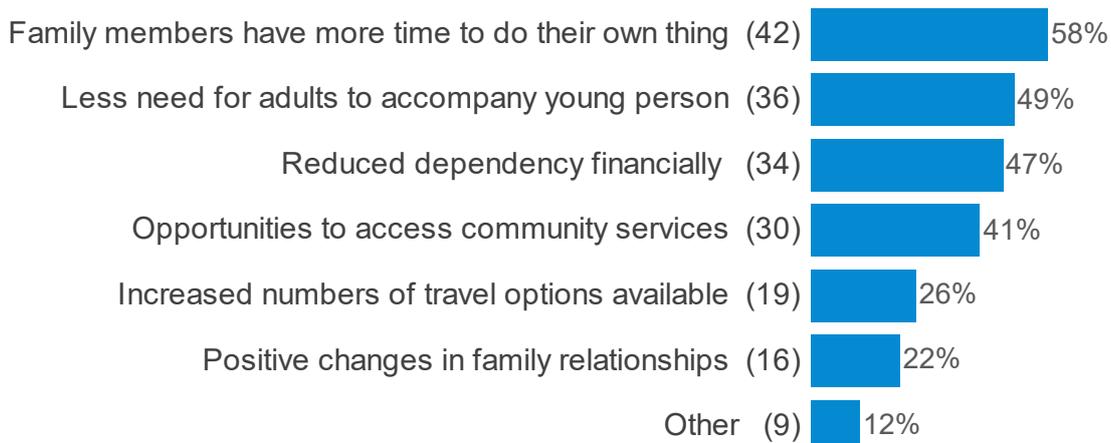
money management, planning, scheduling and time management skills.

unable to know as our child is too young

Reducing the burden they seem to place on society.

This question seems worded towards the fact that all children can be independent and that it is expected. It is not always possible. The question would make me feel a sense of failure as a parent if this was not possible for my child

What are the three biggest benefits for the family of a young person who is successfully supported to travel independently on public transport? Select up to 3



Home to School Transport Survey

Other, please specify

Safety

He cannot travel independently he has severe autism and is non verbal. He has no concept of danger and would run into the road and run away!!

Young person is learning personal responsibility, consequences and coping skills for managing the unexpected.

unable to know as our child is too young

This is completely unsuitable for my child and I feel that I and my daughter are a drain on public funds.

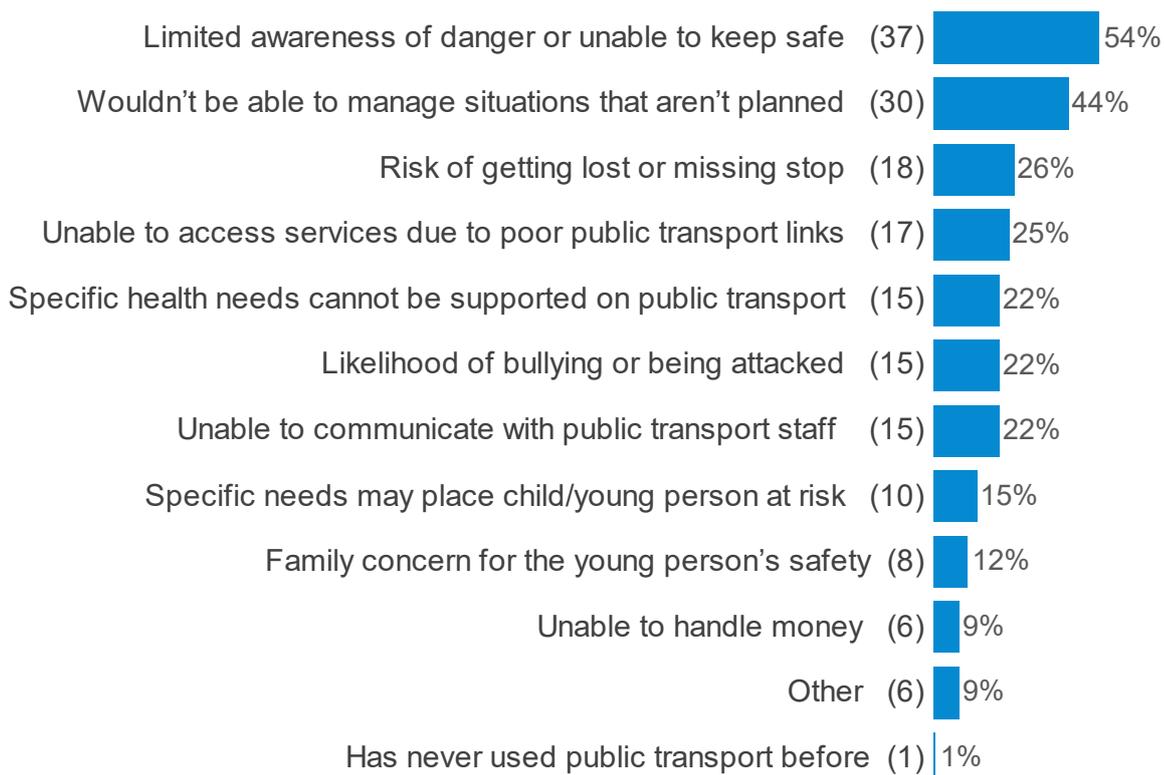
Knowing that the child is developing a form of independence even if that child is unable to walk to school by themselves. For children with Mobility issues this is so important for their overall wellbeing and self esteem. It is imperative these children continue to have the option for school transport to prevent fatigue and for them to feel a growing sense of independence.

None really apply

I would want to know what the “support” is that will be given before I could answer this very leading question !

None we will still worry

What are the three biggest barriers that would prevent your children using public transport independently to access services and activities in the community? Select up to 3



Home to School Transport Survey

Other, please specify

Being able to safely cross the road for the drop off and pick up points are per the safety report April 2020

No safe road crossing areas, speeding cars, narrow overgrown footpaths.

He cannot travel independently he has severe autism and is non verbal. He has no concept of danger and would run into the road and run away!!

Bus pass fayre schemes do not always cover peak hours which is essential for getting to school or work on time

poor transport links mean needing a safe place to store bikes. At unmanned stations (Crowthorne) this doesn't feel safe to do. Are there cameras monitoring theft or vandalism. How is this communicated, reported, and monitored?

All of these except the first one.

What should the Council do to encourage more children and young people to travel on public transport to school or college?

Have a form of security present and visible to those travelling.

Walking should be safe and easy - crossing the road should be safe - no existing walking routes to school - no way to cross the road safely currently.

Listen to the residents and stop being so slow to approve pedestrian crossings. Reduce speed to 30mph on Reading Road.

more buses?

This should be the least expensive option of travelling for them.

Help with costs

They shouldn't encourage them, these are children with SPECIAL NEEDS!! if they can go on public transport they will, don't try to encourage them for your benefit to save money and try to say you are helping them with independence! It's pathetic

Increase the time that reduced price or free bus passes can be used. Introduce a programme of travel training with funding attached. Such as our version of The Lift Programme from Star college.

Put a serviceable public bus system in place

BIKE LANES and eradicate the bullying behaviour of cars in our area.

You have to provide good bus routes which extend all over the borough. And ensure that there are good times for before and after.

provide a more reliable and linked up transport system between boroughs. Time it takes to get anywhere on public transport is also a major issue.

Depends on the level of SEND. My child would never be capable of travelling independently without a trusted adult. She is very vulnerable.

There is no frequent bus facility (not available for school timings) from my location to my daughter's school, as the school is 2 miles away. Though we have few bus services, bus don't have the school route; My children have to walk from some other stops. This is adding risk for us; As a working parent, home to school transport with lower cost / free of cost will be beneficial.

Only if they are older over 16.

Provide free transport to all secondary school pupils we live in lower earley and have to pay for the 202 to emmbrook but all the other people get a free bus

Develop independence skills from an early age. Work with transport providers to help accommodate travel training programmes

Put on special buses/ coaches for the children to access with specially trained drivers and assistants

More public transport, stops by all primary and secondary schools

Home to School Transport Survey

What should the Council do to encourage more children and young people to travel on public transport to school or college?

Provide more information Customised to their journey.

The Council should only encourage this if it is appropriate for the young persons specific needs. It should not be the result of a need for cost savings. The suggestion that children and young people need encouragement suggests that public transport is a viable option. For many children home school transport is a very significant part of their ability to fully access educational opportunities and to develop a sense of independence.

Encourage greater use of public transport and educate in primary school years on using public transport.

MAke travel training widely available for those that it is appropriate to do so. Start with the more able children that need support - these are quick wins and success will breed confidence amongst parents. Recognise that it is very difficult for a parent to teach independence skills to someone who is vulnerable and anxious.

I can not see this being an option for all the children and teens I know with SEN

Accompany them and train them in what to do, if they are able

Travel training opportunities at school or maybe lessons/workshops to parents to help them support their children more

More direct routes to schools. Public transport routes can take significantly longer than dedicated school bus.

WBC needs to invest to provide more public transport facilities across the Borough and across boundaries. In addition to provision of more public transport services, this includes the infrastructure that gets children and young people safely to public transport hubs. The services therefore needs to work closely with highways to not only commission new services and routes, but major upgrades need to take place on the existing walking and cycling network and consideration given to cycle hire schemes (or similar) that allow children to travel to these hubs. Regard also needs to be made for provision for out of hours educational activities that take place in schools and colleges. In addition to better provision, where possible, subsidies should continue to ensure that public transport options remain the most affordable, and additional financial support for low income families. For families severe financial difficulty, consideration should be given to waive the charge completely as this could be a barrier to a young person having an appropriate education.

More direct routes, more support on routes.

No idea really. I have 5 children. The youngest has SEND. My other 4 children have always, and still do use public transport

Get a better, Quicker, cheaper, More reliable and accessible public transport service service

View children as individuals- these questions feel like they are in favour of saving money and not meeting individual needs

The problem is with the provision of schools- there are not enough local school places. Lack of school places is not the driver for my child to become independent!! This is completely irrelevant.

Better bus timings e.g. having to travel from home to Bracknell to Wokingham and making a bus change in Bracknell - the bus to Wokingham used to leave 2 minutes before the bus to Bracknell arrives! Impossible to get to school on time! The number 3 bus which used to go from Reading to Bracknell via the Nine Mile Ride has been cancelled. Can it be reinstated please! To encourage school children to use the bus they really need to make it much cheaper and more convenient than using a car. Perhaps schools and colleges could provide all children in the area a bus pass to all students that would give them a significant discount and could be used on all buses.

wheelchair accessible access to train stations, better bus connections so that it doesn't take so long to get to place

There should be an escort on every bus to offer help and support

Make it safer, cleaner and reliable

Home to School Transport Survey

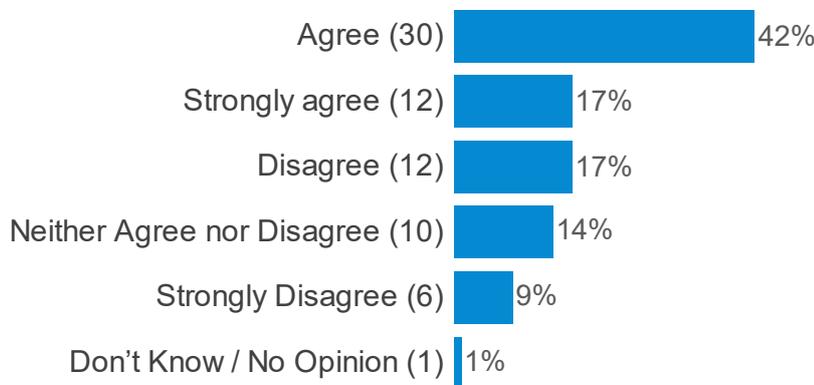
What should the Council do to encourage more children and young people to travel on public transport to school or college?

Subsidised fares, make routes safe for children and drivers - cctv on buses etc, appropriate departure times and adequate spaces on buses etc in line with school opening/departure times

Employee someone to help children with additional needs to access the bus for example. To stop bullying and having someone that my child can go to on the bus and be told where they are getting off etc....

Funding of 1:1 support workers to facilitate practice of young people to develop these skills Public transport worker awareness training Ensure train stations are always manned Clearer signage - especially for changes such as late platform changes Campaign to improve general public social awareness of others

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “If a child or young person has the potential to become an independent traveller and would benefit from Independent Travel Training, then they should be expected to undertake the training?”



Please provide any further thoughts, comments and suggestions in relation to Independent Travel Training.

To encourage independence the person has to feel safe.

Yes if it was safe to do so - which it currently is NOT! as per the Safety report April 2020

As every training it would certainly help young person to feel more confident and safe in situations new for them.

They should not be made to attend it should be thier choice

He cannot travel independently he has severe autism and is non verbal. He has no concept of danger and would run into the road and run away!!

As long as the individuals needs are considered as part of a risk assessment process

But this only makes sense if the appropriate public transport system is in place

There will be young people in our community for whom this is essential - not a luxury. Educating YP on safe use of public transport, reading and understanding a timetable, where to get help or assistance, behaviour expected when waiting or travelling on services. How to use aps to find out where the bus is etc.. This could be online with some practical sessions too.

Again there is no point in saying that If in reality the service isn't there by the council!

'expected' implies forced to do or risk of consequences such as withdrawal of funding. This is not acceptable. If a child is able and willing then ok but should not be expected to do it if the facilities are worse or make qulaity of life worse.

whilst independence is a laudable goal, in practice the council has not been as good at making the assessment of potential options when compared to parents

Home to School Transport Survey

Please provide any further thoughts, comments and suggestions in relation to Independent Travel Training.

My daughter is 8 years old and son is 3 years old. I would agree for 8+. I doubted for less than 5 years of age.

This decision should be a collective one not just by officers of the council. Health and education professionals must be involved in the decision making .

I would have to be convinced that choosing who has the 'potential' is not a choice driven by a determination that all disabled children will be suitable. Who decides this? Parents? Young people themselves? Or you? None of these could make an objective assessment.

You should not force a child to undertake travel training even if they have the potential to do it, you could make situations worse especially at home.

Who determines the potential? What is this based on? This is a leading question that provides no context or definition.

Educate about risks and to keep safe. Dangers of criminals etc.

Whilst I agree with the above statement, you do have to provide reassurance to both parents and the young person and not rush this. If you cause anxiety it will never be successful.

My daughter could Not under any circumstances use public transport even with someone . She has to go to toilet just before she gets into taxi as it is. She would never be able to cope. Then there is the noise, smells, lights, this would lead to sensory overload and meltdown. Which she now has with tics both vocal and motor. The idea of her even contemplating going on public transport would mean she would have to stop college.

Re the last question, it really depends on the individual and their needs/abilities

I have spent a considerable amount of time supporting my son to become an independent traveller - the benefits are immense both for confidence and self esteem for his life opportunities and also for the impact on the family (less time running around after them) it is a huge step to take as a parent but just take little steps to start from an early age and I think parents are too scared to do this - I had no support from my son's SEN school but think this would have helped and perhaps running a parents workshop would have given me more confidence earlier on - my son now travels independently on a train to part time work - Something I would never have dreamed possible a few years ago - parents need help and encouragement to see the possibilities and benefits

In whose opinion would it be to decide if that child 'has the potential'? My child does not although sometimes her teachers feel she does ok on a bus. It's her inability to see dangers that's the problem and I can't see that as ever changing

You shouldn't force or expect people with needs to have to do something or undertake training. It should be simply be available if it is a positive life skill that they want.

This is ridiculous - you are moving the responsibility from the councils poorly administered school provision to saving costs in palming our kids off to public transport. The problem lies with schooling and not our children's failure to become independent. There is another issue of the poor transport links in some areas- to travel the 20 mins to school my daughter would need to undertake over an hour's bus journey to get there "independently" ridiculous! Getting her to school is not a training ground for independence.

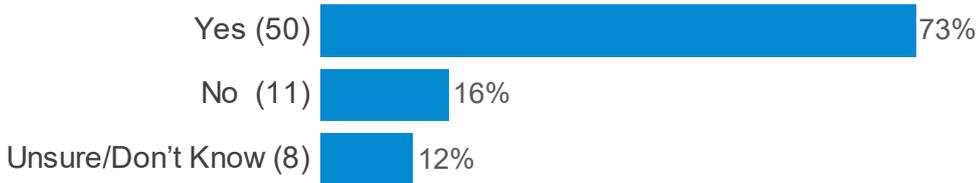
You could travel train my child until you were blue in the face, he would say he understands but would not retain the information.

Some children, especially those educated out of borough, shouldn't be expected to use multiple modes of public transport adding considerable time to a long school day. I would say 1 hour travel each way is the upper limit.

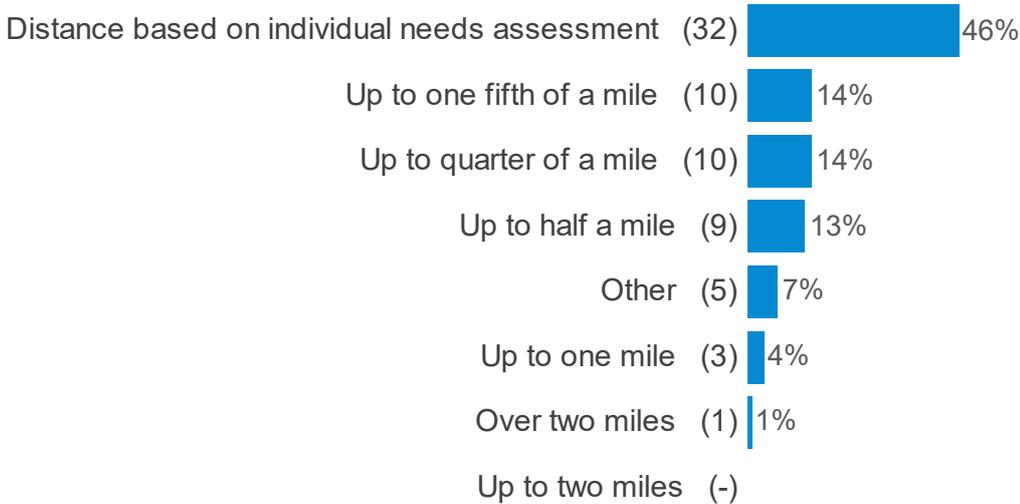
We regularly practice with our son the elements required to access public transport independently - this has been over many years & requires specific 1:1 support. It is intense & he is not there yet. He can now manage reading timetables, planning his route & just about handling money. But any unexpected changes immediately throw him off and can be extremely distressing for him. His social communication limitations hinder his ability to safely ask for assistance.

Home to School Transport Survey

Do you think that the use of collection points for some children and young people would be beneficial?



If collection points were used for some children and young people, how far do you think is reasonable to ask a child or young person to travel to a collection point, accompanied by an adult as necessary?



Other, please specify

None, you are asking Special needs kids to wait around, you clearly have no idea about them

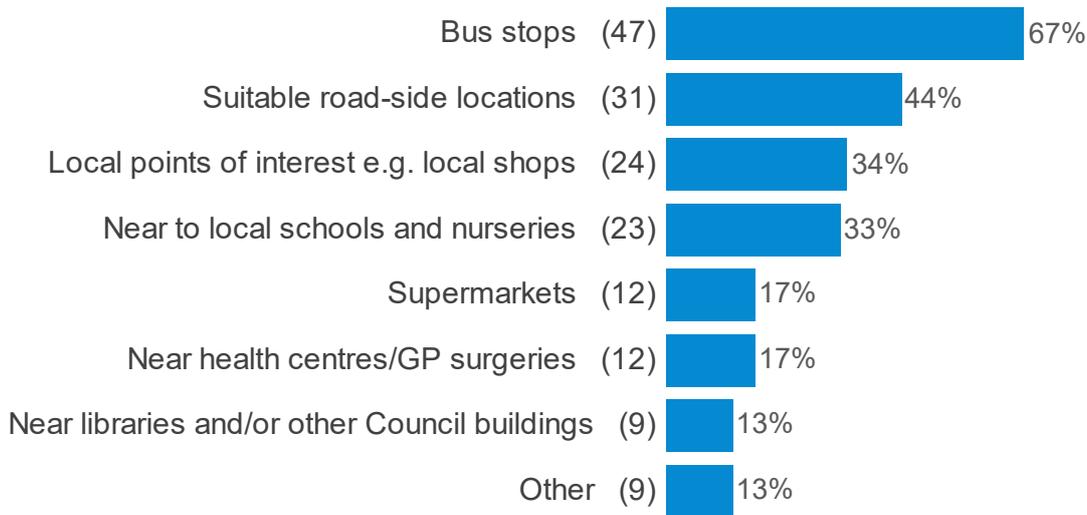
This won't work for children with severe needs.

Not suitable for SEN

they should be picked up from house.

Home to School Transport Survey

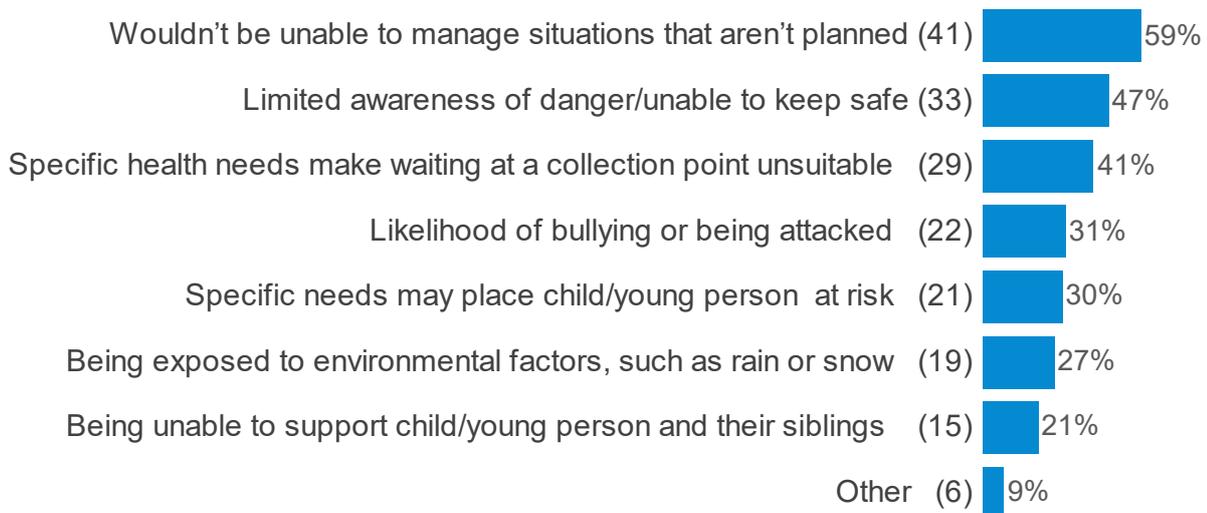
When planning routes with collection points which three location types would be most suitable for a collection point, subject to a location being identified as having suitable facilities for boarding, alighting and waiting? Select up to 3



Other, please specify

- None it's a crazy idea
- Not near fast food outlets
- the locations would have to be were the risk of abuse or other was minimised.
- The nearest other child is 2 miles away. How can we group anywhere?
- The use of a collection point should be based entirely on individual circumstances.
- Not an option
- Away from collections of other groups where's their a risk of being singled out or identifiable

What are the three biggest barriers to a child or young person accessing their school or college transport from a collection point? Select up to 3



Home to School Transport Survey

Other, please specify

Safety

No pedestrian crossings anywhere on the very busy Reading Road. Narrow overgrown footpaths.

Ability to follow guidance on masks, distancing and symptoms especially in cold weather conditions.

Too much administration and extra cost to the council

Point 6: Should read 'Wouldn't be able..' rather than 'Wouldn't be unable..' I would chose that too

Location

Please provide any further thoughts, comments and suggestions in relation to the use of collection points

Please read the Safety Report April 2020 for Reading Road students it has all the details already.

He cannot travel independently he has severe autism and is non verbal. He has no concept of danger and would run into the road and run away!!

I think this is a good idea, it could be that the parents of children waiting at that stop take it in turns to wait with the children. This would only suit certain pupils.

sufficient space needs to be allowed for groups of YP to wait for the bus/coach. I have noticed there are no markers or information about this at the current pick up/drop off sites.

Too much administration and extra cost to the council. Improving public transport and investing in proper policing and public safety is much better.

This is such an individual issue so I have picked the 3 most common reasons in my opinion but each child is different. The biggest issue (as with all transport arrangements) is the logistics of getting multiple children to different places all on time.

This idea in my opinion is ludicrous, I do not know a SEN child or adult that would benefit from this. This would also increase anxiety for carers as the meltdowns to the change in transport would be unbearable.

I have had to use collection points in a supermarket for 1 year - this was ok but did require support from friends to help with other siblings - i think generally not only do we teach children learnt dependence but also families learn dependence by supplying door to door Service. Pickup points support the policy of independent travel not door to door service. Work with schools to assess what the child is capable of with regards to pickup points and travel training - needs can change quickly as child grows up But schools can play big role with teaching independent travel and showing parents what their child is capable of

Collection points need to be in safe locations. This means they can't be hidden away, but they also need to avoid locations with heavy traffic usage. A supermarket car park could potentially be dangerous if it is heavily trafficked. Equally, a collection point on a heavily trafficked road would have high levels of pollution which have huge detrimental impacts on children and young people, potentially stunting their lung growth. Consideration also needs to be given to having some form of shelter to protect children and young people from various weather patterns whilst they wait for their transport. These locations also need to be easily accessible by adequate walking and cycling infrastructure, potentially with bike locking facilities depending on how far children/young people are being asked to come from. Barriers to using a collection point are going to be different depending on the child. All of the options in the list above are possible, particularly for a children/young person with SEND. This will need to be assessed on an individual basis.

please bear in mind wheelchair users, if you are asking a wheelchair user to get to a collection point that might not be as straightforward as an able bodied person. Pavements are not always accessible for them to travel along, crossing busy roads in the morning is not always safe

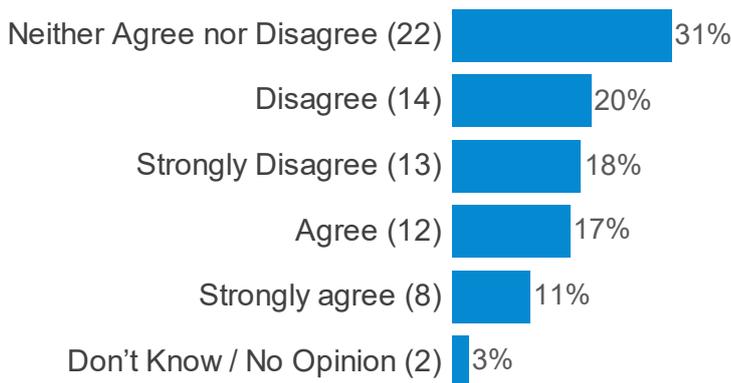
A child that has autism would not understand if transport would arrive early or late as they take things so literally. Also waiting near busy roads is really not a good idea for those that can't cope with danger.

Home to School Transport Survey

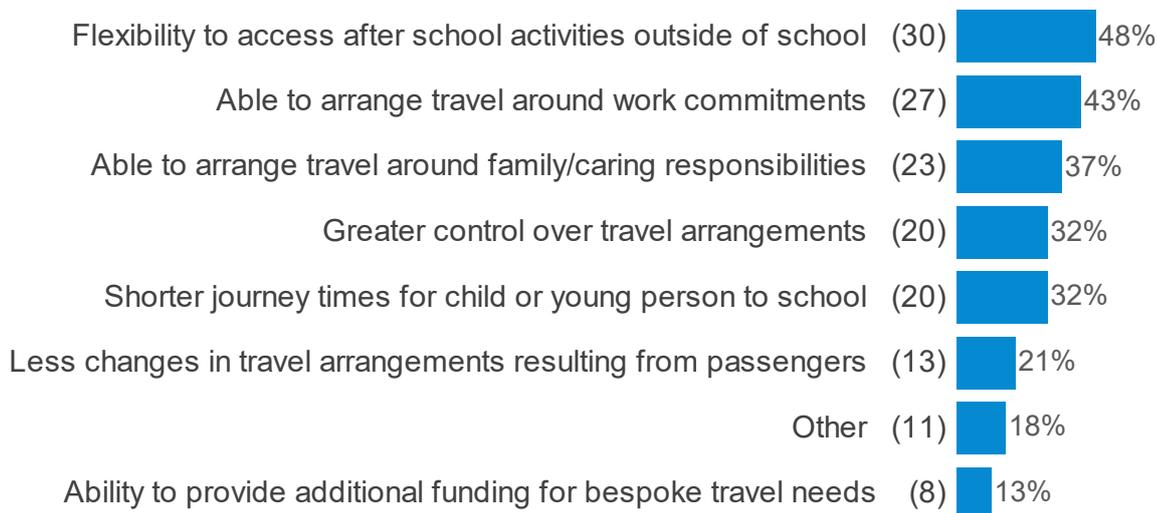
Please provide any further thoughts, comments and suggestions in relation to the use of collection points

If a collection is too busy eg supermarket, other schools the this may be overwhelming whilst waiting for collection If other siblings then difficulty for parents to enable SEN child to be waiting in one outdoor place, whilst attempting to get other children to school. Home collection is a safe indoor place for waiting and also close to school for siblings to access their school. Transport regularly runs late due to traffic/ roadwork/ bad weather delays - practicality of safely waiting for a long period at a collection point is limited

To what extent do you agree with the statement: “The Council should encourage more young people and families to use a travel allowance to make their own travel arrangements to school or college.”



Based on what you currently know about Wokingham’s Travel Allowance, what do you think are the three biggest benefits for families using a Travel Allowance to make their own travel arrangements? Select up to 3



Home to School Transport Survey

Other, please specify

it should be safe to walk to school

more cost effective

There would be no benefit for my son

I don't know about the travel allowance

None.

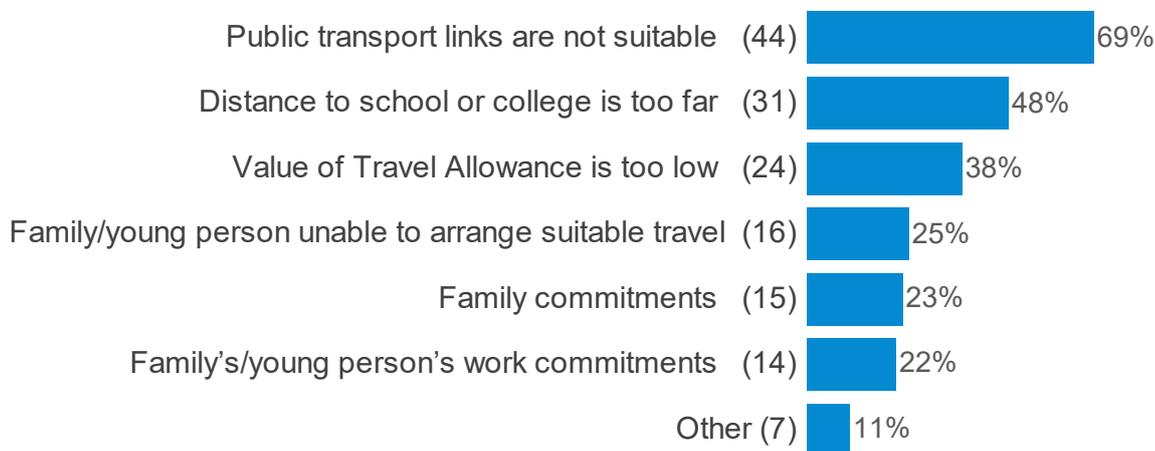
I don't know anything about it

I don't know what the policy allowance is

None- money doesn't help people to access what isn't there!

It will be less environmental friendly to arrange individual transport for pupil

What would do you think are the top three barriers stopping a young person or their family using a Travel Allowance to make their travel arrangements for accessing school or college? Select up to 3



Other, please specify

not safe to walk to school or even cross the road.

family not wanting to put themselves out

You stop parents from working

It is just not an option as daughter is more or less disabled with sensory overload and urinary inco

Don't know what the allowance is

Covid 19 guidelines

Please provide any further thoughts, comments and suggestions in relation to Travel Allowances.

see above

Interviewing appropriate families for a forum discussion would be helpful to you here.

arranging individual travel adds stress and planning to an already stretch situation. Having the travel arranged by a council means situations and issues can be addressed by an authority rather than an individual and therefore any travel arranging company would resolve issues correctly.

Centralised transport provides cost saving options not available to individual parents

Home to School Transport Survey

Please provide any further thoughts, comments and suggestions in relation to Travel Allowances.

I could not carry on teaching if I had to get my daughter ready and take her to a pick up point. Also I have never heard of any travel allowance. We pay for the transport and £70 per month does not seem cheap.

Near to bear in mind that not all special needs children are schooled locally to their home, for instance my child would have to take two buses to be able to get to his school and that would mean over an hour traveling to and from school/ home

Issues with siblings is probably the biggest barrier

I think you need to employ companies that are not run by people that know nothing about SEN. The trouble I have had with a previous transport company should NEVER have happened. The companies you use need to be vetted well and checked on regularly.

Parents will go with the easiest option if you give it to them - i did! However much more beneficial in long term to family and child to get them to take some responsibility for travel arrangements - it is amazing what you and your child can do when they have to - parents should try and look to long term benefits not the here - however if another parent had told me that when my child was younger and i as struggling with their behaviour I might not have given them a polite response !! I wish now the old me could go back and tell the young me when my son was at primary and early secondary school it would be ok - have faith, its ok to make some mistakes Or have mishaps on public transport - just keep going try again, or try a different way. With regards to travel allowances i think they are a good way to start training parents to make independent steps

A travel allowance should be based upon the individual circumstances. If a travel allowance is used to cover the cost of private vehicle travel, then this is something that actively goes against the council's climate emergency agenda. If a travel allowance gives a family the flexibility to put towards public transport or purchase of a bike for example, it is a good use of funds.

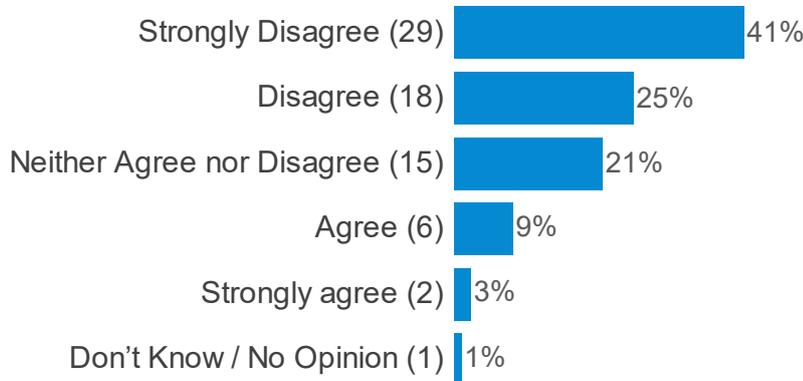
Not aware of Travel Allowance

Travel allowance would enable us to transport our son to school rather than in a shared taxi where, due to collecting other students, what should be a 20 minute journey each way takes over an hour each way - this significantly extends the school day & affects concentration levels & behaviour etc If transport is running late due to delays it can be very stressful waiting for the taxi to arrive in time to get a younger sibling to their school on time. A travel allowance would enable better time planning for the whole family. However, due to public transport limitations we would have to drive to our son's school as it is not near a transport route, which affects the environment and for those without access to a car would likely significantly adversely affect them.

Home to School Transport Survey

Wokingham Borough Council’s expenditure on home to school or college transport for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities is over £3.5 million this year.

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Council should take reasonable steps to limit spend on this service?



If you have any suggestions on how the Council could take reasonable steps to limit its expenditure on home to school or college travel assistance, please provide these.

Safety has no cost!

Travel assistance for young people should be top priority, cut backs should be made else where

Stop funding places at mainstream independent schools without checking their finances, it is disgrace you are funding children at HawleyHurt/Hurst Lodge (whatever name it has changed to since going into admin) .

Work with other councils for travel to same school

It shouldn't be limited! A modern caring society does not look at the most vulnerable and needy and say "they are costing too much, let's cut back the services they need" they are the people that need help, not to be forgotten about. It is this council's responsibility to provide the help that people in their area require and help them!

This figure on its on is hard to make a judgement on. It would be useful for the figure of £3.5 million to link to how many children this affects and what a per child cost is. This would give parents a better idea of whether they could support those costs and how good it was on a value for money basis.

The drivers used on our route are paid less than minimum wage. (They have to pay for their own DBS checks and other qualifying credentials, which reduces their pay to less than minimum wage.) So any attempt to make further savings will impact these already underpaid employees even more negatively.

The idea that every family becomes responsible to driving their kids to school would be a total nightmare in terms of congestion, pollution, increased number of journeys. Mental health issues with drivers and their lack of time management/ aggression and child safety on school grounds/drop off zones near schools. To leave travel arrangements to families to source would make cycling/walking to school more unsafe and parents in walking distance less certain this is a safe option for children learning to go independently.

When I went to school our transport was paid for up until the age of 16. It was some time ago, but children should be allowed to attend ANY school within our catchment area regardless of distance if parents feel they would benefit from that one against another!

It should be increased. All spending on SEND facilities needs increasing. There are insufficient or suitable schools or funding for the growing number of children with needs.

My view is that it costs what it costs.... cutting back provision is not the answer, efficiencies within the provision are the right answer

Home to School Transport Survey

If you have any suggestions on how the Council could take reasonable steps to limit its expenditure on home to school or college travel assistance, please provide these.

Start independent travel training wherever possible earlier than currently proposed (post 16?) Have more SEN specialist settings within Borough Consolidate travel routes and avoid single person journeys Have clusters of families with disabled children with same disabilities using common collection points

Without travel assistance we would have to stop work in order to get our daughter to and from school. She cannot travel alone and there is no public transport anywhere near our home so we would have to stop work and drive her to and from school. We don't have the means to pay for taxis and to pay for an adult to accompany her.

Build more suitable special needs school's, there was no school in wokingham that could cater for my child's needs

If there were more suitable school places within a smaller radius children and young people would not have to travel as far for suitable school placements.

In order to take a view it would be better if the Council was transparent re the alternative options for reducing its expenditure. Where there is a need for school transport to support these young people with very specific needs there should be no question re maintaining the service. This is another leading question citing high sums of money with no comparison to enable an informed response.

Changing the criteria is likely to have a negligible effect on the budget and a disproportionate impact on our most vulnerable families. The most effective method of reducing the transport budget is to ensure sufficient, good quality local provision. This would also have a positive impact on the SEND budget as a whole.

Is there a way that families ay have the option of moving house nearer the schools or colleges. I know some one who particularly won't move nearer their child's school because they will lose their free transport. Perhaps if housing associations have offered a move and its turned down then you could look into this and say if you move you move nearer the school. Not further away just to keep free travel.

Support should be dependent on need not on budgets

Join up with other LEAs To share transport to schools - my son went out of borough for education for a few years and we drove past pickup points in other leas boroughs of children going to his school in half empty taxis. Also not sure why some SEN schiols have numErous school minibuses tgat could be run by school to pick up children must be cheaper than Private companies - if school coukd run them using existing staff LEA pay school at cost price for this service or even with a small markup so financial benefit to school to do - much better seeing money going back into school than companies trying to maximise profit

The term 'reasonable' is the crucial word. In order to limit spending on this service, this should not be achieved by limiting the eligibility criteria further. WBC should lobby the government for appropriate funding in line with the legislation to ensure this vital service can continue. In addition, the service should consider working with other departments that the policy affects to find other ways of getting value for money. For example, sustainable travel for the policy links in with WBC's climate emergency agenda and highways.

It is an extremely important service. My child goes to Addington school. I don't drive. Public transport is negligible. No other option. She would not have been able to attend the school best suited to her without it.

If there isn't adequate educational provision for children within the borough then the council should be paying these cost so that children with Sen have the same access to education as all other children. I find the suggestion that the council wants to reduce this offensive. All children have a right to an education

Build more schools!! Allocate school places more sensibly- for example children in Risley and Swallowfield having access to Bohunt school rather than those children in the town centre who are close to numerous schools

plan a mileage for children and give us in fuel vouchers or another mean of support

Home to School Transport Survey

If you have any suggestions on how the Council could take reasonable steps to limit its expenditure on home to school or college travel assistance, please provide these.

i appreciate how expensive this is, it is unfortunate that private taxi services have to be used as they charge so much I am assuming that the council do not have their own transport themselves. Services for children with additional needs are always being cut and families with children with SEND have so much that they have to deal with including services being cut that another cut puts even more pressure on these very vulnerable families.

The health safety and well being of these children should not be impacted by budgets

If there was more appropriate provision for special educational needs in borough this wouldn't be so much of an issue. I am aware of very capable families of children without any additional needs who could easily drive their children to school who have taxi provision. I believe this is where the cost-saving focus should be.

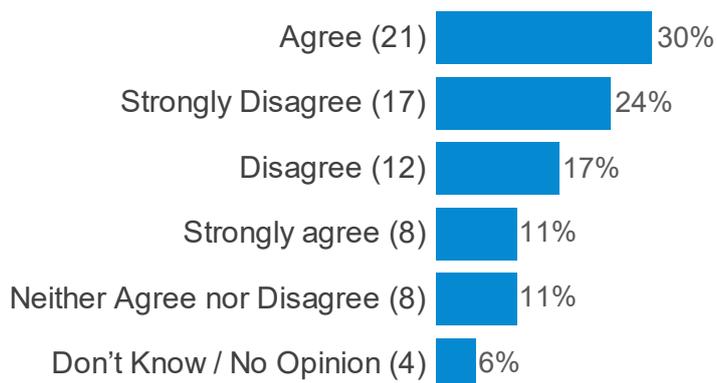
This is a basic need and should not be stopped

Have one school bus going to each school that only children with additional needs can go on.

Continued enablement of access to education for SEN students and safety must be the priority for the council. The council could consider providing funding to the individual school to run a minibus style pick up in an area - parents could take their children to a central pick up point, school staff would have sufficient knowledge and training to support a larger group of the children to travel together safely, less likelihood of the service to be affected by travel delays encountered on taxi circuitous routes. As part of EHCP plan discuss transport requirements and funding. This would ensure transport appropriate to student's need & parents could hold an agreed budget to fund the travel. Are shared taxi costs more economical than individually funded private transportation with a mileage rate? Taxi funding could then be focused on those without private access to cars and/ or pupils who are unable to access their education setting via an easily accessible public transport route.

Children and young people may be receiving Disability Living Allowance, a Personal Independence Payment or another form of travel benefit or concession. Ordinarily the purpose of this benefit is to provide support with travel and access to services and activities. With this in mind, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following:

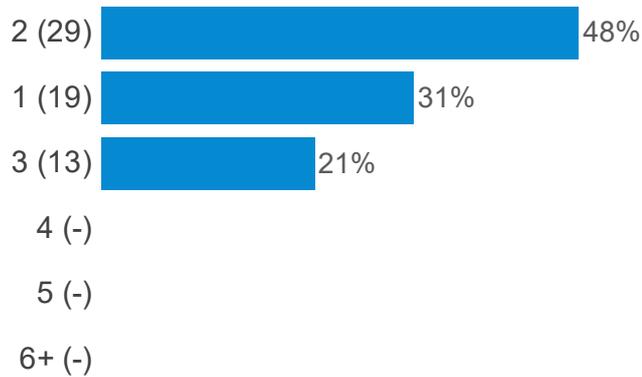
“Existing travel benefits or support should be one of the factors taken into consideration when assessing if a young person over the age of 16 needs additional support with travel to their education placement.”



Are you a parent of school age children?



If yes, how many?



If yes, which school year(s) will they be in as of September 2021?

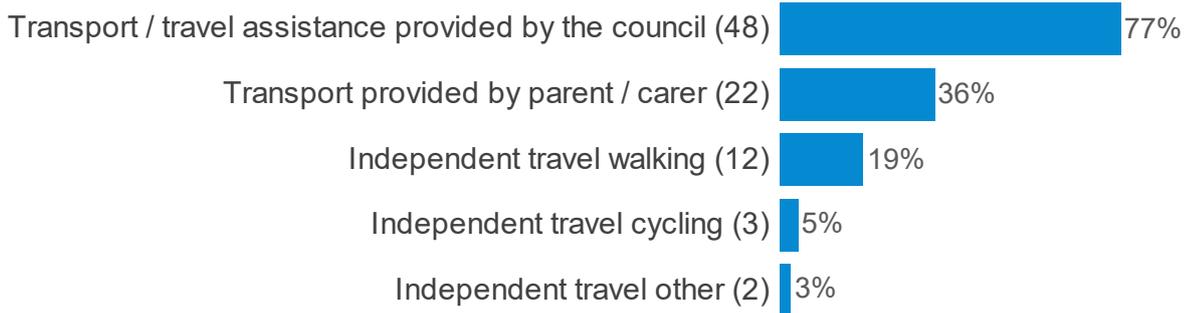
Y8 & Y12	Will have finished school
Bohunt	3 and 6
11 and 13	4 and 2
13 and 10	4
year 8	8
10, 3, 1	8, 11
8 & special needs 9years old	13, 10, 5
3 and 7	11
Year 10 and year 6	3
7	5, 12
11 and 13	2 & 5
The Forest	Year 1, Year 7 and Year 10
10, 12, 7	4 and 7
year 8	8, 6
Year 8 and Year 10	Will have left
Years 9,7 and 5	y7 y9
year 5 and year 8	5,9,10
13, 10, 9	Year 10
College level 3	6, 3 foundation
College of further education	11
10	2, 7 and 9
11	7, sixth form
6	Yr9 yr5

Home to School Transport Survey

If yes, which school year(s) will they be in as of September 2021?

4,8,10	years 4, 9 and 11
2	will be age 16.
Year 12	5 and 6
YEAR 1 AND YEAR 9	13, 11 & 3
7 & 4	the coombes coe primary school
Year 7 and Year 11	

If yes, how does your child / children currently access their place of learning?



If transport provided by the Council, what type of transport/travel assistance do you currently access?

Shared Taxi with escort
Taxi
Taxi
bus
Minibus collection
School van
School bus year 5 currently walks to school with me
Minibus
we do not receive any financial assistance - we are fee paying on the school bus
Fare Payer - I pay for my son to get to school!
taxi
Taxi
Home to school taxi
School bus for secondary school
Taxi
Minibus with adult supervision.
School taxi that he shares with others
taxi to school
Taxi
Taxi
Taxi
Home to school Transport, special needs

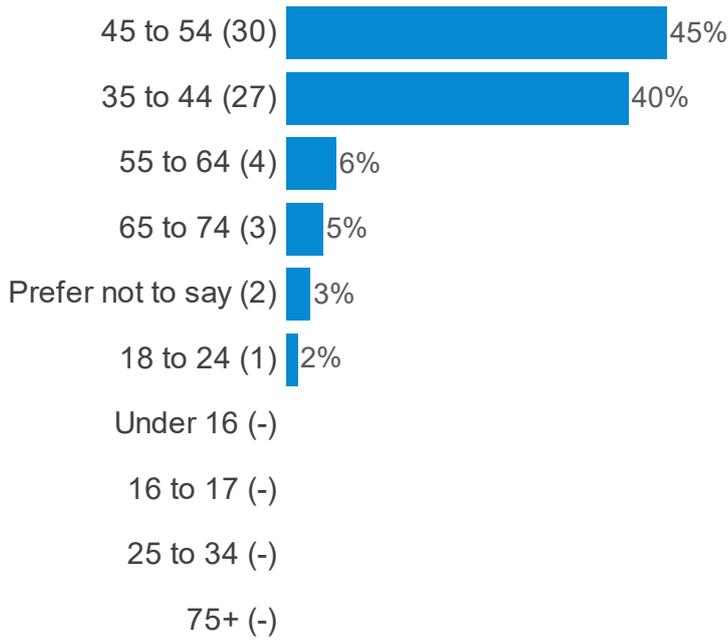
Home to School Transport Survey

If transport provided by the Council, what type of transport/travel assistance do you currently access?

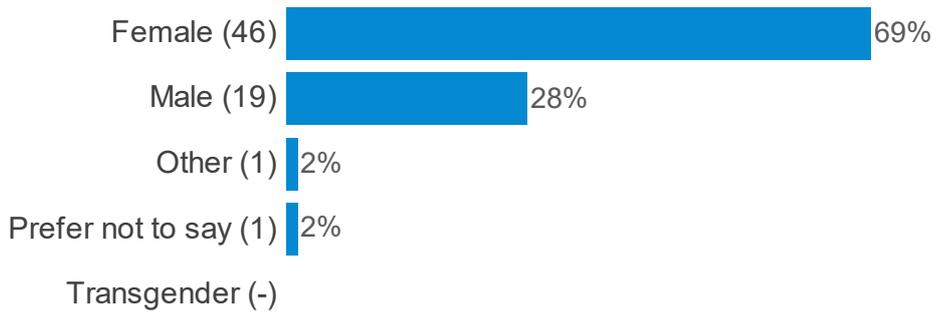
- Mini bus with escort and driver pick up/drop off at home
- SEND son (profound) has school transport from home to school in Maidenhead.
- I pay the council for a seat on a dedicated bus service
- 1:1 solo transport
- Taxi
- Shared taxi
- Travel is funded through ehcp
- taxi (shred) to and from school
- Taxi
- special access vehicle
- School bus
- Taxi with escort
- Taxi
- taxi
- minibus
- Taxi with driver and support carer
- Council minibus
- Taxi
- taxi
- Taxi service with others
- Taxi
- Shared taxi to specialist out of area school
- taxi

Home to School Transport Survey

How old are you?



What sex / gender to you identify as?



Please specify

I have female reproductive organs I assume I am female. Girls and women can't id out of abuse & FGM

Have you undertaken any form of sex / gender reassignment?

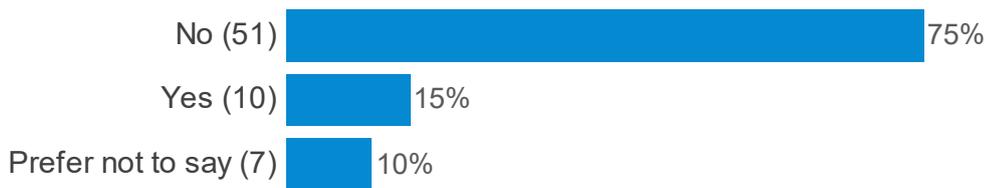


Home to School Transport Survey

Are you currently pregnant or have you given birth within the last year?



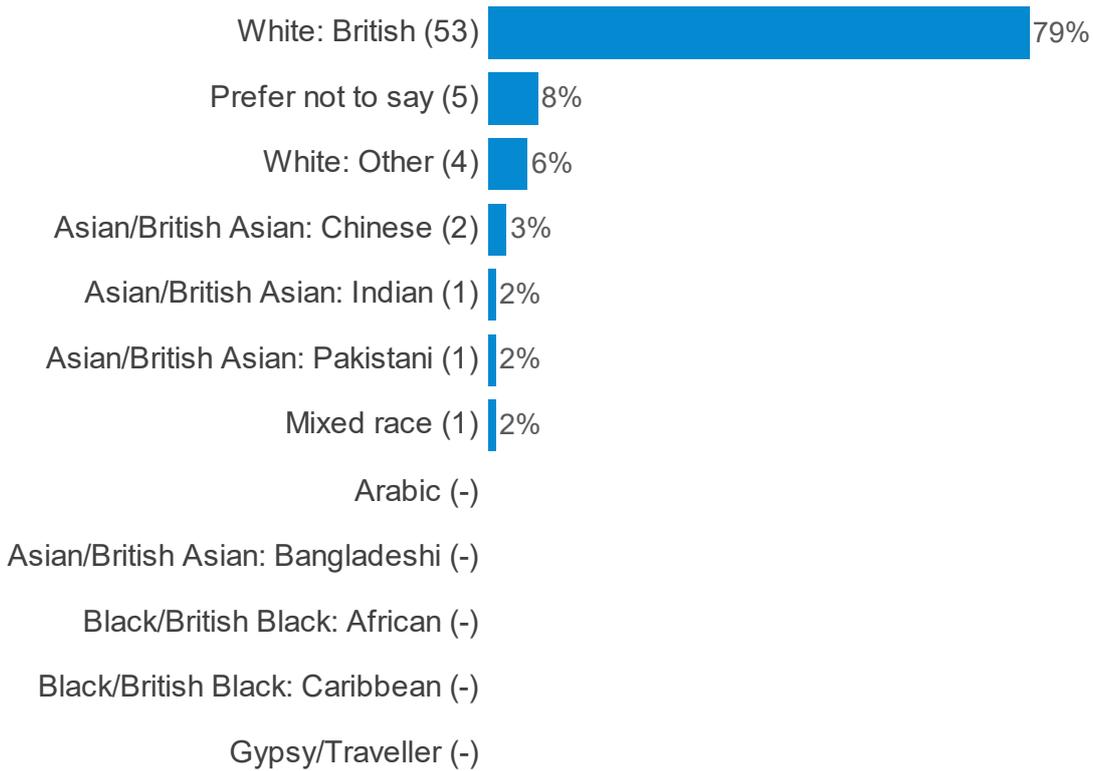
Do you have a disability, long-term illness, or health condition?



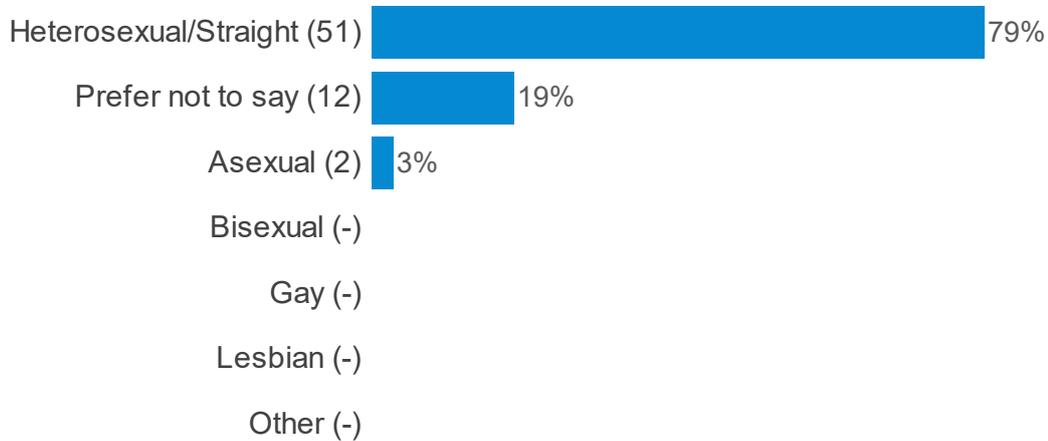
Would it be helpful if you could indicate the nature of your disability? If so, please do.

- diabetes type 2
- Two total knee replacements, and fatigue due to a blood disorder and a couple of bulging discs in lower back
- Type 1 Diabetic for last 37 years
- high blood pressure
- Asthma Alopecia

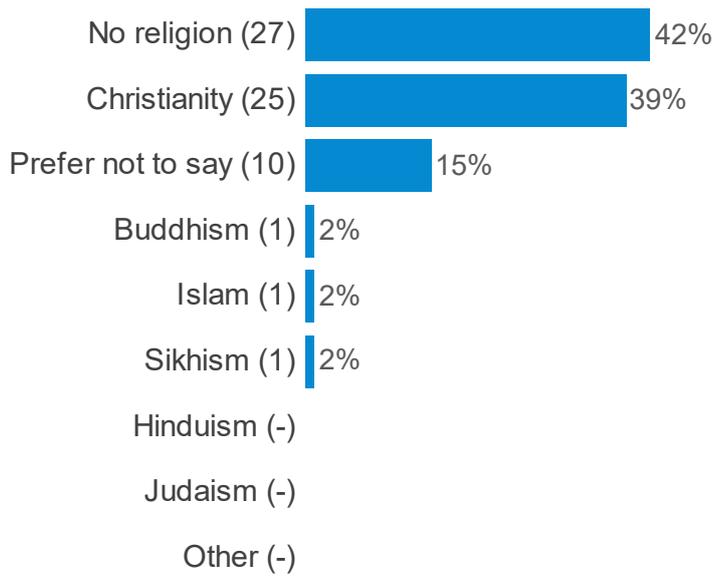
What race of ethnicity best describes you?



Which of the following terms best describes your sexual orientation?



What do you consider your religion or belief to be?



APPENDIX 4: Full Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) for proposed new Travel Assistance Policies

Decisions in scope of this Equality Impact Assessment

Two decisions are in scope of this Equality Impact Assessment:

1. **The decision to approve** a new Travel Assistance Policy for children resident in Wokingham aged 5-16, including children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
2. **The decision to approve** a new Travel Assistance Policy for young people aged post-16 including young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

Please note that the proposed implementation date for both policies is the Academic Year commencing **September 2022**.

Background and Context

All local authorities are required to periodically review their policies in relation to Travel Assistance for children and young people to access education, including children and young people with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND).

Further to consultation with a cross-party representative group of elected Members, two new Travel Assistance Policies were developed in the Summer of 2020. The purpose of this work was to update the Council's current Home to School Transport Policy, with a view to implementing a clear set of viable policy commitments in relation to Travel Assistance which are lawful, sustainable and viable, and appropriate given the needs of children and young people in Wokingham. The proposed new Policies were intended to help enable the Council to:

- Continue to fulfil its statutory responsibilities and requirements in relation to Travel Assistance
- Deliver on its commitments to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families
- Consider options in relation to discretionary Travel Assistance

The Policies were submitted for consultation, which included:

- Consultation with Parent Carers through focus groups facilitated by the Parent Carer Forum (SEND Voices Wokingham)
- Full public consultation which commenced on 18th September 2020 and concluded on 6th November 2020 – which involved targeted communications through service-user contact information; promotion through professional networks; promotion through the Council's social media platforms; and promotion through the Parent Carer Forum and Children with Additional

Needs Network to ensure that service users were aware of and able to respond to the consultation

Outcomes from the public consultation exercise, and a summary of the key messages from responses, were submitted to the Executive for discussion in March 2021.

The Travel Assistance Policies have been updated in the light of feedback from the public consultation, in order to help ensure the new Policies meet statutory and legal responsibilities, whilst helping to ensure the long-term sustainability and financial viability of the service offer.

The Travel Assistance Policies are one of several strands of the Community Transport Programme, and are strategically aligned with the Borough's SEND Strategy 0-25 and SEND Innovation and Improvement Programme. Collectively this work aims to ensure that Travel Assistance is provided in an efficient and effective way for those who are eligible to receive it; that the service is safe and high-quality; and viable in the long-term.

Why does this Equality Impact Assessment need to be completed?

The proposed new Travel Assistance Policies are likely to have an impact on groups with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, in particular:

- Age
- Disability

Additionally, several stakeholders are likely to be affected by implementation of new Travel Assistance Policies in scope for this EIA. These include:

- Children and young people (of statutory school age, and aged 16+ in the case of young people with SEND)
- Parents and Carers
- Schools and colleges
- Transport providers

This EIA is necessary to understand any potential differential impacts prior to any formal decisions to approve the new Policies. In the case where any potential negative differential impacts may possibly arise from implementation of the new Policies, these need to be identified along with suggested mitigations.

How does the proposed decision support delivery of the Council's Community Vision

The proposed new Travel Assistance Policies make a direct contribution towards the Community Vision to ensure Wokingham is 'A great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business', and towards strategic priorities which deliver that Vision.

The benefits to the community from effective Travel Assistance policies include:

1. To help enable all children and young people to fulfil their potential by facilitating and enabling access to learning and education, thereby making a an important contribution towards priorities in the Community Vision around **Enriching Lives**
2. To enable the Council to fulfil its legal and statutory duties to provide Travel Assistance to eligible children and young people in the borough

In addition, new policies for Travel Assistance aim to:

3. Put in place policies and criteria which are clearer and easier for parents, carers and professionals to follow, which contributes towards the strategic priority **Changing the Way We Work for You**
4. Contribute to the substantial portfolio of work which aims to improve the long-term sustainability, quality and financial viability of Travel Assistance, and set out an offer of Travel Assistance which is in line with best practice in local government - which helps enable the Council to **Be the Best** it can be for its residents

Which areas of the Borough are potentially affected by this decision?

All areas

The following section sets out more detailed analysis of issues relating to the potential Equality Impact of the proposed new Travel Assistance Policies, and details of how the proposed new Policies attempt to address key Equality Issues, and mitigate against any potential negative differential impacts.

ANALYSIS OF ISSUES WITH POTENTIAL EQUALITY IMPACT

Legal Duties in Relation to HST/Travel Assistance

Local authorities are subject to several legal and legislative requirements in relation to provision of Travel Assistance for children and young people to access places of education and learning including those set out in the following legislation and statutory instruments:

- The Education Act 1996
- The Education and Inspections Act 2006
- **The Equality Act 2010**
- The School Admissions Code
- The School Travel Regulations 2007
- The Care Act 2014
- Education Funding Regulations
- The Children and Families Act 2014
- The School Standards and Framework Act 1998
- Statutory guidance from the Department for Education

By way of summary, the legal and statutory requirements around Travel Assistance relate to:

- Legal responsibilities and duties on local authorities to provide Travel Assistance
- Specifics relating to eligibility criteria as described in law, relating to factors such as walking distances from home to places of education and how these are to be calculated; criteria relating to assessment of the safety of walking routes; responsibilities around safeguarding children and young people in receipt of Travel Assistance (which extend to responsibilities of the local authority in terms of relationships with providers); **and specific duties and eligibility criteria relating to Travel Assistance for children and young people with SEND**
- Terms and conditions under which discretionary Travel Assistance can be provided, and circumstances under which local authorities are able to apply charges for Travel Assistance (e.g. for young people post 16).

This means that local authorities' provision of Travel Assistance is subject to several complex legal, legislative and statutory drivers and constraints. The work undertaken to develop new Travel Assistance Policies has been carried out in the light of these drivers and constraints; the Policies aim to provide creative but fair and lawful solutions to the need to meet legal obligations relating to Travel Assistance, whilst laying the foundations for a new approach to providing Travel Assistance which will improve the sustainability and long-term financial viability of the service for the benefit of all customers and service users.

Consideration of duties under the Equality Act 2010 with regard to the proposed new Travel Assistance Policies

As part of the initial EIA carried out during the policy development process, and included in a previous report to Members relating to the outcomes from public consultation, the following key points were raised in order to ensure that Members are aware of some key issues which relate to both the Travel Assistance Policy and the Equality Act 2010. These are set out below:

Equality Issue 1: Impact on Under 5s

There is no legal obligation to provide free transport for this age group, but a blanket refusal has the potential to be considered discriminatory (for example, if a four year-old attends a special school some distance from home and could not access education without transport). Impact on children in early years arising from the new policies need to be worked through from an Equality perspective, and the wording of the final policies must demonstrate that public sector Equality duty has been taken into account.

POLICY RESPONSE TO EQUALITY ISSUE 1: The wording in the proposed new statutory school age Travel Assistance Policy (page 11) states:

“There is no statutory duty to provide Travel Assistance for those under the age of 5. The Council may exercise its discretionary power and provide home to school Travel Assistance for children under the age of five on a case-by-case basis.”

This is to state the legal position with regard to Travel Assistance for under 5s, whilst avoiding the negative differential impact which would arise from a blanket refusal and retaining discretionary power to provide Travel Assistance to under 5s on a case-by-case basis.

Equality Issue 2: Travel training

It is reasonable to ask parents and young people to consider travel training, but this should not be a blanket policy. It should be based on individual assessment and tailored to the young person's needs. There may be issues in some areas if times of courses for young people with SEND don't fit in with bus times, for example, and some young people may never manage independent or supported travel by public transport.

POLICY RESPONSE TO EQUALITY ISSUE 2: Independent Travel is not a blanket policy/requirement in either of the proposed new Travel Assistance Policies, but Independent Travel Training is one of several potential options featured in both Travel Assistance Policies that may benefit the child/young person.

The wording on page 10 of the statutory school age Travel Assistance Policy and Page 15 in the post-16 Travel Assistance Policy states:

“The Council is committed to supporting all children and young people to achieve their maximum potential, and become as independent as they are able to be.

In order to better support young people to travel independently, the Council may offer Independent Travel Training (ITT) in their travel assistance offer. The training will support the young person to learn the necessary skills to allow them to effectively deal with and resolve a range of scenarios that they might encounter when travelling on public transport.

A trainer will travel and work with the young person on a 1:1 basis to ensure that the skills taught are understood and put in to practice independently. Training may include:

- Timetables (including time management).
- Orientation.
- Road Safety.
- Accessibility (access to transport, exits and purchasing tickets).
- Communication.
- Personal Safety (including what-if scenarios).
- Travel planning and preparation.

Where the Corporate Transport Unit identify that a young person may have the potential to be supported to travel independently through a travel training programme, a formal assessment will be undertaken to help create a personalised travel plan and identify what training would be required. Training programmes last on average 12 weeks, and the young person will only complete the training once the trainer and the young person, together with their family/carer agree that they have gained the necessary skills to travel on public transport on their own.

Once a young person is deemed capable of independent travel no further Travel Assistance will be offered except in exceptional circumstances.”

Equality Issue 3: Collection Points

Some local authorities now expect parents to take children to pick up points instead of collecting children from home. This is legal but should be based on individual assessments, not a blanket policy. Local authorities have a duty to provide 'non-stressful' transport arrangements.

POLICY RESPONSE TO EQUALITY ISSUE 3: In order to ensure appropriate due regard to the Equality Act and mitigate against negative differential impacts, the Policies make reference to the Council’s responsibilities to ensure collection points are “safe and appropriate”, and subject to individual assessments rather than a blanket policy.

Page 16 of the post-16 Travel Assistance Policy states (emphasis added):

“The Council uses collection points to support the development of independence and preparation for adulthood in our young people. The use of Collection Points also assists the Council to keep journey times for young people to a minimum whilst also minimising timing changes.

The Council will aim to use an approved location near local points of interest as a collection point. This may include libraries, health centres, public Bus Stops, shops, or outside nearby schools or colleges. **Collection points will be individually assessed for suitability to ensure they are safe and appropriate locations for the collection of 1 or more passengers.**

If the young person’s Travel Assistance offer requires them to walk to a collection point, then it is expected that an adult will accompany them where necessary. Collection points will be a reasonable distance from the young person’s home address. We will aim to use collection points that are no more than ½ mile from the home and it is expected that most collection points will be significantly closer. **The distance and location of the collection points for each young person will be individually assessed on a case-by-case basis.**

If a young person is accessing a collection point a parent/carer will be responsible for ensuring that the young person gets safely to and from the collection point at the appropriate time. The parent/carer will also be responsible for them when they are waiting for transport, and when they leave the transport at the end of the day.”

Page 10 of the Statutory School Age Policy states (emphasis added):

“Eligibility for Travel Assistance is assessed based on the pupil’s registered home address, but any transport provided may not necessarily be door to school gate. Local Authorities are able to use reasonable pick-up and drop-off points **in appropriate individual cases.** This may be a bus stop or other place where young people can **safely** wait for their vehicle. The Council aims to ensure there are **safe and appropriate** pick-up points within reasonable distance from schools and centres of population. Pupils can be required to walk to and from a central pick up and/or drop off point. This will usually be within one mile walking distance from the child’s home, **and total walking distance will be within the relevant statutory mile walking distances according to age and ability, and in the light of any identified Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities.**”

Equality Issue 4: Charging for transport for young people of 6th form age

This is lawful but should avoid indirect discrimination and requires the council to consider the impact on groups with protected characteristics under the Equality Act. For example, the impact on children and young people with SEND, their parents and carers arising from applying the same levels of charge/discount for young people with SEND as for other groups of young people should be considered. The local authority should also take into account that students with SEND may have to travel further to a suitable setting that can meet their needs.

POLICY RESPONSE TO EQUALITY ISSUE 4: The Policies retain the lawful right to apply a charge for Travel Assistance for young people of 6th form age, but clarifies that this is to help contribute towards the costs of the service; that discounts are available for young people eligible for free school meals; and that payments can be made in monthly instalments to make payment more manageable.

Page 9 of the post-16 Policy States:

“If you are assessed as eligible under the Council’s policy, **a charge towards the cost of Travel Assistance** will be applied. Details of the charge for the Academic Year can be found at the following link:

[The link will be inserted in published version of the Policy]

There will be **a discount of 50% for young people who are eligible for free school meals.**

The payment can also be made in **10 monthly instalments.**”

Additional information to note:

Page 7 of the statutory school age Travel Assistance Policy also states:

“The Council promotes equality of opportunity for parents with Disabilities. Where a parent’s Disability prevents them from accompanying their child along a walking route that would otherwise be considered unsafe without adult supervision, a reasonable adjustment might be to provide free home to school Travel Assistance for the child in question.”

Travel Assistance Customer Profile and relevance to the Equality Act 2010

The profile of current utilisation of the service, which shows service users at Primary and Secondary stages, and children and young people with SEND, is set out in Table 1 below:

Table 1: FY21-22 profile of HST/Travel Assistance service users

	Primary	Secondary	SEND	Total
Numbers	80	363	294	737

Table 1 shows that the largest customer group is Secondary mainstream, followed by children and young people with SEND. It is relevant to note that although children and young people with SEND account for just under 40% of HST/Travel Assistance customers, this utilisation accounts for approximately 70% of the total budget for HST/Travel Assistance. It is also relevant to note that in terms of any forecast demand pressures, the potential for increased demand relating to SEND Travel Assistance is by far the most significant driver.

In terms of the Equality Act 2010, Table 1 indicates that when changes to the current Home to School Transport Policy and implementation of the proposed new Travel Assistance Policies are considered, prior to any decision-making the Council will need to have due regard to the potential for impact on service users with protected characteristics such as Age (the Policies relate directly to children and young people and their capacity to access education), and Disability (the Policies have important implications for children and young people with SEND, their parents and carers).

Children and Young People with SEND in Wokingham

The most recently available SEND Improvement Dashboard data shows that there are over 1,250 children and young people with Education Health and Care Plans, and additionally over 2,300 children and young people receiving SEN Support.

It is important to note when assessing Equality Impact, that not all children and young people with SEND will require Travel Assistance. However, when assessing potential Equality Impact, it is useful for Members to review the profile and levels of different types of SEND-related needs across the Wokingham SEND population, to better understand the likely size of the local population that could be particularly affected by any proposed changes to Travel Assistance Policies.

Figure 1 below shows a breakdown of pupils with SEND in Wokingham by primary type of need, as listed currently on the Council for Disabled Children (CDC) data dashboard.

Figure 1: Treemap of primary SEND needs in Wokingham

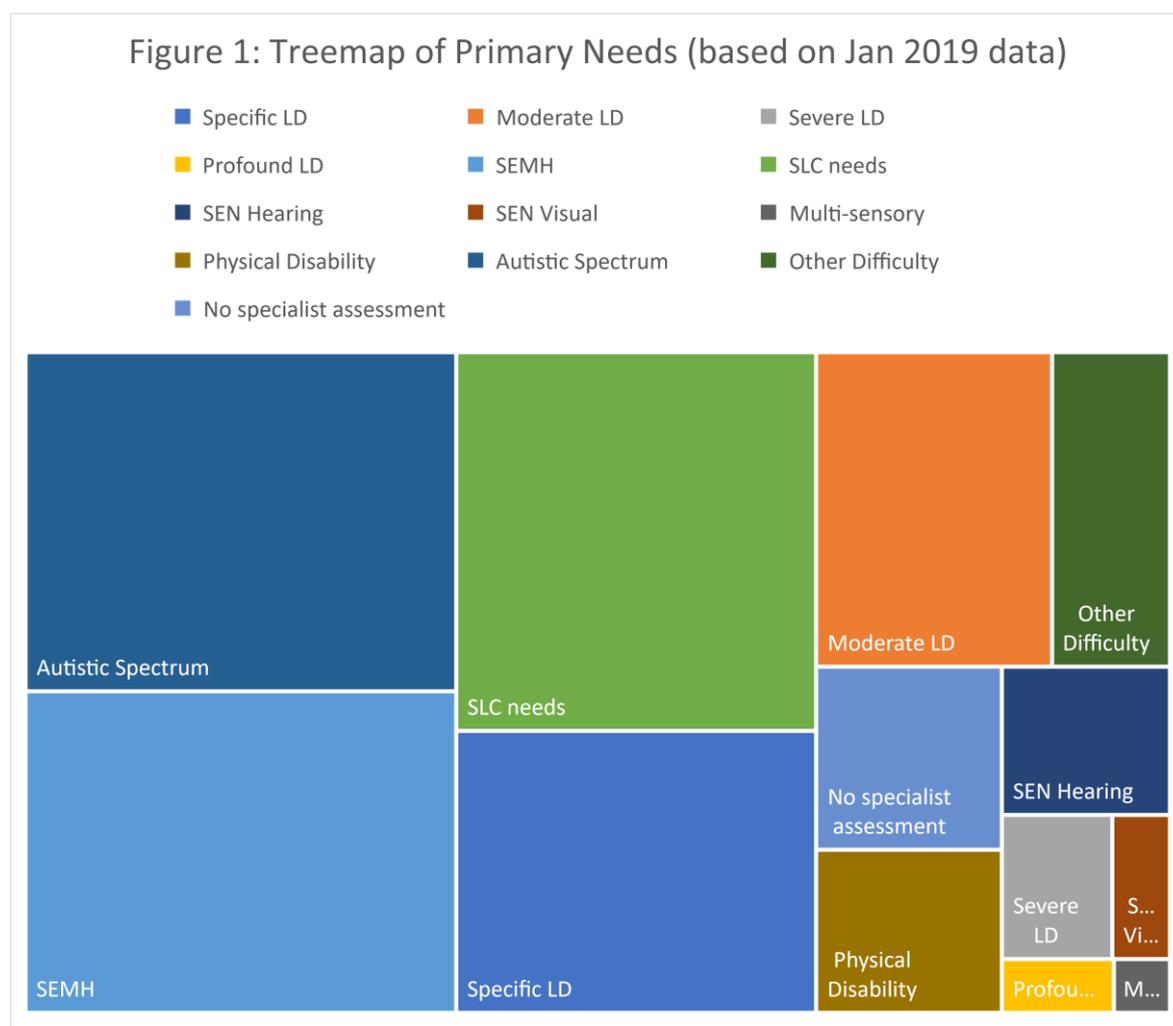


Table 2 shows the number of EHCPs by primary need type for the total EHCP cohort aged 0-25, from 2018-2020.

Table 2: EHCPs by primary need type (2018-20)

Primary Need	2018		2019		2020	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
ASD	342	39	374	40	440	41
Hearing impairment	23	3	26	3	26	2
Moderate LD	96	11	91	10	97	9
Multi-sensory impairment	2	0.2	2	0.2	2	0.2
Other difficulty/disorder	4	0.5	4	0.4	6	0.6
Physical disability	50	6	50	5	53	5
Profound and Multiple LD	33	4	35	4	38	4
SEMH	156	18	170	18	215	20
Severe LD	77	9	89	10	96	9

Speech, Language and Communication needs	60	7	69	7	80	7
Specific LD	20	2	21	2	20	2
Visual impairment	2	0.2	3	0.3	3	0.3
Not recorded	2	0.2	0	0	2	0.2

Table 2 shows that the **top three primary needs** have remained consistent over the past 3 years:

- Autistic Spectrum Disorder (39-41%)
- Social, Emotional and Mental Health (18-20%)
- Moderate Learning Difficulties (9-11%)

Whilst it is important to remember that not all children and young people with SEND will require HST/Travel Assistance, and Travel Assistance requirements vary significantly from one child to another according to their individual needs.

Consultation with the public including stakeholders and service users

Public Consultation with key stakeholders, parents and carers was undertaken between September and November 2020 to understand the potential impacts of the new proposed Travel Assistance Policies, and to understand any changes that may be needed to the consultation drafts prior to submission to elected Members for approval in order to mitigate negative differential impacts.

Consultation drafts of both the new Travel Assistance Policies, and specific questions relating to proposals in the new Policies, were made available through the Council's consultation website. Notification of the consultation, with links to the consultation draft Policies and consultation questions, were sent to current service users, and promoted through Schools and Education networks, the Parent Carer Forum (SEND Voices Wokingham), and the Children with Additional Needs (CAN) Network.

How Consultation Outcomes have informed further development of the proposed new Travel Assistance Policies and report to the Executive

The full Consultation Report has been attached (with this Equality Impact Assessment) to the Report to the Executive which lays out the recommendations for Member decisions.

About the respondents to the public consultation

76 members of the public responded to the formal public consultation on the Council's website between 18th September and 6th November 2020.

Ahead of this date, schools and current service users were notified of the consultation, given appropriate links to the consultation page, and notice of the closing dates. Officers also raised awareness of the consultation through e-newsletters and flagged the consultation in meetings with key stakeholders in the build up to the consultation.

The consultation was promoted through the Council's social media platforms, professional networks including schools, the Parent Carer Forum (SEND Voices Wokingham) network, and the Children with Additional Needs (CAN) Network.

The Council directly contacted service users and sent reminder communications throughout the consultation period.

89% of these were parents of school age children. 77% of respondents reported that their child/children had transport/travel assistance provided by the council; 36% of respondents have transport/travel assistance provided by a parent or carer.

In addition to responses via the public consultation portal, the Council have also received feedback from:

- SEND Voices Wokingham (Wokingham's Parent Carer Forum), Additionally, two focus groups with parents and carers were facilitated by SEND Voices Wokingham (in August and November 2020) and attended by officers developing the consultation drafts of the Travel Assistance Policies
- A formal written response from the Liberal Democrat Group (submitted previously to the Executive as part of the March 2021 report on Travel Assistance Policies)

Feedback from Consultation on options to change discretionary Travel Assistance

A **headline summary** of the key questions and responses relating to options to change discretionary Travel Assistance is set out in Table 3 below:

Table 3: headline summary of key consultation questions and responses relating to options to change discretionary Travel Assistance

Theme	Summary of questions	Summary of responses
Ceasing discretionary transport for children under the age of 5	The council has the option to cease to provide free HST to an infant or primary school for a children under the age of five, where a child is deemed as eligible once they turn 5 years of age – to what extent do you Agree or Disagree with this approach?	64% of respondents Disagreed with ceasing to provide discretionary transport to under 5s who are deemed as eligible once they turn 5. 66% of respondents said they Agreed that the Council should provide discretionary transport to under 5s deemed eligible for transport at the age of 5.
Ceasing discretionary transport for a child turning 8 years	Wokingham has the option to cease to provide HST at the end of the term in which a child turns 8, where the child has been eligible due to living more than 2 miles but less than 3 miles from their nearest school. To what extent do you Agree or Disagree with this Approach?	81% Disagreed with this approach, and 78% said they Agreed that the Council should continue to provide HST to the end of the academic year in which a child turns 8, where the child has been eligible due to living more than 2 miles but less than 3 miles from their nearest school.
Continuing provision for young people aged 17-18 who meet criteria under existing policies	The Council could continue to provide home to school/college travel assistance for young people ages 17-18 who meet the eligibility criteria under our existing policies. To what extent do you agree with this approach?	72% Agreed provision should continue under these circumstances; 75% Disagreed that the Council take up the option to cease to provide ordinarily home to school/college travel assistance for young people ages 17-18 whilst promoting the Student Fare Card Scheme, 16-17 Saver and Disabled Person's Bus Pass Scheme to all post 16 students.

Additional Feedback from Public Consultation

In addition to giving members of the public, service users and professionals the opportunity to give views on specific options as set out in the table above, the consultation also gave respondents an opportunity to give their views on a small number of key issues relating to home to school or college transport, in order to help with further development of the policies and to enable the Council to understand public opinion and perspectives on opportunities to help strengthen the service and improve its overall sustainability and viability.

These subjects included:

- Independent travel
- Collection points
- Use of travel allowances
- Reasonable steps to limit spend on the service
- Existing benefits being taken into account during the assessment process

A summary of the feedback received in response to these thematic areas is set out below:

(a) Feedback on Independent Travel

Questions were asked in the consultation document around Independent Travel, in order to better understand the opportunities, barriers and support required to enable children and young people to be as independent as possible, and travel independently to their place of learning where it is possible for them to do so.

A summary of responses to these questions showed:

1. In terms of **a child's aspirations to travel independently**, 51% said that their aspirations for independent travel included sharing school transport with other children and young people; 48% reported aspiring to being able to carry their own bags and board and alight a vehicle on their own; 45% reported their aspiration as being to travel without a parent or carer in attendance, and 42% reported an aspiration to access transport from a collection point. 31% reported an aspiration to undertake a single journey/route independently using public transport.
2. The **greatest benefits to a child or young person who is successfully supported to travel independently** were reported as being increased self-esteem and confidence (81%), reduced reliance on family members to assist with travel needs (53%), and improved access to employment or vocational opportunities (43%). The **biggest benefits to the family of a young person who is successfully supported to travel independently on public transport** were reported as being family members having time to do their own thing (58%), less need for adults to accompany the young person (49%), reduced dependency financially (47%) and opportunities to access community services (41%).
3. The **greatest barriers** to independent travel via public transport were reported as limited awareness of danger or being unable to keep safe (54%), not being able to manage situations that aren't planned (44%), risk of getting lost or missing the stop (26%) and being able to access services due to poor public transport links (25%).
4. When respondents were asked if a child or young person has the potential to become an independent traveller and would benefit from **independent travel training**, should they be expected to undertake that training, a total of 59% agreed with this (42% Strongly Agreed, 17% Agreed). 26% Disagreed.
5. 73% of respondents thought that **collection points** for some children and young people would be beneficial; when asked how far it is reasonable to ask a child or young person to travel to a collection point, accompanied by an adult

as necessary, 46% said the distance should be based on an individual needs assessment. In terms of suitable collection points, Bus Stops were reported as being the most suitable (67%), followed by suitable road-side locations (44%) and local points of interest e.g. local shops (34%) and near to local schools and nurseries (33%).

6. When asked about whether the Council should encourage more young people and families to use a **travel allowance to make their own arrangements** to travel to school or college, 31% neither agreed nor disagreed with this approach. 38% disagreed, and 28% agreed. The biggest benefits of travel allowances were cited as flexibility to access after school activities (48%), ability to arrange travel around work commitments (43%), ability to arrange travel around family/caring responsibilities (37%) and greater control over travel arrangements (32%). The **top three barriers** to use of a travel allowance were reported as public transport links not being suitable (69%), distance to school or college being too far (48%) and the value of the travel allowance being too low (38%).
7. It is worth noting that feedback received during the focus group sessions with parents and carers also included points relating to the potential for and challenges around independent travel. From these sessions it was clear that “independence” means different things for different children and young people according to their needs and the challenges they face; independence is an aspiration for many children, young people, their parents and carers, but support to children young people and families is needed if those aspirations are to be realised – both in terms of training, some forms of travel assistance, and a partnership/coproduction approach to ensuring that children and young people with SEND are able to access their place(s) of learning.

(b) Feedback on taking reasonable steps to limit spend on the service

The consultation document flagged the level of expenditure on home to school or college transport for children and young people with special educational needs or disabilities, and asked respondents whether they agreed that the Council should take reasonable steps to limit spend on this service. 66% disagreed with this approach, and 12% agreed.

However, the full consultation document report attached as Appendix 3 sets out several suggestions from respondents about how the Council could take reasonable steps to limit spend on this service.

(c) Feedback on taking account of existing benefits into account when assessing transport needs

The consultation document proposed the question:

“Children and young people may be receiving Disability Living Allowance, a Personal Independence Payment, or another form of travel benefit or concession. Ordinarily the

purpose of this benefit is to provide support with travel and access to services and activities. With this in mind, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following: “Existing travel benefits or support should be one of the factors taken into consideration when assessing if a young person over the age of 16 needs additional support with travel to their education placement.” 41% agreed with this approach, 41% disagreed.

Updates made to the Travel Assistance Policies following formal consultation

Table 4 below provides an overview of the key changes to the Travel Assistance Policies following the formal public consultation:

Table 4: Summary of feedback on consultation drafts of Travel Assistance Policies, and amendments made to the Policies in the light of this feedback

Feedback on Policies from consultation	Amendments and updates made to the Policies as a result
Some sections of the Policies appear to be duplicated / in an inappropriate section of the Policy	Duplications have been removed; structure of the Policies have been updated to ensure the Policies are easier to navigate
Links to points of contact for the Travel Assistance Team should be included in the Policies	Links and appropriate contact details will be included in the published version of the policies
The timetable for applications needs to be clarified and confirmed in the Policies	A web link to the timetable for applications and process for review of allocations of Travel Assistance will be included in the published versions of the Travel Assistance Policies
Clarification is required around eligibility criteria for young people post-16 with SEND in relation to Travel Assistance	Travel Assistance eligibility criteria for young people post 16 with SEND has been set out in a clear Section in the post-16 policy; clarifications have been made around eligibility at sixth form (aged 16-18) and post-19
Consultees requested that the final Policies make it easier for parents, carers and professionals to identify the appropriate eligibility criteria for Travel Assistance	Two Policies (one for statutory school age children, one for young people post-16) have been developed to help parents, carers and professionals to identify and apply the relevant eligibility criteria to applications and assessments. Eligibility criteria is set out in clear sections of each of the proposed new Policies. This approach also reflects feedback undertaken during the initial review of the current HST Policy that eligibility criteria were sometimes hard to identify within a single Policy that aimed to cover children and young people at all ages

<p>Consultees were not in favour of withdrawing discretionary Travel Assistance for children under the age of 5, or at the end of the term in which a child turns 8, where the child has been eligible due to living more than 2 miles but less than 3 miles from their nearest school.</p>	<p>The proposed new policies retain the option to provide discretionary Travel Assistance under these circumstances, but stress that the Council does not have legal obligations to do so.</p> <p>Work undertaken on the Equality Impact Assessment showed that Policy terms which withdrew completely the option for this discretionary Travel Assistance could have a negative differential impact on the Equality Act 2010 protected characteristic "Age".</p> <p>Data modelling showed the numbers of children and young people who would be adversely affected by the decision to withdraw completely this discretionary provision are small; costs of providing under these circumstances are (according to current service user data) <£4k.</p>
<p>Further clarification required about what is meant by Independent Travel and potential support available to support Independent Travel</p>	<p>Definitions of Independent Travel and examples of support in the form of Independent Travel Training are now included in the updated Travel Assistance Policies</p>
<p>Some consultees disagreed that the Council should take into account other benefits (such as provision of a motability vehicle) when assessing eligibility for Travel Assistance for young people with SEND post-19.</p>	<p>The post-16 Policy wording clarifies this point as follows:</p> <p>"Where there is a 'Motability' vehicle available to the student, but a decision has been made not to use the 'Motability' vehicle to support the student to reach their education placement, we would normally expect the carer/student to make their own appropriate alternative arrangements. If this is not possible/reasonable, further details will need to be provided to inform the decision-making process."</p> <p>The Policy also clarifies:</p> <p>"Please note that we would not generally consider work or childcare commitments as an exceptional reason for travel assistance to be provided for young people with SEND aged 16+."</p>

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TITLE	School Meals Managed Catering Service
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 29 July 2021
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Finance and Housing - John Kaiser

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

The report presents the procurement business case for School Meals and Kitchen Maintenance traded services contract and requires Executive approval as the estimated value of the proposed contract is greater than £500,000.

The scope of the services includes provision of meals, directly supplied to schools by the appointed supplier, and maintenance of school kitchen's equipment managed by Council's officers. This traded service is available to all schools across the Borough at an annual subscription fee payable by the schools to the Council. The current contract is due to expire in July 2022.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive approves the proposed business case for procurement of a new contract for school meals and kitchens maintenance to commence in August 2022, noting that the updated traded services offer will no longer deliver the same level of income but still represents a viable option.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The School Meals Managed Catering Service is a pre-procured and centrally managed corporate Contract, which includes the supply of school meals and repair and maintenance of school kitchen's equipment, including replacement of catering equipment currently provided to 34 schools within the Borough.

The Council has been offering this service for 13 years, however, since many schools became academies over the last few years, more and more of them prefer to adopt the solution recommended by the academy trust managing them, which have resulted in a significant reduction in the number of schools subscribing for this service over the years.

As a result of Covid-19 pandemic and various other factors, the level of performance of the current contract dropped down over the last year leading to overall dissatisfaction with the quality of the service. This necessitated a thorough review of the traded service and an improved offer introducing a new operational model for schools to consider. Following a consultation with schools, a total of 20 schools have confirmed commitment to use the new traded service from August 2022.

The current contract comes to an end on the 31st July 2022, meaning that procurement of new contract will need to commence in September 2021 at the latest to allow for a compliant procurement process (4 to 6 months) and a mobilisation period of 6 months.

BACKGROUND

The School Meals Managed Catering Service is a pre-procured and Council managed corporate contract, which includes the provision of a school meals service, school meal kitchen maintenance and repair or replacement of catering equipment for 34 schools within the Borough.

34 schools have signed up to the current contract due to expire in July 2022. Each one of them pays an annual subscription fee which forms the budget used to cover the kitchens maintenance cost. Any surplus is carried forward and used over the next financial year for the same purpose. This approach suggests an insurance type scheme which has been operating very efficiently so far without the need of requesting any additional revenue funds to cover deficit for the relevant year. The Council allocates capital budget of £100k annually to this contract via the MTFP.

The school meals service is provided via a procured catering supplier, responsible for the production and serving of the meals, recruitment and management of the necessary qualified staff.

The kitchens repair and maintenance service is coordinated and managed by 2 Contract Officers (0.5 FTE each) employed by the Council, reporting into a Senior Procurement Specialist, using specialists contractors procured by the Operational Property team. The Contract Officers are also responsible for the performance monitoring of the school meals provision element of the contract implemented via regular quality audits at the relevant school sites.

In summary, the current traded service offer includes:

- Procurement and contract management of a suite of service contracts
- Access to a fully managed catering service (outsourced)
- Maintenance of heavy commercial catering equipment (e.g. combi ovens, dishwashers, hot trolleys etc)
- Replacement of heavy catering equipment beyond economic repair
- Replacement and sourcing of light equipment e.g. cutlery, trays, etc
- Management of inspection and treatment costs for pest control
- Catering site quality audits
- Coordination of high-level kitchen cleans including return to School following COVID/School holidays
- Coordination of associated kitchen management service Contracts:
Duct cleaning, Gas inspections, Ventilation filter cleans, PAT testing, Fire equipment maintenance, Facilities repair (floor, water pipes), Kitchen drain blockages
- Menu designed to align to legislative requirements
- Project management of kitchen improvements
- Provision of helpdesk service to report equipment breakdown etc.

Despite the current Traded Service Contract being very comprehensive, and the various services covered by the Contract articulated in the SLA, feedback received suggests that Schools believe the existing Contract is expensive, particularly for smaller Schools.

This perception is more prevalent in 'servery only' schools, who currently pay the same Traded Service buy-back rate as the schools with kitchens.

The procurement business case contains a comprehensive options analysis which suggest that a new contract with the same scope can be procured under the updated traded services offer, however, the income generated by the Council will reduce significantly and therefore the opportunities to invest in improvement of the service will also reduce.

BUSINESS CASE

The business case is provided as a standalone document supporting this paper.

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 and capital
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£0	Yes	Revenue and capital
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£0	Yes	Revenue and capital

Other Financial Information

This Contract is offered as a buy-back service to Schools; revenue budget is based on the buy-back charges. The Council allocates capital budget of £100k to this contract via the MTFP.

The Contact is intended to deliver an income which the Council could utilise in further enhancing the services offered to schools and local communities.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

Public consultation is not required. Consultation with schools has been completed and feedback from schools incorporated into the updated traded services offer.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Equalities assessment is not required due to the nature of the service – this is a traded service provided to schools. All schools have been offered the opportunity to opt in.

Climate Emergency – *This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030*

The contract is not directly linked to the climate emergency measures agreed, however, the service is aligned with the food recycling introduced across the schools and the catering provider is required to fully cooperate with the commercial waste supplier employed by the Council.

List of Background Papers

Procurement Business Case

Contact Marius Marisca	Service Business Services
Telephone 0118 974 6000	Email Marius.Marisca@wokingham.gov.uk

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In accordance with the Procurement and Contracts Rules and Procedures (PCRP) (see section 3.1.1): a formal business case is required for any procurement with a total value above £50,000. The level of approval required for the Business Case depends on the type of procurement and total ascertainable value of the Contract, as indicated in the table below:

1. Level of Approval

State “YES” in the applicable box at either Level 1, Level 2 or Level 3:

Type of Procurement	Level 1		Level 2		Level 3	
	Assistant Director & Director Approval		Executive Approval		Full Council Approval	
Goods and Services	£50k – £500k		> £500k	Yes	Annual Value >£5m or TAV >£25m (if capital >£15m)	
Schedule 3 Services	£50k – £663k		> £663k			
Works	£50k – £4,733k		> £4,733k			

NOTE:

Executive meetings (Level 2) are held each month but the submission of papers is strictly controlled, resulting in a cycle of at least 6-weeks – speak to Democratic Services for assistance.

Full Council meetings (Level 3) are held every second month and submission of papers is controlled as per Executive meetings – speak to Democratic Services for assistance.

2. Project Information

Project / Contract Title	School Meals Managed Catering Service
Project / Contract Description	Pre-procured and centrally managed corporate Contract, which includes the provision of a School meals service, School meal kitchen maintenance and repair or replacement of catering equipment.
Expected Start Date & Duration (months)	01.08.2022 – 31.07.2025
Any Extension/s Allowed (months) <i>(e.g.: 1 x 24m / 1 x 12m + 1 x 12m)</i>	2 x 12 months
Total Ascertainable Value	Approx. £6m (£1.2m per annum)
Procurement Advice <i>Provide a short summary of the advice or attach/append any written advice you have obtained, including the type of procedure, Brexit considerations and if the BC is for setting up of DPS or framework agreement.</i>	N/A as Procurement and Contracts is the procuring service.
Finance Advice <i>Confirm budget availability and add any comments relevant to the budget.</i>	Schools Finance have reviewed our preferred “Option 1” and are happy for us to proceed on this basis.
Source of Funding <i>(revenue or capital or specified other)</i>	This Contract is offered as a buy-back service to Schools; no revenue budget is required. The Council

	allocates capital budget of £100k to this contract via the MTFP.
If procurement is for software, specify outcome of your consultation with IMT and/or Business Change	N/A

3. Project Justification

Link to Service or Corporate Objectives:

This Procurement exercise involves the re-procurement of the Schools Meal Catering Contract which will replace the current 3-year Contract with Caterlink.

This Contract will enable the Council to fulfil and act upon many of the commitments stated in the Corporate Plan, not least through:

- Waste Minimisation – potential bidders should demonstrate the measures they will take (across all waste types) to implement the waste hierarchy – reduce, reuse, recycle, recover, and dispose. This is likely to extend from key business processes (such as accurate and timely recording of waste volumes) to eye-catching innovation (for example – onsite composting for use on School/Council grounds and for educational projects). The Council will expect the Supplier to show a genuine commitment to waste reduction, presenting well-articulated SMART objectives and indicating how they would work to deliver an industry-standard service in this respect. In addition, the Council will wish to understand how the Supplier proposes to respond to forthcoming policy developments (such as the National Waste and Recycling Strategy in 2023 – RAWs) and the challenge of aligning with the aspirations set out in the Council’s Climate Emergency Action Plan.
- Local Supply Chain – the Council recognises that developing local supply chains takes time and effort. However, it will expect Suppliers to demonstrate a commitment to this journey. It is widely recognised that local supply can be instrumental in re-circulating economic and social benefits within a specific area. Money spent with local businesses tends to stay local and helps to create local jobs and support place-based regeneration. The Council will want Suppliers to indicate how, within the mandate cost envelope, they can draw on local Suppliers – from food production and logistics to marketing and consumables.
- Financial target and Service sustainability – the current Contract will generate circa£40,000 as an income paid to the Council. It is therefore imperative that the procurement exercise will deliver an attractive, effective, and efficient product which is customer focused and which Schools want to buy in to.

Project Specific Objectives, Appraisal of Options and Project Timetable:

Summary of Contract/ SLA

The School Meals Managed Catering Service is a pre-procured and Council managed corporate contract, which includes the provision of a school meals service, school kitchen maintenance and repair or replacement of catering equipment for 34 schools within the Borough.

The school meals service is provided via a procured catering supplier, which is responsible for the production and serving of school meals, as well as recruitment and management of the necessary staff for the provision of said service.

The kitchens repair and maintenance service is coordinated and managed by 2 Contract Officers (0.5 FTE each) employed by the Council, reporting into a Senior Procurement Specialist, using specialists contractors procured by the Operational Property team. The Contract Officers are also responsible for the performance monitoring of the school meals provision element of the contract implemented via regular quality audits at the relevant school sites.

In summary, the current traded service offer includes:

- Procurement and contract management of a suite of service contracts
- Access to a fully managed catering service (outsourced)
- Maintenance of heavy commercial catering equipment (e.g. combi ovens, dishwashers, hot trolleys etc)
- Replacement of heavy catering equipment beyond economic repair
- Replacement and sourcing of light equipment e.g. cutlery, trays, etc
- Management of inspection and treatment costs for pest control
- Catering site quality audits
- Coordination of high-level kitchen cleans including return to School following COVID/School holidays
- Coordination of associated kitchen management service Contracts: *Duct cleaning, Gas inspections, Ventilation filter cleans, PAT testing, Fire equipment maintenance, Facilities repair (floor, water pipes), Kitchen drain blockages*
- Menu designed to align to legislative requirements
- Project management of kitchen improvements
- Provision of helpdesk service to report equipment breakdown etc.

Despite the current Traded Service Contract being very comprehensive, and the various services covered by the Contract articulated in the SLA, feedback received suggests that Schools believe the existing Contract is expensive, particularly for smaller Schools.

SLA fee and Over-recovery

Currently, the SLA fee is set at £8550 for Primaries, and £9350 for Secondaries and Academies. This is based on the proportionate costs of the annual spend such as maintenance and the Council’s service charge. For example:

- £8,550: c£6,750 or c80% allocated to spend on maintenance or equipment.
- £1,800 or 20% covering the c£65k Council management charge.

Cost per meal

The current, and historic, meal charges are demonstrated in the table below. The current prices of £2.10 for Primary and £2.30 for Secondaries benchmarks relatively low, and well below the UIFSM funding of £2.34.

Year	Primary	Secondary
2015-2016	£1.95	£2.15
2016-2017	£1.95	£2.15
2017-2018	£2.00	£2.20

2018-2019	£2.05	£2.25
2019-2020	£2.05	£2.25
2020-2021	£2.10	£2.30

Despite the feedback received from Schools in relation to the poor value for money on the Contract, Schools would be open to a small increase in the meal price if the general quality of food provision were to improve, including the provision for those with special diets.

Objectives of new Contract

The new Contract needs to represent value for money for all Schools, regardless of size. The Contract itself needs to be transparent, with clear articulation to Schools of what their fee covers.

The Contract should be clearly split into two parts, with the first part detailing what is received in relation to the procurement and management of the outsourced School meals catering service by the Council. The second part should detail monies allocated to the repairs, maintenance, and replacement of catering equipment.

The new Contract could achieve a sum of c40k to the Council, along with a simple rebate mechanism for Schools. The figure is based on 20 schools that have agreed to participate in the new Contract.

The service provided by the Supplier will need to be flexible for individual Schools to ensure a high-quality service provision. Particular attention must be required of the Supplier in relation those with special dietary requirements to ensure their food offer is of an equivalent standard to pupils without those requirements. Similarly, those Schools with a servery only offer should also not be disadvantaged in the quality and variety of food offered.

Cost Benefit Analysis:

It has been recognised that the current delivery model for this service does not provide the Council with a robust and sustainable platform for future development. Although the model does currently cover the Council's costs and generate a small income to balance the capital budget allocated to this service provision, it offers no effective incentives for either Schools to opt in or for the Supplier (Caterlink) to actively pursue growth and performance improvement.

Option 1: Maintenance Insurance Scheme (MIS) – recommended option

- SLA fee: fixed at £1,900
- Charge per pupil: £6 per annum
- Maintenance fee: Schools with a kitchen £5,000
- Maintenance fee: Servery only schools £4,250
- Schools Rebate 1: Equal share of year-end surplus on Maintenance Insurance Reserve.
- Schools Rebate 2: Payment of £0.03 per meal served during year.
- Schools Rebate 3: Production Kitchens only receive £0.04 per servery meal.
- Servery Charges: £0

Strengths Reduces net annual cost to Schools.	Weaknesses
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<p>Increases transparency around what Schools are paying for. Maintains WBC role in managing maintenance. Council processes and resources configured to support this model. Reliably covers Council costs and generates surplus. More equitable fee contribution model</p>	<p>Change may prompt Schools to review provision resulting in customer attrition.</p>
<p>Opportunities Change of catering Supplier. New offer to attract non-signed up Schools. Increased retention potential for signed up Schools. Service improvement to drive up meal uptake.</p>	<p>Threats Competitor activity stimulated by change. Lack of support from Schools – food quality. Ongoing fragmentation of target market (academisations, mergers into Trusts, formation of ‘buyers groups’). Alternative purchasing options (frameworks etc).</p>

Option 2 – Not to re-tender

Based on the feedback received from Schools, the existing School Meals Managed Catering Contract will not be extended. Schools were, however, open to the Council reviewing the current Traded Service model, therefore taking a decision not to re-tender without having firstly offered a new Traded Service model to Schools would not be a responsible action for the Council to take. Should there be insufficient numbers of Schools committing to a new contract, the Council would provide advice and guidance to Schools so that they can start to make their own arrangements for a School Meals Catering contract.

Recommendation

Option 1

Our recommendation is to offer Option 1 for the following reasons:

1. It will reduce the overall annual cost to Schools.
2. It is demonstrably fair and equitable in relation to its approach to both charging and rebates.
3. It is the least disruptive change option (for both WBC and Schools)
4. It will deliver higher levels of transparency and trust and, therefore, increase traction with Schools.
5. It builds on the strengths of the current scheme and will utilise the existing systems and processes.
6. It does not preclude a change of catering Supplier (which our research suggests will be necessary) and will support service innovation and improvement.
7. It provides refreshed value proposition that will help to retain existing and attract new customers.
8. It will encourage deeper School engagement which will, in turn, help to drive up meal uptake.

Contract Management:

Currently the service is managed with the following personnel:

- 1 x Contract Manager @ £20,000 - 0.30 FTE
- 2 x Contract Officer @ £21,000 - 0.55 FTE

The two dedicated Contract Officers complete quality audits which cover quality of food provision as well as food safety, equipment, cleanliness and health and safety checks. In addition to that, they provide overall coordination of all necessary communication with the School and Caterlink staff, including; Day to day operational management, Monitoring Contract performance and tracking KPIs

- Reviewing Contractor Invoices
- Scheduling Contractors for planned maintenance
- Planning kitchen capex project
- Assisting Helpdesk service team with reactive maintenance, as required

To realise the benefits of the recommended option, the Council must ensure that it can provide the following organisational capabilities:

- Efficient and effective Contract management, including day-to-day administration and end of year reconciliation of rebate payments.
- Effective client-side management of the catering Supplier to ensure that specifications are met in full and that any service development or commercial stretch targets are met.
- Comprehensive customer support that is based on a well-planned and efficiently delivered audit programme.

4. Approval

Please fill in the applicable fields according to the level of approval required.

Note: If Level-2 or 3 approval is required, the document should be signed by Assistant Director and Director at Level-1 first, and then presented to the Executive (and Full Council where appropriate) for final approval.

Level 1

<i>Position</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Department</i>	<i>Signature</i>
Assistant Director			
Director			

Level 2

NOTE: Level 1 approval must be completed first.

Please state the date of the relevant Executive meeting or Individual Executive Member Decision at which the Business Case has been approved.

<i>Date of Executive meeting / approval</i>	<i>Item No</i>
Executive Approval	

Level 3

NOTE: Level 1 and 2 approval must be completed first.

Please state the date of the relevant Full Council meeting at which the Business Case has been approved.

<i>Date of Full Council meeting / approval</i>	<i>Item No</i>
Full Council Approval	

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TITLE	Climate Emergency Community Deliberative Processes
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 29 July 2021
WARD	None specific
LEAD OFFICER	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions - Gregor Murray

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

This report describes the work undertaken to identify effective deliberative engagement processes with the community on climate emergency and establishes the commitment to develop a proposal for delivering these processes and to report back to Council in October 2021.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Executive:

- 1) notes the extensive review that has been undertaken regarding community deliberative processes in climate emergency (as set out in Appendix A to the report);
- 2) supports progressing the development of focus groups and e-panels to engage the community with climate emergency;
- 3) notes that a fully worked-up proposal with financial implications will be presented to Executive in October 2021.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report outlines:

- The work done to assess different community deliberative processes to inform the future engagement methodologies for the climate emergency agenda. The extensive research carried out (Appendix A) includes the identification and assessment of different public deliberative methods, reviewed case studies of engagement approaches used by other local councils, presents evaluation criteria to assess the relative merits of each method, and provides the recommended approaches to be adopted following the results of this evaluation.
- Based on the results from this research (Appendix A), the recommended public deliberative methods to engage the community with the climate emergency agenda are focus groups and e-panels. These methods will engage a wide variety of stakeholders, have low-cost delivery implications, have a relatively quick turnaround, and will provide a large amount of usable data which can be utilised not just for

developing a greater understanding of residents' thoughts, but also for important carbon accounting figures and potentially for use in future engagement programmes.

- Following the research and the recommendations, the next steps are to develop a detailed proposal to deliver public deliberative processes as mentioned above (focus groups and e-panels), to be presented to Executive on October 2021. The proposal will establish the financial implications, timelines and expected outcomes from the delivery of this process. There are key topic areas that need to be addressed with the community to achieve a greater impact on carbon emissions reduction. This report describes these topic areas and how through deliberative processes they can be addressed.

BACKGROUND

Following the climate emergency declaration made in July 2019 and the commitment to reduce the borough's carbon footprint to net-zero carbon by 2030, Wokingham Borough Council adopted a Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) in January 2020. This was followed by a detailed progress report in July 2020. The council also committed to communicate and engage with residents and other stakeholders to work together to initiate education programmes and encourage behaviour change.

The Climate Emergency Action Plan was reviewed by the Task and Finish Group established by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee. Their September 2020 report recommended that the council works with schools, businesses, and community stakeholders to develop a 2030 Vision for a Net Zero Borough.

At a council meeting in January 2021, a Motion was submitted proposing that the council set up a citizens' assembly to consider the climate emergency. The council decided not to support the Motion on the grounds that a citizens' assembly was only one of several deliberative processes and that other options should be considered to find an appropriate and cost-effective solution to successfully engaged the public.

In April 2021, an extensive review of climate emergency community deliberative processes was carried out by the council's climate emergency team. The Climate Emergency Community Deliberative Processes Options Appraisal Report (Appendix A) aims to inform the next steps the council should take to engage the public.

In February 2021 the Climate Emergency Task and Finish Group reconvened and agreed to review the Action Plan and to focus on four key elements of the CEAP: transport, homes, renewable energy and behaviour change. The Group requested that:

- The Climate Emergency Community Deliberative Processes Options Appraisal (Appendix A) be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee meeting on the 16th of June for evaluation and scrutiny before implementation;
- The council publishes updates on the process; and
- To incorporate findings from the chosen deliberative process into the annual CEAP update.

Because climate emergency is a high profile issue the value of public engagement to inform decision making has been given a lot of current emphasis by both local and central government. However, public deliberative process should be a corporate response, and the council should look at engaging with the community across a number of topics going forward.

BUSINESS CASE

Overall, the Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) aims to deliver “warmer homes, cleaner air, better health, more green spaces and support green job opportunities – as well as reduced carbon emissions”. However, even with the Councils best efforts, delivery of many of the outcomes of the CEAP rely on factors that are outside the Council's control. The effective delivery of this action plan therefore depends on the influence and support of multiple agencies. To increase citizen-led transitions to a non-carbon future the community must be engaged through effective frameworks for

discussion that empower residents and lead to real behavioural change. Tackling the climate emergency in Wokingham will need active participation from its residents, who must be consulted and involved in the big changes that will affect the way they live their lives. Through the right consultative and participation methods, the council will be able to hear their voices, collect their views and gather insight to inform future decisions.

Engaging with climate change will be a long-term activity. Climate change has been happening for a long time but it is only recently that its impact is gaining the level of attention its seriousness merits. Therefore, our response to it must be both immediate and long-term. The Climate Emergency Action Plan is a ten-year action plan, and a living document and our engagement strategies will run through the duration of the plan and probably longer.

Wokingham Borough Council has extensive experience of public engagement and consultation and frequently undertakes such activities as a key element of policy or project delivery. Some of the engagement initiatives delivered since the climate emergency declaration include: a climate emergency consultation to inform the initial action plan; the Youth Climate Conference; Climate Drop-in Sessions with towns and parish councils; Climate Conversations Event with businesses; consultations on greenways, walking and cycling infrastructure; and electric vehicles off-street charging points, amongst others. The council has also increased external communication around climate emergency and progress on projects within the CEAP.

However, achieving a net-zero carbon Wokingham Borough will require big changes to every aspect of its residents' lives. It will involve, for example, upgrading the housing stock, replacing gas boilers and transitioning to electric vehicles and modal shift from the private car to active and public transport. Public engagement has significant value in informing decision making throughout this agenda and in promoting opportunities and options for positive change.

Community Deliberative Processes Options Appraisal

The Community Deliberative Processes Options Appraisal Report (Appendix A) outlines fifteen of the existing options for community engagement recently used for climate emergency and scores them based on the policy stage, cost, length of the process, number of participants, participant's selection and delivery form.

With a 10-year climate emergency action plan, it is important to cover both the short and long-term community engagement methods. Because of this, several methods which cover all potential timeframes have been outlined here, so that they can be compared and selected depending on the priorities and resources available.

Selection of deliberative processes

The deliberative processes reviewed include opinion polls, community appraisal, user panels, participatory strategy planning, focus groups, feedback kiosks, citizen advisory groups, 21st century town meetings, area forums, positive deviance, conversations cafés, crowd wise, crowdsourcing, and e-panels. This comparison not only highlights the breadth of options available but also enables the best solution to be chosen for engagement on the climate emergency agenda taking into account timescales and resources.

Existing successful case studies from other local authorities engaging their residents with the climate emergency agenda have also been sourced to demonstrate the potential effectiveness of these approaches. For example, Camden Council delivered a Citizen Assembly, while Doncaster and Durham County Council used Opinion Polls, and South Gloucestershire and Leeds City Council used Citizen Advisory Groups. The results from these community deliberative processes vary in terms of the number of residents involved, length and cost of delivery, but produce similar results on engaging the community, producing recommendations for action and informing the climate emergency action plans.

Evaluation methodology

Evaluation criteria were established to assess the identified community deliberative methods through key variables which include cost, length of the process, number of participants, feedback detail, discussion potential, participant variation, and communication of results.

A scoring matrix was used to quantify these variables to allow comparison between the different deliberative methods (Table 1, Appendix A). Each method was then compared against the scoring matrix based on the information available, to give an initial value (Table 2, Appendix A).

Additionally, to factor in the different importance of each variable, a weighting was assigned to each in a separate matrix (Table 3, Appendix A). While all these variables are important, higher weighting was attributed to the methods that allow capturing as many views of the community, and in the most detail, as possible, with a lower time of delivery and reduced cost implications.

Finally, each deliberative method was graded by multiplying the variables scores against the weighting (Table 4, Appendix A). This evaluation methodology aims to provide a reasonable comparison between the assessed options.

Recommended Community Deliberative Processes for climate emergency

Based on this research (Appendix A), the recommended public deliberative methods to engage the community with the climate emergency agenda are focus groups and e-panels.

Focus groups were the only option to score over 100 points. This method provides great opportunities for detailed discussion on a number of topics, where attendees can bounce ideas off each other and generate new unique solutions to issues which the council may not have considered previously. Such highly detailed qualitative data is particularly useful to fully understand the motivations behind behaviours, what influences decisions and some of the barriers which may be preventing the adoption of measures.

This method will allow targeting relevant stakeholders to join specific workshops on a topic they may specialise or have an interest in. Focus groups are also a low-cost option with a relatively quick turnaround for conception and analysis stages, as well as for the sessions themselves, being reasonably short and so causing minimal disruption to the council and residents involved. Responses from these groups could also be used as starting points for other engagement options to gauge the wider responses to suggestions, such as integrating them into e-panels, for maximum effectiveness.

The e-panels are the second recommended option to be implemented as a starting point, scoring 90 out of a possible 130. These are particularly easy to use, both for the council in terms of analysis and for residents to participate. The process is all done online so is COVID 19 secure and also saves the running costs of printing, delivery, staff and venues required with other approaches.

The proposed engagement via e-panels will provide a large amount of data which can be utilised not just for developing a greater understanding of residents' thoughts, but also for important carbon accounting figures and potentially for use in marketing material. This option is one of the simplest and most open available, meaning it should be accessible by all, enabling everyone to input their ideas and feel included in the process, greatly increasing the likelihood they will be engaged in any climate-related actions.

Additionally, combining focus groups with e-panels and using the ideas garnered from the focus groups within the questionnaires, ensures high-quality feedback. This remains one of the lowest cost options and a very quick process in terms of creating the questions and gathering results, alongside easy completion for users, meaning engagement will be higher thanks to this simplicity.

Next Steps

Following the research and the recommendations (Appendix A), officers will develop a detailed proposal to deliver community deliberative processes as mentioned above (focus groups and e-panels). The proposal will include comprehensive information on how these methods will be set up and delivered, including:

- Stakeholder mapping and selection
- Delivery partners
- Key topics for discussion
- Steering groups selection
- Number of focus groups to be delivered
- Timeline of delivery
- Cost implications
- Platform for e-panels
- Other resources needed (internal and external)

The deliberative processes aim to help better understand the views of our residents and community groups on the council's response to climate change while raising the profile of the Climate Emergency Action Plan. Therefore, key topics for discussion will reflect the behaviour change needed to achieve Net Zero, including:

- Drive less – reducing car ownership, modal shift to public transport, walking and cycling more, transitioning to electric vehicles;
- Energy– reduce energy consumption by adopting better behaviours, improving our homes, adopting green technologies;
- Waste - reduce the amount of waste generated and improve our recycling behaviours;
- Food - eat less meat and dairy products, consume seasonal produce;
- Conscious consumption - shop local, use less plastic, avoid fast fashion, staycation;

- Support biodiversity - plant or adopt a tree, support local gardens, give home to nature.

A better-engaged community will help to deliver the actions within the Climate Emergency Action Plan and help identify new actions to close the carbon emissions shortfall identified in the CEAP. Moreover, simply engaging with the public and businesses effectively will help both raise awareness of issues and can promote behavioural changes towards this goal.

Officers will report back to Executive in October 2021 with the fully costed proposal for the delivery of focus groups and e-panels.

Finance

There are no cost implications for the process to develop the proposal to deliver the recommended public deliberative processes as This can be done with existing staff resources.

However, the Executive should note that the proposal to be submitted in October 2021 will present financial implications for the actual delivery of this project. It is anticipated that there will be associated costs for delivery that may include engaging skilled facilitators with experience in planning the discussion guides, selection and recruitment of relevant and diverse participants and supporting the delivery of the focus groups. Some costs may also arise from producing marketing materials, administrative capabilities and potential use of venues if the events are hosted publicly.

There is an assumption that participants will be volunteers, a scenario that is not unlikely due to the level of interest in this topic within the community. However, were incentives to be required, this would increase the cost.

Internally, it will require significant staff time in preparation, support, delivery, and analysis of data. Some of these engagement methods are expected to be more resource-intensive than others and will require the support of multiple teams within the council.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

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

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£0	Yes	
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	Nil	No	
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	Nil	No	

Other Financial Information
The Council will need to support the delivery of community deliberative processes. This may lead to resource implications.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation
The Climate Emergency Action Plan is a council-wide project. Community deliberative processes will allow the council to strengthen stakeholder engagement and consultation within the climate emergency agenda.

Public Sector Equality Duty
Equalities assessment has been completed and can be found at Appendix B

Climate Emergency – <i>This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030</i>
This project will support the Council target to become net-zero carbon by 2030 and the delivery of the Climate Emergency Action Plan.

List of Background Papers
Appendix A. Community Deliberative Processes Options Appraisal Report Appendix B. Equality Impact Assessment

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Appendix A. Climate Emergency Community Deliberative Processes

Options Appraisal

May 2020

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1. Introduction

Following the climate emergency declaration made in July 2019, and the commitment to reduce the borough’s carbon footprint to net-zero carbon by 2030, Wokingham Borough Council adopted a Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) in January 2020. This was followed by a detailed report in July 2020. The council also committed to communicate and engage with residents, businesses, schools, Town and Parish Councils, charities, the University of Reading, other organisations, and local authorities to work together to initiate education programmes, encourage behaviour change and to develop a Vision for a Net-zero Borough.

Overall, the Climate Emergency Action Plan aims to deliver “warmer homes, cleaner air, better health, more green spaces and support green job opportunities – as well as reduced emissions”¹. However, despite the Council’s best efforts, many of the outcomes of the CEAP rely on factors which are outside the Council’s control. The effective delivery of this action plan depends on the influence and support of multiple agencies.

Moreover, the success of any action plan and its associated projects relies on thorough community engagement in order to properly empower people and meet their needs to lead to real behavioural change. Indeed, tackling the climate emergency in Wokingham will need active participation from its residents. It

will need secure, functioning and bold democracies, with leaders in every community, capable of enacting the societal changes that will be required of all of us. We recognise that Wokingham residents expect to be consulted and involved in the big changes that will affect the way they live their lives. Through the right consultative and participation methods, we want to hear their voices and to collect their views. Ideally, community engagement activity should take place in the developmental stage of drawing up proposals so that these ideas are captured early on in the processⁱⁱ.

Fortunately, engagement and public consultation are activities that Wokingham Borough Council have extensive experience, and frequently do, as a key element to produce and deliver policy or projects. The council regularly carry out survey work, liaise with pressure and action groups and implement methods for hearing and acting upon individual opinions on different matters.

The communication and engagement of the Climate Emergency Action Plan will be built upon the council's experience and from tried and tested tools and mechanisms delivered by other organisations and local authorities. To make the message clear, maintain engagement, inspire local people, harness the power of our communities, and ensure a wider acceptance of the CEAP it is critical to use the correct community participation methods.

Engaging with climate change will be a long-term activity. Climate change has been happening for a long time, but it is only recently that its impact is gaining the correct level of attention. Therefore, our response to it must be both immediate and long-term. The CEAP is a ten-year action plan, and a living document, and our engagement strategies will run through the duration of the plan and probably longer.

There are many innovating ways to enable the discussion, from digital platforms to forging community partnerships. To keep momentum, we need to stay in touch with and utilising up to date social media and emerging engagement, communications and educational products, services and techniques. We will also seek community engagement about specific local projects, such as solar farms, new green spaces, or new cycling routes.

Therefore, in order to assess the best options for such engagement, this desk-based review outlines some of the existing options for community engagement and scores them based on their varying qualities against the councils and publics criteria. By enabling this comparison, it not only highlights the breadth of options available but enables the best solution to be chosen for engagement within the climate emergency agenda. Existing successful case studies from other local authorities have also been sourced from to demonstrate the potential effectiveness of these approaches.

The council's resource for the development and delivery of these engagement methods have not been included into the assessment factors used for this exercise. Some of these are more resource intensive than others and will require the support of multiple teams within the council.

2. Community Engagement methods review

With a 10-year action plan, it is important to cover both the short and long term with the community engagement methods in order to collect feedback both initially and throughout to ensure the projects remain on track. Hence, several methods which cover all potential timeframes have been outlined here with their respective costs, scale and more key information, such that they can be compared and selected depending on the priorities and resources available.

2.1. Opinion Polliii

POLICY STAGE: Policy development

COST: Varies

LENGTH OF PROCESS: Short

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS: Varies

PARTICIPANT SELECTION: Representative sample

ONLINE / OFFLINE: Online and Offline

Description:

Opinion polls are quantitative surveys carried out to gauge and compare people's views, experiences and behaviour. There are several different kinds of opinion polls, including questionnaires, face-to-face interviews, telephone surveys, online/email surveys, and deliberative polling.

Costs:

- The cheapest option is usually to buy a few questions on an existing survey, such as YouGov.
- Costs go up if the survey is created from scratch, carried out independently, completed face to face, etc.
- Compiling and analysing the data can also be costly.

Strengths:

- If done properly, will generate statistically significant data about wider public opinion.

Weaknesses:

- There is a potential for inaccuracy or bias, such as sampling error: the participants not being 'representative'.
- The wording of the questions asked may affect the findings.
- The findings may only provide part of the story and can be misleading.
- Opinion polls do not provide information about how or why the respondents think as they do or how this may alter over time.
- They do not allow for a two-way dialogue between the people carrying out the survey and the respondents.

2.2. Community Appraisal

POLICY STAGE: Agenda-setting

COST: Medium

LENGTH OF PROCESS: Up to a year
NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS: Varied
PARTICIPANT SELECTION: Self-selecting
ONLINE / OFFLINE: Mainly offline

Description:

Community Appraisal is a method that includes gauging the viewpoints of members of a community on particular issues. Appraisals may be conducted to form a plan of action to resolve an issue or improve existing services. Whilst all Community Appraisals will vary in their application, many will include the following steps:

- Form a steering committee to take an oversight role.
- Write up a questionnaire which is to be distributed to households and later collected. As an alternative, software can be used.
- Sort the responses and compile a report of the findings.
- Distribute the report throughout the community to citizens and to decision-makers in local authorities. Attempts can also be made to convince the local media to discuss the issues raised by the report.
- Agree on actions to be taken that address the concerns raised by the report with the relevant bodies.
- Monitor developments and report back to the community with information about the progress of the initiatives.

Costs:

- Training for staff
- Organisational costs e.g., venue hire for meetings
- Report publication and distribution
- Software (optional)

Approximate time expense:

- It will take time to distribute and retrieve the questionnaires, given the number of people involved. Compiling and publishing a report based on the results may also be a lengthy process.

Strengths:

- You can discover what the needs of the whole community
- Residents can gain in confidence and skills
- Encourages communicative thinking

Weaknesses:

- Potentially too many conflicting interests

2.3. User Panels

Policy Stage: Implementation
COST: Varies
LENGTH OF PROCESS: Ongoing
NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS: 1 - 24
PARTICIPANT SELECTION: Representatives of wider interest groups (stakeholders)

Description:

User Panels usually take the form of a workshop and it is important to outline a clear purpose and the time required for participants' involvement right from the beginning. There also needs to be very clear lines of feedback between the Panel members and the decision-makers. You should use User Panels when:

- You are working with people who are not usually heard, for example those with learning disabilities, children, and the elderly
- You want to establish a two-way dialogue between service providers and users,
- You want to set up a sounding board for new approaches or proposals relating to services
- As a way of identifying emerging problems

Participants:

- A User Panel should be relatively small to allow quality interaction between participants. Some organisations recruit a large pool of users so that they can draw out smaller groups to be consulted on a particular issue.
- Groups can be targeted to reflect certain subgroups of users, such as people with disabilities, or ethnic minorities - it is best to include a diverse range of users in the Panel.
- Panel members should not remain on the panel indefinitely, after a while participants tend to become too knowledgeable about the service delivery organisation and may come to identify with it and so lose credibility with other users.

Costs:

- It depends on whether or not you have in-house facilitation skills, where the groups meet, how large it is and how often it meets.
- Panel members should at least receive expenses such as transport.

Approximate time expense:

- User Panels are usually ongoing (with participants being replaced as time goes on).
- A member of staff will need to provide support for the Panel.
- The accountability and credibility of the Panel can be increased if you allow time for representatives to refer back to wider user groups.

Strengths:

- Changes can be tracked over time
- Solution focused
- The Panel members are well informed on the issues

Weaknesses:

- Time consuming/long-term commitment
- The Panel is not necessarily representative
- A small number of people may dominate the group
- May not take into account relevant needs of non-users of services
- The panels will not deliver statistical information

2.4. Participatory Strategic Planning

POLICY STAGE: Agenda-setting

COST: £1,000-£9,999

LENGTH OF PROCESS: 2 days. Follow up after 6 months

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS: 5-50

PARTICIPANT SELECTION: Representative sample

ONLINE/OFFLINE: Offline

Description:

This process is a consensus-building approach that helps a community come together in explaining how they would like their community or organisation to develop over the next few years.

Participatory Strategic Planning consists of four stages:

- First, the group determines their vision for the future of the organisation or community.
- Second, they describe the obstacles that are preventing them from reaching their vision.
- In the third stage they move on to agree methods that will help them get past the obstacles and reach the vision.
- The final stage is about implementation planning e.g. 'What shall we do in the first year?', and finally, 'What shall we do in detail in the first 3 months?'

Each stage uses a workshop process which involves brainstorming to generate ideas, gathering to explore the themes that emerge, and naming to develop the agreement of the group in each cluster. Each workshop involves a combination of working individually, in small groups and with the whole group. A trained and experienced facilitator is required (a team of two is preferable).

You should use Participatory Strategic Planning when you want to build a spirit of ownership and commitment in a group or when you want to reach consensus to move forward. Participatory Strategic Planning can deliver direct decisions as well as a clear idea of where participants want an organisation or community to go, consensus about directions, a community commitment to making things happen and a stronger sense of being a team. Participatory Strategic Planning cannot deliver the fine detail of plans which need to be developed in smaller groups.

Participants:

- 5 to 50 is the typical range but it can be more or less than that. The method works well with a mixed group of participants from all levels of the community or organisation.
- It is designed to be inclusive, so a diverse group of participants can take part.

Costs:

- A team of two trained and experienced facilitators or a two-day event would typically cost £2,000-£4,000 including preparation, facilitation and documentation in addition to a venue, catering, travel, board and lodging, as required.

Strengths:

- Flexible and applicable to multiple settings
- A remarkably quick way of enabling a diverse group to reach agreement
- Works for people with auditory as well as visual preferences
- Participants often find the process and outcome inspiring

Weaknesses:

- Requires trained and experienced facilitators
- Requires buy-in and commitment beforehand from people in power
- Requires hard work and commitment on the day and subsequently
- Requires all major stakeholders to be in the room

2.5. Focus Groups

POLICY STAGE: Policy development

COST: Low - Medium

LENGTH OF PROCESS: 2 hours

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS: 6- 12

PARTICIPANT SELECTION: Representative sample

ONLINE / OFFLINE: Offline

Description:

A facilitator leads a guided discussion of 6-12 people to gauge their views and attitudes on the subject. The discussions are normally recorded and a report is produced of the process and results which is then distributed to the participants. Clients or other interested parties may observe the discussions. Focus Groups provide useful information on how people respond to particular questions or issues, but the short amount of time limits the depth of discussion that can be had.

Participants:

- The group needs to be small (6-12) for participants to feel comfortable in voicing their views.
- Members of the Focus Group can be selected to be demographically representative or of a specific sub-set of the population.
- It can be a good way of engaging marginalised groups e.g., people who are not native English speakers can be included through translators.

Costs:

- The cost of Focus Groups is generally not very high, unless you need to recruit participants through truly random selection, which can be costly.
- An incentive may have to be offered to citizens in order to get them to participate.
- Additional costs include venue hire (choose an informal setting where possible), catering and supporting arrangements, such as childcare.

Approximate time expense:

- It is important not to overlook the time required to plan the event, recruit the participants and write up and respond to the results.
- If the topic for discussion is complex or largely unknown to the participants you may need to provide reading in advance.

Strengths:

- High level of participant interaction due to the small size of the group.
- Can lead to a greater understanding of how people think about issues.
- Members can be specially recruited to fit (demographic) profiles.
- Good for getting opinions from people who would not be prepared to give written answers.

Weaknesses:

- Heavily dependent on a skilled facilitator.
- Easily dominated by one or two strong opinions.

- Some participants may feel inhibited to speak.
- Responses are not quantitative and so cannot be used to gauge wider opinion.

2.6. Feedback Kiosks

POLICY STAGE: Implementation

COST: Low

LENGTH OF PROCESS: Varies

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS: Open

PARTICIPANT SELECTION: Self selected

ONLINE / OFFLINE: Online

Description:

Kiosks are electronically operated touch screen devices which can be placed in any space (most often they are seen in hospital waiting rooms and other public spaces). They allow service users/employees/visitors to provide feedback and answer survey questions. The information provided can then be analysed. Kiosks can be used for single events, in order to capture public opinion or feedback on that single instance, or on a permanent basis to monitor performance and measure changes in opinion over time.

Used for collating feedback with a view to improving public services. Feedback kiosks however are not especially suitable when more detailed feedback is required. There are instances when more benefit could be had from seeking a face-to-face approach, particularly if issues are complex or sensitive.

Participants:

- Anyone. Feedback kiosks can be aimed at specific groups, for example, service-users or customers, to gauge public opinion on a specific area.

Costs:

- There will be a need for initial investment to purchase and install the kiosk and there may be the need for bespoke software.

Approximate time expense:

- Low. Gathering the feedback is quick simple, as users are unsupervised and can have access to the kiosks at any time of day. Analysis may be more labour-intensive, depending on the quality of software purchased and the type of questions asked.

Strengths:

- Users can give real-time feedback unattended so, the required staff assistance is minimal.
- The information given is secure and confidential.

Weaknesses:

- Although they are low maintenance and do not require much staff involvement, this can result in lower participation rates than for example, a Personal Digital Assistant. Their location needs to be carefully considered to maximise respondents.
- They could also be a barrier to those less used to using technology.

2.7. Citizen Advisory Groups

POLICY STAGE: Implementation

COST: Low

LENGTH OF PROCESS: Ongoing

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS: 10-30

PARTICIPANT SELECTION: Varies

ONLINE/OFFLINE: Offline

Description:

Citizen advisory groups involve members of the public who sit as a committee to inform and advise decision making over an extended period of time. Advisory groups can create effective and on-going dialogue that allow issues and concerns to be explored in depth, and ideally addressed, while the participants are still involved. Advisory groups can take many different forms depending on the exact purpose of the group. The group may meet either over a couple of days as a one-off event, or regularly over a longer period. The selection of participants is crucial. Those who are most affected should be considered first and there should be an attempt to benefit from a spread of expertise amongst the participants. Participants should be provided with all the necessary information to reach informed decisions on issues. Participants should understand that there is a goal to be sought and the different values, problems and benefits of each decision should be weighed accordingly when attempting to reach it. The participants' decisions and/or recommendations should be respected. Whilst this ought to apply for every instance, it is of particular importance for those groups that meet over a long period of time and cover a spread of issues. If the participants feel their time is being wasted they will not attend or contribute.

Participants:

- Can either be a representative sample of the local population, representatives of particular groups (for example, older people) or specific individuals, such as community leaders.

Costs:

- The events themselves are usually not that expensive, but the cost of recruiting, supporting and rewarding the participants can be high.

Approximate time expense:

- Allow a minimum of three months to set up and run an advisory group.
- The scale of the project undertaken and the level of expertise required to grasp the issue can affect the time required.

Strengths:

- Can provide an early warning of potential problems and be a useful sounding board to test plans and ideas.
- Regular meetings over extended periods of time give participants a chance to get to know each other, which can help discussions.
- Citizens can introduce a fresh perspective to discussions, encouraging innovation.
- Citizen involvement increases accountability in governance due to the more transparent process.

Weaknesses:

- Requires a long-term commitment from participants; hence recruiting and retaining participants can be difficult.
- Can appear exclusive to those who are not included.
- Involves only a small number of people and therefore does not provide statistically significant data.
- Participants can become less representative over time; advisory groups may need to be renewed regularly.

2.8. 21st Century town meeting

POLICY STAGE: Policy development

COST: High

LENGTH OF PROCESS: 1 day

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS: 100 to 5,000

PARTICIPANT SELECTION: Varies

ONLINE / OFFLINE: Combination

Description:

21st Century Town Meetings bring together between 500 and 5,000 people, to discuss local, regional or national issues. By using technology, this method combines the benefits of small-scale face-to-face discussions with those of large group decision making.

This method uses technology to overcome the common trade-off between the quality of discussion and the size of the group. The participants are split up into groups of 10-12 people, where they have facilitated small-group discussions. Each facilitator uses a networked computer to instantly collate ideas and votes from the table. This information is sent to a central point where a team summarises comments from all tables into themes that can be presented back to the room for comment or votes. Each participant also has a keypad which allows them to vote individually on themes or questions. The results of these votes are presented in real time on large screens for instant feedback from participants. The computers and voting pads generate volumes of useful demographically sortable data. This information is often quickly edited into a report which is printed and given to participants, decision-makers and journalists at the end of the event.

The whole process can either take place within one room, or groups can gather in many locations around the country or the world. Often, the participants are selected to be demographically representative of the whole population.

The interchange between the small- and large-scale dialogues is powerful as it allows participants to discuss the issues in a small manageable setting, whilst maintaining the legitimacy of a process involving large numbers of people. The immediacy of the vote also creates transparency during the meeting

These meetings are especially useful for engaging citizens in planning, resource allocation and policy formulation. They have been used to create recommendations around a number of different issues, including:

- The redevelopment of the World Trade Center site in New York.
- The rebuilding of New Orleans following hurricane Katrina.
- Assessing the state of healthcare in California.
- Balancing the U.S. federal budget.

Participants:

- One of the key distinguishing features of 21st Century Town Meetings is the high number of participants involved.
- Most events are open to all citizens, although it is often necessary to target hard-to-reach sectors of the population to ensure a representative group of participants.

Costs:

- A 21st Century Town Meeting is a very intensive process. Designing, planning and coordinating an event involving hundreds, or even thousands, of people requires a substantial

budget. Furthermore, the individual tables need to be run by skilled facilitators and the use of technology adds to the cost.

Approximate time expense:

- The scale of the events and the amount of information generated, which needs to be ordered and then presented back to the room, requires a lot of staff time and planning. The high profile of most 21st Century Town Meetings also means that there are additional tasks in dealing with the media and decision makers.

Strengths:

- Combines a large number of participants in considered dialogue
- Gathers clear and instant information on what participants think about an issue, including demographic data on what different groups feel
- Immediacy and scale of the event can energise the participants
- Can capture the imagination of the media and the public more widely

Weaknesses:

- High cost
- Can raise expectations to unrealistic levels if not managed well
- Reliant on technology
- Works better on salient issues

2.9. Area forums

POLICY STAGE: Implementation

COST: Low

LENGTH OF PROCESS: Ongoing

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS: Small group

Description:

Area Forums are meetings held locally, often hosted by the local council. Forums are typically comprised of local residents, councillors, senior representatives from the local authorities, the Police, Primary Care Trusts and other key local organisations, to debate key topics and answer residents' questions face-to-face.

The Area Forum workshops are normally run in the evenings and are chaired by a local councillor. Very often a Chief Officer also attends each meeting and ensures that the recommendations made are properly fed back into the council's decision-making processes. Area Forums concentrate their conversations on the topics of particular concern to local communities in the area. The outcomes are reported to Area Forum members either on an individual basis or via an Area Forum newsletter, which is distributed to members after each meeting; the minutes from each meeting are normally available online. You do not have to be a member of an Area Forum to attend, but you are encouraged to join so that you can be regularly updated about meetings and developments that have occurred as a result of your input.

Participants:

Area Forums are generally made up of a cross-section of the local community, normally divided by ward including:

- Local residents and businesses

- Local amenity society and residents' association representatives
- Tenant management organisations
- Special interest groups
- Voluntary organizations
- Representatives of the police and health authorities

Costs:

- Council buildings or community centres are normally used as the venue.
- Costs are incurred in staff time for planning and attending the meetings, as well as responding to participants.

Approximate time expense:

- Area Forums are an ongoing process of engagement with the local community.
- Each Forum meets somewhere between every two months or every quarter.

Strengths:

- Can provide citizens with information on Council services and Council policies affecting the local area.
- The forums encourage openness and transparency around Council decisions.
- Discussions can be tailored to the concerns of local residents.
- Area forums provide a direct channel between elected representatives and the communities they represent.
- The opportunity for citizens to monitor feedback from the actions they raised during the meetings.

Weaknesses:

- Area Forums tend to be attended by the 'usual suspects' although many organisers try to attract young people in particular and residents from minority communities.
- Individual workshops may be dominated by one person or a particular viewpoint.

2.10. Citizens' Assembly

POLICY STAGE: Decision-making

COST: High - £60,000+

LENGTH OF PROCESS: Several days

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS: 50 - 250

PARTICIPANT SELECTION: Civic lottery (Random stratified sample)

ONLINE / OFFLINE: Either

Description:

A citizens' assembly is a group of people who are brought together to discuss an issue or issues and reach a conclusion about what they think should happen. The people who take part are chosen so they reflect the wider population – in terms of demographics (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity, social class) and sometimes relevant attitudes (e.g., preferences for a small or large state).

Citizens' assemblies give members of the public the time and opportunity to learn about and discuss a topic, before reaching conclusions. Assembly participants are asked to make trade-offs and arrive at workable recommendations.

Citizens' assemblies often adopt a three-step process of learning, deliberation and decision making. This is supported by a team of impartial facilitators who guide participants through the process, ensuring that everyone is heard and comfortable participating.

The participants learn about a topic through a combination of presentations from experts to cover the breadth of opinion on the issue being addressed (participants can also be provided with additional learning materials that introduce them to the topic being discussed before the Assembly starts). There is also time given for experts to answer questions from participants.

The second phase (deliberation) encourages participants to explore their own opinions on what they have heard and develop a wider understanding of the opinions of others. Experts will usually participate in this phase to provide additional information and clarification (but not opinions).

The final phase (decision making) of the Assembly involves participants coming to some conclusions on what they have learnt through the assembly process. It is important that citizens' assemblies do not manufacture a false sense of consensus; thus, alongside agreed positions, individual voting can be used to collect the views of all participants. This ensures that minority voices are heard as well as the majority. Citizens' assemblies are often overseen by an independent Advisory Group. They support the preparations for the citizens' assembly, including topic selection, process design, and the materials that will be used during the citizens' assembly meetings. A key responsibility of this group is to ensure that assembly participants are presented with factually accurate, comprehensive, balanced and unbiased information. Citizens' assemblies usually tend to be quite high-profile events. The relevant decision makers will often be present at the Assembly allowing citizens to present their findings directly.

This method can be used most effectively when the goal is:

- Examining broad policy objectives/ horizon scanning to create new ideas and propose solutions.
- Assessing policy options to develop recommendations.
- Gaining insight from the public about the efficacy of existing practice.

Citizens' assemblies have been used in the UK and other countries – including Australia, Canada and the United States – to tackle a range of complex issues. A citizens' assembly in the Republic of Ireland – established by the Irish parliament – addressed a number of important legal and policy issues facing Irish society. These included equal marriage, abortion and the opportunities and challenges of an ageing population.

Participants:

- Recruited randomly, to be broadly representative of the population

Costs:

- Recruitment of participants
- Location and logistics (finding a space big enough for the numbers of participants)
- Facilitation
- Participant expenses (travel and accommodation)
- Participant gift/honorarium
- Planning
- Communication and promotion

Strengths:

- The process can be high profile and provide a good way of drawing attention to an issue
- Can bring out diverse perspectives on complex and contested problems
- Decision makers brought face-to-face with citizens or those with lived experience of an issue
- Learning phase and deliberation with peers can help participants to understand, change and develop their opinions.
- Offers policy makers an insight on public opinion on a contested issue based on the public having access to thorough and unbiased information and time for deliberation

Weaknesses:

- Gaining a broadly representative group of people can be challenging and expensive
- The process for developing and planning an assembly is intensive and demanding on human and time resource
- Running a citizens' assembly is a highly complex process requiring significant expertise
- There is a danger of being seen as a publicity exercise if not followed by real outcomes

2.11. Positive Deviance

POLICY STAGE: Implementation

COST: Varied

LENGTH OF PROCESS: Long term

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS: Over 100 people

PARTICIPANT SELECTION: Local populations

ONLINE / OFFLINE: Offline

Description:

The Positive Deviance method is based on the belief that in every community that suffers from deep rooted problems, there are some (the 'deviants') who are innovative in dealing with the issue. Despite having access to the same resources, the positive deviants have developed ways of dealing with problems that through a process of learning can be shared by the whole community.

The process typically involves:

Recognition: Community members must first come together and recognise the issues that need to be addressed.

Definition: Having recognised the problem, community members must gather information to assess its scale and to identify the different solutions adopted by members of the community. People who are adopting unusual behaviours which create positive outcomes are identified as the positive deviants.

Positive Deviance Inquiry: This stage involves observing the deviants with a focus on their behaviour, actions and attitudes in dealing with the problem. Rather than turning the deviant into a local celebrity, the inquiry is intended to empower ordinary community members. This is achieved by recognising that if a neighbour, no different in status or resources from oneself can tackle the problem, then so too can any other community member.

Acting into a new way of thinking: Having identified the strategies of the deviants, the community chooses an approach to the problem to adopt. Activities are then designed to help spread the information or skills required amongst community members. This stage is not intended to merely teach best practices; it is supposed to foster a new mentality by 'acting into a new of thinking' through the use of the designed activities.

The outcome: The success of the designed activities in changing the communities approach to the problem will be assessed over time. This can be done through conventional methods (statistics) or through those specifically tailored to a community or the problem. The point here is to measure the progress made towards the previously outlined goals and to maintain the drive behind the activities.

Participants:

- Positive Deviance relies on a community-wide effort to tackle problems or at least those who are immediately involved with or affected by the issue.
- The cooperation of deviant individuals or groups is also fundamental to success. The number of participants can depend on the size of the community but usually 100 people plus

Costs:

- Positive Deviance is usually a community-led initiative and so can be done cheaply, but only with the dedication of a lot of people.
- If local authorities, police or health services are leading the project then organisational and administrative costs need to be factored in.
- Implementing agreed solutions may also be costly.

Approximate time expense:

- The time expense of community members who initiated the project will be high.
- The length of the project will vary depending on the issue at hand. The first use of Positive Deviance in Vietnam was concerned with malnutrition of children and lasted two years. Since many deep-rooted community problems are social in nature (domestic violence, anti-social behaviour, etc.), measuring progress could also take years.

Strengths:

- Highly participative
- Provides local solutions to local problems
- Solutions are achieved through existing resources (the positive deviants)
- Empowering
- Develops the skills and capacity of participants in dealing with common problems

Weaknesses:

- Based on premise that deviants exist
- Relies on deviant cooperation
- Old habits and responses to problems may be difficult to overcome

2.12. Conversation Cafes

Policy stage: Agenda-setting

Cost: Low

Length of process: 1-2 hours

Number of participants: 10 - 12

Participant selection: Self-selecting

Online / Offline: Offline

Description:

'Conversation Cafe' can refer to activities that involve informal, hosted, drop-in discussions in cafes, bookshops and other public places. The conversationcafe.org organisation in the US suggests the following process:

- Assemble up to 8 people plus host; agree on a hearty topic, find a talking object that is to be passed around, and set a time (1-2 hours). The host explains the process and agreements.
- Round 1: Pass around the talking object e.g., a cushion; each person speaks briefly to the topic, no feedback or response.
- Round 2: Again, with the talking object, each person deepens their own comments or speaks to what has meaning now.
- Dialogue: Open, spirited conversation. Use the talking object if there is domination, contention, or lack of focus.

- Final Round: With the talking object, each person says briefly what was meaningful to them.

Participants:

- Anyone - the process is usually open to anybody who is interested in the topic.

Costs:

- All that is needed is a space to host the conversation, usually a café or other public space, a talking object and somebody who is willing to host the discussion.

Approximate time expense:

- A Conversation Cafe usually lasts between 1-2 hours.

Strengths:

- Informal, Open, Flexible.
- Encourages learning, listening and sharing views.
- May inspire people to take action.
- Stimulates debate.
- Meet new people.

Weaknesses:

- Does not lead to any particular goal.
- Cannot be used to reach a decision.
- Likely to only encourage certain participants.

2.13. Crowd Wise:

Policy stage: Decision-making

Cost: Low

Length of process: 1/2 - 1 day

Number of participants: Varies

Participant selection: Varies

Online / Offline: Offline

Description:

Crowd Wise is a community participation method for making shared decisions such as setting priorities, allocating budgets or responding to a consultation. It produces outcomes which the participants are more likely to support or accept as consensus emerges through a combination of discussion and voting on a set of previously formed options.

A range of options is developed. This is important because decisions are rarely a matter of black and white. The options reflect the views of the participants. The options are either developed by the participants, or, if they were prepared before the discussion, they are adapted to reflect the values and interests of the participants. Discussion leads to options being adapted to widen their appeal, and sometimes to mergers between options.

Consensus emerges through a combination of discussion and voting. The voting reflects people's preferences on all the options. This contrasts with majority voting where people vote only for one option. The chosen option is often a composite of some or all of the original options. People can find common ground. This means that people are less likely to be polarised. No-one votes against any option: they vote

for all the options, to different degrees. In addition, people have an incentive to engage with the other participants, to understand how they can make their preferred option more appealing to others. Crowd Wise uses a form of voting called 'consensus voting'. All participants are invited to rank the options in order of preference, the higher the preference, the greater the number of points. The votes are counted. The higher the number of points earned by the top option, the greater the degree of consensus. The voting shows how much consensus exists. If there is not enough, that is a sign to continue the process.

Participants:

- Lots of people can take part, both in developing and discussing the options and in voting. It can be carried out with a group of 15 people or 1500 people.

Costs:

- Costs can vary depending on the size of the group.
- A larger group may require venue hire.
- Approximate time expense:
- It can work for a single event of 2-3 hours or over a long period of time through several sessions.

Strengths:

- Avoids polarisation of views.
- Allows you to take decisions that work for everyone.
- Helps people to better understand other peoples' positions.
- Involves service users.
- Develops policies and strategies.

Weaknesses:

- Some may be uncomfortable with the 'compromises'.
- Can take longer if consensus is not reached.

2.14. Crowdsourcing

Policy stage: Agenda-setting

Cost: Low

Length of process: Varies.

Number of participants: Varies but can be very high.

Participant selection: Self-selecting

Online / Offline: Mainly online

Description:

Crowdsourcing seeks to harness collaboration for problem-solving, innovation and efficiency. It is underpinned by the concept of openness; often an open call is made for contributions, and then any solutions or outcomes are freely distributed. It seeks to take advantage of increasing global interconnectedness, particularly via the internet, and use this to find innovative and creative solutions. What makes crowdsourcing unique is that it utilises both bottom-up processes to achieve top-down goals; it is not just consultation, where solutions are already framed, but an opportunity for deep participation with lowered barriers. Crowdsourcing is a predominantly online practice, although it can be carried out offline. Users can edit books or web pages, post products or items, provide information or edit others' work. Crowdsourcing can be used for a variety of tasks, from calls for labour, to specific requests, such as crowd-voting and crowd-funding, or open competition, a search for answers or solutions.

There are also the following specific types of crowdsourcing:

- Crowd-voting – when a website gathers many opinions and judgement on a certain topic.

- Crowd-sourcing creative work – this can span projects such as graphic design, architecture, and illustration.
- Crowd-sourcing language-related data collection – this is simply gathering vocabulary for use in dictionaries. It is particularly useful for publishing archives of words in languages not usually documented.
- Crowd-funding- this is the practice of calling out for funding from the public for projects that may not be able to receive funding through conventional means. A particular example of this is websites that seek to obtain funding to make films and other creative projects.

Participants:

- The very nature of crowdsourcing is that it seeks to open itself up to involving as many people as is possible to reach a solution or goal. Therefore, anyone is welcome to contribute in the process of crowdsourcing.

Costs:

- The costs of crowdsourcing will vary greatly depending on the type of task in question. Costs will stem from collating ideas, paying for labour or executing the actual solution.

Approximate time expense:

- The time expense again varies greatly depending on the scope of the task. The larger and more complex it is, the more time needed to allow individuals to contribute well-developed ideas.

Strengths:

- It is a collaborative process, which can involve a large amount of people at a relatively meaningful level.
- It can reach large numbers of people across the world.
- Its open nature brings transparency throughout the process and result.

Weaknesses:

- The value and impact of the work put in by the crowd can be wasted if the project takes a different direction.
- There are potential ethical implications attached to low paid crowd-workers.
- It can be very time consuming.
- There may be more incentive for contributors to complete tasks quickly rather than thoroughly.
- There can be a lack of iteration between the crowd and the co-ordinator.

2.15. E-Panel

Policy stage: Implementation

Cost: Low - Medium

Length of process: One off or months / years

Number of participants: 500+

Participant selection: Representative sample

Online / Offline: Online

Description:

e-Panels are a way for councils or other organisations to carry out regular online consultations with a known group of citizens. The most well-established e-Panel is YouGov. It was established by a market

research company in 2000 to provide research for public policy, market research and stakeholder consultation. YouGov currently has 350,000 panellists and can focus its research on particular groups if necessary.

Councils have adopted this idea to have a way of consulting a group of people on a regular basis using a range of technology. It provides a quick and potentially cheap way of staying in touch with a group of citizens.

Market research companies tend to focus their e-panel activities on online surveys but other interactive technologies such as discussion forums or VIP messaging have since been introduced. These help create a sense of online community and enable e-panel members to participate in the consultation process, suggesting topics for discussion that the council might not have considered.

Participants:

- e-Panels can be tailored to distinct audiences, depending upon the purpose of the consultation. Therefore, anyone with access to the internet is a potential participant.

Costs:

- If there is the technology and web space already in place, then costs can be very small. In some cases, the only cost incurred would be for the time it takes to recruit the participants, set the questions and analyse the results of the e-Panel consultation. However, if it was decided that a dedicated website needed to be built (which is not a necessity), then the costs could greatly increase.
- Incentives may also be considered. YouGov for example, has a point collection scheme which panellists can eventually exchange for £50 or a store voucher.

Approximate time expense:

- Time requirements involve recruiting the participants, setting the questions, sending them out, chasing responses, analysing responses and writing up the results.
- Most e-Panels are ongoing over several months or years, although they can also be a one-off event.

Strengths:

- They can increase discussion and awareness about an issue.
- They can be used alongside offline initiatives.
- They can increase participation in local democracy, particularly amongst young people or those who are time poor.
- The online platform enables local authorities to reduce their administrative costs since no paper questionnaires or postage is required. There are limited additional costs to run a focus group or live chat (just the cost of online facilitators). Data input is not necessary and analysis is generally quicker and can be immediate depending on the type of software being used.
- Allows anyone to contribute in their own time.
- Allows different views to be aired and discussed.
- Engages people that may not normally be involved in face-to-face consultations.

Weaknesses:

- As with all online methods, e-Panels exclude people without ready access to the internet.
- If too much is asked of participants, such as too many follow-up emails from e-Panels, then participants may become uninterested.
- If topics require specialist knowledge or insight, then e-Panels may not be able to deliver the depth of debate required.

- They do not empower participants.

3. Case Studies

Case Study: Camden Council local Climate Assembly in July 2019^{iv} Similar to (2.10)

The **first session** focused on background information about climate change and the situation in Camden; **the second** looked at ideas for actions that could be taken in the home, at neighbourhood or council level; **and the third** focused on developing, prioritising and agreeing actions at all those levels. The Council's Commonplace platform also received 225 submissions to the Citizens Assembly from local people and organisations. The Council also worked with the Camden Climate Change Alliance to collect around 600 further ideas for action from local businesses.

The Citizens Assembly produced a list of 17 key actions, all of which had at least 75% support from its members. These were forwarded to a full Camden Council meeting in October 2019 and received unanimous support from Councillors of all political parties: Camden Council supports Citizens Assembly actions. Following more widespread community engagement, these actions set the direction of the Camden Climate Action Plan 2020-2025, which was published in June 2020.

An Evaluation of Camden Citizens Assembly was carried out by the Evaluation Team at University College London. Involve has also produced further information about Citizens Assemblies and Juries on Climate Change.

Case Study Durham County Council^v – Similar to (2.1) Opinion Poll

Consultation was undertaken between 19 September and 31 October 2019. It involved public and staff surveys, and meetings/presentations with Area Action Partnerships, Town and Parish Councils and special interest groups such as Extinction Rebellion. Over a thousand responses were received ranging from a simple questionnaire return to more comprehensive responses. In addition, the council coordinated specific schools and young people-based sessions during the period. The Council ran two sessions at County Hall for small groups of children to come together to share their ideas during collaborative workshops for primary and secondary aged pupils on one of the School Climate Strike Days.

In addition, through the council's ECO2 Smart Schools Programme they worked with their charity partner OASES (Outdoor and Sustainability Education Specialists) to go into 27 schools (nearly 400 pupils) to work with classes and eco-groups and gather their thoughts and feedback on how to become carbon neutral. The overwhelming feedback was that they wanted to get on with it and move faster.

The large volume of responses indicates a strong interest in the issue of climate change, and the details reveal support for the council's overall approach. Priorities identified for the council include reducing the need for travel, more renewable energy, existing buildings to be energy efficient, and new buildings to be as low carbon as possible. Priorities countywide include tree planting, reducing waste, more renewable energy, walking and cycling. It was clear from the responses that there was considerable appetite for partnership working, especially with utility companies. Arising from the consultation responses a two-year costed action plan was developed.

Doncaster^{vi}: Similar to (2.1) Opinion Poll

Doncaster have run a number of engagement activities including conferences and surveys, such as the 'Doncaster Talks' survey, with a great response from the community. Some of the key points from this survey are highlighted below:

- 451 responses received.

- 98% of respondents are extremely or somewhat aware of 'climate change' and 'global warming'.
- 61% said tackling climate change is extremely important to them, 30% said it is somewhat important.
- When asked what information would be useful to them, the top themes respondents cited were general information (e.g., more practical tips, resident's information pack), information about waste and recycling, information about how to make good choices regarding products and companies to use and information about local groups or initiatives such as organised fly tipping.
- 87% of respondents agree or strongly agree with the need for big changes to address climate change.
- When asked whether Doncaster should target resources on a few specific areas in the borough or spread resources evenly across all areas, respondents placed the emphasis almost halfway between the two options, but slightly closer to spreading resources evenly across the borough.
- 63% of respondents say the council should focus on improving the energy efficiency of its existing Council houses and building new homes to high environmental standards, while saying no to building developments that are not at the highest environmental standards even if this results in those developments not going ahead.
- 75% of respondents think they have enough information to take action in response to climate change.

Guildford Borough Council^{vii} (Planning Services Environmental Projects team) – Similar to (2.4) Participatory Strategic Planning

As a result of a building development near to Kingpost Parade, funds became available for environmental improvements to the area through a negotiated planning contribution from the development. A consultation took place in 2010 to find out what improvements residents and the community thought most important at the shopping parade. Owners of the shops were contacted and flyers left with tear-off strips for comments. A gazebo was erected on the site to attract shop visitors, and a website page was created to register responses. A meeting was also held at the Sutherland Community Hall where local people could look at the plans and ask any questions they had about the project. Detailed plans have since been drawn up based upon the comments received and these will be publicised via the Burpham Community Association and by direct contact with the Parade businesses and residents. Notices of the intended work will also be pinned up to inform shoppers and passers-by, shop keepers and residents notified and the website page updated.

South Gloucestershire^{viii}: Climate Emergency Community Engagement Group – Similar to (2.3) User Panels or (2.7) Citizen Advisory Groups

CVS South Gloucestershire and the council are jointly coordinating community engagement events, working with groups as well as individuals and businesses across the district to scale up action in our area. This group meets to discuss how to work together and scale up our area wide response to the climate emergency. A steering group consisting of members from different communities and organisations help to shape the group's agenda. This helps by:

- Working with communities to find and deliver their own solutions.
- Providing high quality support services to develop the capability and capacity of local voluntary and community organisations.
- Enabling communities to have a strong voice locally and further afield.
- Supporting communities and voluntary and community groups to come together to share knowledge and spread expertise.
- Supporting the development of leadership in our communities.

Leeds City Council^x – Citizens Jury – Similar to (2.7) Citizen Advisory Groups

Leeds City Council declared a Climate Emergency on 27 March 2019, along with a commitment to work to make Leeds carbon neutral by 2030. In response, a Citizens Jury was set up and financed by Leeds Climate Commission, an independent advisory group with members from key local organisations and businesses. The Citizens Jury was run by Leeds Climate Commission working with Shared Future CIC, and tasked with producing recommendations to guide the future work of the Commission and other organisations across the city. An oversight panel was set up to ensure the process was unbiased and fair with a wide range of different local organisations from Extinction Rebellion to the Leeds Chamber of Commerce.

The panel made decisions about the recruitment process and the jury profile and selected 22 expert commentators who gave presentations to the jury and answered questions from them. Professional facilitators from Shared Future supported the jurors throughout the process. The Citizens' Jury began on 12 September 2019, running for a total of 30 hours over nine sessions, ending on 3 November. The jurors produced recommendations which were presented at a launch event on Monday 25 November 2019, and subsequently to Leeds City Council's Climate Emergency Advisory Committee in January 2020: Shared Future report on Leeds Citizens Jury.

The contribution of the Leeds Climate Change Citizens' Jury was referenced in Leeds City Council's Climate Emergency Update report of 7 January 2020, which described the council's work to date and set out a Climate Emergency Strategy, which will result in more than halving Leeds' carbon emissions by 2025. The report noted: "The citizen's jury did demonstrate that given exposure to the evidence in an intensive environment, the majority of people became engaged and recognised the role they can play. This will be hard to replicate for the population as a whole but an essential part of the city's strategy must be a determined and on-going programme of awareness raising in order to influence personal behaviour change."

York^x: Similar to (2.11) Positive Deviance

In promoting greener lifestyles, "high potential" neighbourhoods were targeted with regard to reducing CO₂ emissions from transport and housing. The sample population was based on those residents who lived on streets in two selected areas. Questionnaire surveys on household consumption over a 12-month period were used before the intervention to measure its effect on the household carbon footprint in the areas of home energy, travel, consumables etc. Participants were recruited on the doorstep from the selected neighbourhoods in November December 2009.

Approximately 500 households were targeted in the two areas and residents were then invited to a neighbourhood workshop where their carbon footprint was calculated based on their completed questionnaire survey. Those residents who could not attend the workshop were invited to return the completed questionnaire by post. All residents who had completed and returned their questionnaire survey were invited to a local team meeting where they received an assessment of their carbon footprint and a chance to meet fellow participants. The personalised carbon footprint showed their total carbon footprint, where they were in relation to other members of the team and highlighted actions they could take to achieve a 10 per cent reduction in their CO₂ e emissions.

The participants were asked to complete a second questionnaire at the end of the intervention period. The post-intervention questionnaire survey examined activities of the last six months and this was standardised over a 12-month period to allow a comparison of change. The results therefore provide an estimate of the potential reduction in CO₂ e emissions if the behavioural change achieved in the six-month intervention period were continued for the rest of the year. The 49 participants who completed the challenge have an estimated average carbon footprint reduction of 2.0 tonnes of CO₂ e/year. This is a total reduction of 11.3

per cent. The largest reductions were seen in the area of shopping, housing (heating and powering the home) with an average reduction of over 20 per cent in both cases. The area of food showed the smallest reduction (4.6 per cent)

4. Scoring Methodology

In order to assess the relative worthiness of each method, a number of key variables were selected which relate to the objectives of the overall community engagement, those being maximum engagement with the community, with a high level of detail and at the lowest cost and time expenses. These variables are:

- Cost
- Length of process
- Number of participants
- Feedback detail
- Discussion Potential
- Participant variation
- Communication of results (COR)

To quantify these variables for a quick comparison, a scoring matrix has been comprised which outlines the varying criteria each variable is being measured against, with higher scores being preferred (Table 1). Each method has then been compared against this matrix for each variable based on the information available to give an initial value (Table 2).

However, this does not factor in the various importance of each variable. In order to incorporate this key aspect, each variable has been assigned a weighting within a separate matrix (Table 3). While all these variables are important, as the primary goals of engagement are to get the views of the community as much as possible and in the most detail possible, with lower time and cost expenses due to budget availability, these are the variables which have been attributed relatively higher weightings.

By then combining the two, multiplying the variables scores against the weighting, it outlines the overall score for each engagement method (Table 4). From this the total scores can be compared to identify the best options moving forward.

Table 1. Scoring system for engagement options:

Table Rating	5	4	3	2	1
Cost	Under £1000	Up to £5000	Up to £10000	Up to £20000	£40,000 +
Length of process	4 weeks	8 weeks	12 weeks	16 weeks	32 weeks +
Number of participants	2000+	Up to 1000	Up to 250	Up to 100	Up to 50
Feedback detail	Detailed, descriptive information addressing specific issues.	Predominantly written responses with useful ideas and discussion points.	Mixed quantitative and qualitative information.	Mainly numerical based but with opportunity for some suggestions.	Purely statistical.
Discussion Potential	Lots of discussion between participants and chance for feedback to be reinput into the decisions.	Moderated format to ensure all opinions are heard and all points discussed equally.	Participants encouraged to work together to discuss solutions.	Opportunity provided for participants to discuss issues as a group.	Done on an individual basis
Participant variation	Very varied, engagement from multiple sources with different viewpoints.	Largely varied backgrounds/agendas etc with moderation to ensure all opinions are heard and all points discussed equally.	Reasonably mixed group, with opportunity for all present to voice their opinions.	Still largely led by activists but with more general public members at least aware and involved.	Low variety, usual suspects present, dominated by a few individuals, often with similar agendas.
Communication of results (COR)	Easy to demonstrate the outcomes with a quick feedback turnaround.	Allows for clear graphs or visual data. Or delivers clear actions to communicate.	Quality of results is good but can be difficult to understand and take some time.	Large amounts of data with mixed and conflicting responses.	Very slow results and difficult to relate the results into useful communication.

Table 2. Weightings of decision variables. Relative importance of the factors: 5 - very important and 1 - unimportant:

Weighting	5	4	3	2	1
Cost		x			
Length of process		x			
Number of participants	x				
Participant variation			x		
Feedback detail		x			
Discussion Potential				x	
Communication of results (COR)			x		

Table 3. Initial assessment of options:

Community participation method	Cost	Length of Process	Number of Participants	Participant variation	Feedback Detail	Discussion Potential	COR	Total
Opinion Poll	4	4	4	3	2	1	5	23
Community Appraisal	3	1	3	4	5	4	4	24
User Panels	4	1	1	5	5	5	3	24
Participatory Strategic Planning	4	5	1	4	3	5	3	25
Focus Groups	5	5	1	3	5	5	4	28
Feedback Kiosks	4	3	4	3	2	1	5	22
Citizens Advisory Groups	4	2	1	4	5	5	4	25
21 st century town meeting	1	5	5	4	3	4	1	23
Area Forums	5	4	1	1	5	5	3	24
Citizens Assembly	1	3	3	5	5	4	1	22
Positive Deviance	4	1	3	3	5	5	4	25
Conversation Cafes	4	4	2	2	4	5	4	25
Crowd Wise	3	3	5	4	3	2	4	24
Crowd-sourcing	4	4	4	3	3	3	3	24
E-Panels	4	4	4	3	2	1	5	23

Table 4. Overall matrix of combined assessment with weightings:

Community participation method	Cost	Length of Process	Number of Participants	Participant variation	Feedback Detail	Discussion Potential	COR	Total
Opinion Poll	16	16	20	9	8	2	15	86
Community Appraisal	12	4	15	12	20	8	12	83
User Panels	16	4	5	15	20	10	9	79
Participatory Strategic Planning	16	20	5	12	12	10	9	84
Focus Groups	20	20	5	9	20	10	12	96
Feedback Kiosks	16	12	20	9	8	2	15	82
Citizens Advisory Groups	16	8	5	12	20	10	12	83
21st century town meeting	4	20	25	12	12	8	3	84
Area Forums	20	16	5	3	20	10	9	83
Citizens Assembly	4	12	15	15	20	8	3	77
Positive Deviance	16	4	15	9	20	10	12	86
Conversation Cafes	16	16	10	6	16	10	12	86
Crowd Wise	12	12	25	12	12	4	12	89
Crowd-sourcing	16	16	20	9	12	6	9	88
E-Panels	16	16	20	9	8	2	15	86

5. Conclusions

Table 4 is colour coded to highlight the relative scores and associated preferences for each method based on all the criteria and weightings, with 7 green options being highest, 5 yellow following them, and 3 orange being the least preferred. This was originally intended to be an even split of 5 in each category, however due to the similarity of some of the options, they have been counted together and have skewed such numbers slightly. I.e., Crowd-wise and Crowdsourcing are very similar in the context due to the crowd-voting element contained within the processes, while e-panels and opinion polls are effectively the same for these purposes. Therefore, these would be the priority options recommended to use in future community engagement approaches as they will maximise the return.

Even though the high scoring options were close total scores, they achieved their totals in very different ways in terms of the different variables which they did best in. Indeed, this summary table shows clearly how good each option is for each variable, meaning that depending on preferences for these variables, the large selection available here allows for the best option to be selected to meet each requirement, which may vary depending on the topic.

By following these recommended engagement methods and acting on the subsequent feedback, it will help improve the council's action plan and identify new actions to close the carbon emissions shortfall identified in the Climate Emergency Action Plan. Moreover, simply engaging with the public and businesses through many of these methods both helps raise awareness of issues and can promote behavioural changes towards this goal.

Throughout this process it is important to include and communicate often with other relevant council bodies, such as the planning team, transport, and environmental services among others, as the success of resulting actions will rely on their involvement.

6. Recommendations

The goal of this assessment is to understand what more can the council do to encourage behavioural change amongst residents. Based on these results, the primary recommendation to engage with residents would be focus groups, being the only option to score over 100, out of a possible 130.

This option provides great opportunities for detailed discussion into topics, where attendees can bounce ideas off each other and generate new unique solutions to issues which the council may not have considered previously. Such high detail qualitative data is particularly useful to fully understand the motivations behind behaviours, what influences decisions and some of the barriers which may be preventing adoption of measures.

This method will allow targeting of relevant stakeholders to join specific workshops on a topic they may specialise in, such as teachers on schools or distribution companies for transport, benefitting from expert knowledge in these areas. These groups are also a low cost option with a relatively quick turnaround, both from conception and analysis stages, but also for the sessions themselves, being reasonably short and so causing minimal disruption to the council and residents involved.

Responses from these groups could also be used as starting points for other engagement options to gauge the wider responses to suggestions, such as integrating them into the below e-panels, for maximum effectiveness.

These e-panels would be the second option we would recommend pursuing as soon as possible, thanks to their similarly high score and particularly their ease of use, both for the council in terms of analysis and for residents to complete, being all done online so safe during the ongoing COVID-19 situation, also saving running costs of printing, delivery, staff and venues in the process.

This process will provide a large amount of usable data which can be utilised not just for developing a greater understanding of residents thoughts, but also for important carbon accounting figures and potentially for use in marketing material. This option is one of the simplest and most open available, meaning it should be accessible by all, enabling everyone to input their ideas and feel included in the process, greatly increasing the likelihood they will be engaged in any climate related actions, helping to close the gap to achieve a net zero carbon Borough by 2030.

By combining focus groups with e-panels and using the ideas garnered from the focus groups within the questionnaires, it ensures high quality feedback, eliminating the only potential downside of this option, so, maximising the benefits gained. This remains one of the lowest cost options and a very quick process in terms of creating the questions and gathering results, alongside completion for users, meaning engagement will be higher thanks to this simplicity.

7. Next Steps

Officers will develop an approach to deliver community deliberative processes based on the work done to assess engagement methods.

Key areas for discussion will be identified, following the CEAP priorities and largest emitters:

- Drive less – reducing car ownership, modal shift to public transport, walking and cycling more, transitioning to electric vehicles;
- Energy– reduce energy consumption by adopting better behaviours, improving our homes, adopting green technologies;
- Waste - reduce the amount of waste generated and improve our recycling behaviours;
- Food - eat less meat and dairy products, consume seasonal produce;
- Conscious consumption - shop local, use less plastic, avoid fast fashion, staycation;
- Support biodiversity - plant or adopt a tree, support local gardens, give home to nature.

They will also discuss motivations, influences, aims and barriers.

Because climate emergency is a high profile issue the value of public engagement to inform decision making has been given a lot of current emphasis by both local and central government. However, public deliberative process should be a corporate response, and the council should look at engaging with the community across a number of topics going forward.

8. Resources

The cost to deliver the recommended community deliberative process will be identified through the suggested approach. It is expected that there is an associated cost from engaging skilled facilitators with experience in planning the discussion guides, analysis of results and the recruitment of relevant and diverse participants. Some costs may arise from producing marketing materials, administrative capabilities, and use of venues if the events are hosted publicly.

There is an assumption that participants will be volunteers, a scenario which is not unlikely due to the level of interest in this topic within the community, however, were incentives to be required, this would increase the cost.

Internally, it will require noticeable time in preparation and analysis, consideration will be given to some of these engagement methods being more resource intensive than others and will require the support of multiple teams within the council.

9. References

- ⁱ <https://ashden.org/news/how-can-councils-engage-citizens-in-climate-action/>
- ⁱⁱ <https://www.apse.org.uk/apse/assets/File/Engagement%20Survey%20Doc%202021%20Final.pdf>
- ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/methods?show=pager&page=0%2C1>
- ^{iv} <https://www.apse.org.uk/apse/index.cfm/local-authority-energy-collaboration/apse-energy-publications1/climate-emergency-public-engagement-survey/>
- ^v <https://www.apse.org.uk/apse/index.cfm/local-authority-energy-collaboration/apse-energy-publications1/climate-emergency-public-engagement-survey/>
- ^{vi} https://dmbcwebstolive01.blob.core.windows.net/media/Default/Environmental/Documents/Doncaster%20Talks%20Environment%202020%20-%20response%20analysis%20summary_.pdf
- ^{vii} www.guildford.gov.uk/kingpostparade
- ^{viii} <https://www.southglos.gov.uk/environment/climate-change/climate-emergency-community-engagement/>
<https://cvs-sg.org.uk/>
- ^{ix} https://www.leedsclimate.org.uk/sites/default/files/REPORT%20V1.1%20FINAL_0.pdf
- ^x https://mediamanager.sei.org/documents/Publications/Rethinking-development/SEI-Green-NeighbourhoodChallenge-Project_report.pdf

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Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) form: Deliberative Processes

If an officer is undertaking a project, policy change or service change, then an initial impact assessment must be completed and attached alongside the Project initiation document.

EqIA Titular information:

Date:	14/06/2021
Service:	Place Commissioning
Project, policy or service EQIA relates to:	Climate Emergency Community Deliberative Processes Options Appraisal
Completed by:	Diana Tovar
Has the EQIA been discussed at services team meeting:	No
Signed off by:	Rhian Hayes
Sign off date:	14 June 2021

1. Policy, Project or service information:

This section should be used to identify the main purpose of the project, policy or service change, the method of delivery, including who key stakeholders are, main beneficiaries and any associated aims.

What is the purpose of the project, policy change or service change, its expected outcomes and how does it relate to your services corporate plan:

This report describes the work undertaken to identify effective deliberative engagement processes with the community on climate emergency and establishes the commitment to develop a proposal for delivering these processes and to report back to Council in October 2021.

These processes aim to help better understand the views of our residents on the council's response to climate change, while raising the profile of the Climate Emergency Action Plan and encouraging residents to engage more with its existing actions, though ultimately helping to identify new actions to close the carbon emissions shortfall identified in the CEAP. Therefore, key topics will include:

- Driving less – reducing car ownership, modal shift to public transport, walking and cycling more, transitioning to electric vehicles
- Energy – reduce energy consumption by adopting better behaviours, improving our homes, adopting green technologies
- Waste - reduce the amount of waste generated and improve our recycling behaviours

- Food - eat less meat and dairy products, consume seasonable produce
- Conscious consumption - shop local, use less plastic, avoid fast fashion, staycation
- Support biodiversity - plant or adopt a tree, support local gardens, give home to nature

Outline how you are delivering your project, policy change or service change. What governance arrangements are in place, which internal stakeholders (Service managers, Assistant Directors, Members ect) have/will be consulted and informed about the project or changes:

The Community Deliberative Processes Options Appraisal Report (Appendix A) outlines fifteen of the existing options for community engagement recently used for climate emergency and scores them based on the policy stage, cost, length of the process, number of participants, participant's selection and delivery form.

The deliberative processes reviewed include opinion polls, community appraisal, user panels, participatory strategy planning, focus groups, feedback kiosks, citizen advisory groups, 21st century town meetings, area forums, positive deviance, conversations cafés, crowd wise, crowdsourcing, and e-panels. This comparison not only highlights the breadth of options available but also enables the best solution to be chosen for engagement on the climate emergency agenda taking into account timescales and resources. Additionally, existing successful case studies from other local authorities engaging their residents with the climate emergency agenda have also been sourced to demonstrate the potential effectiveness of these approaches.

Evaluation criteria were established to assess the identified community deliberative methods through key variables which include cost, length of the process, number of participants, feedback detail, discussion potential, participant variation, and communication of results.

Based on this research (Appendix A), the recommended public deliberative methods to engage the community with the climate emergency agenda are focus groups and e-panels.

Following the research and recommendations, officers will develop a fully costed proposal to deliver community deliberative processes (primarily focus groups and e-panels), detailing how these methods will be set up and delivered, for Executive approval in October 2021. The climate emergency team is leading on the implementation of this report and the subsequent development of the proposal to deliver the recommended deliver community deliberative processes. Cooperation from multiple departments across the council will be needed in delivering the proposal. This includes feedback on the methodology, support providing evidence and informing focus groups and the e-panels questionnaires.

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

The main beneficiaries of the project are all of the residents and businesses of Wokingham Borough. By engaging with them through these processes it will allow the council to informed decision making throughout this agenda and to promote opportunities and options for positive change and to support the effective delivery of the Climate Emergency Action Plan.

By engaging the community and empowering residents to lead real behavioural change, the council will be able to increase citizen-led transitions to a non-carbon future the community

Tackling the climate emergency in Wokingham will need active participation from its residents, who must be consulted and involved in the big changes that will affect the way they live their lives. Through the right consultative and participation methods, the council will be able to hear their voices, collect their views and gather insight to inform future decisions.

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

Following the research and the recommendations (Appendix A), the proposal to be developed will include comprehensive information on how these methods (focus groups and e-panels) will be set up and delivered, including:

- Stakeholder mapping and selection
- Delivery partners
- Key topics for discussion
- Steering groups selection
- Number of focus groups to be delivered
- Timeline of delivery
- Cost implications
- Platform for e-panels
- Other resources needed (internal and external)

The deliberative processes aim to help better understand the views of our residents on the council's response to climate change, while raising the profile of the Climate Emergency Action Plan and encouraging residents to engage more with its existing actions, though ultimately helping to identify new actions to close the carbon emissions shortfall identified in the CEAP. Therefore, key topics will include:

- Driving less – reducing car ownership, modal shift to public transport, walking and cycling more, transitioning to electric vehicles
- Energy – reduce energy consumption by adopting better behaviours, improving our homes, adopting green technologies
- Waste - reduce the amount of waste generated and improve our recycling behaviours

- Food - eat less meat and dairy products, consume seasonable produce
- Conscious consumption - shop local, use less plastic, avoid fast fashion, staycation
- Support biodiversity - plant or adopt a tree, support local gardens, give home to nature

2. Protected characteristics:

There are 9 protected characteristics as defined by the legislation:

- Race
- Gender
- Disability
- Gender re-assignment
- Age
- Religious belief
- Sexual orientation
- Pregnancy/Maternity
- Marriage and civil partnership:

To find out more about the protected groups, please consult the EQIA guidance.

3. Initial Impact review:

In the table below, please indicate whether your project, Policy change or service change will have a positive or negative impact on one of the protected characteristics. To assess the level of impact, please assign each group a Positive, No, Low or High impact score:

For information on how to define No, low or high impact, please consult the EQIA guidance document.

If your project is to have a positive impact on one of the protected groups, please outline this in the table below.

For details on what constitutes a positive impact, please consult the EQIA guidance.

Protected characteristics	Impact score	Please detail what impact will be felt by the protected group:
Race:	No/Neutral	All of the residents and businesses of Wokingham Borough will be equally and positively impacted by this new aim of Wokingham Borough being net-zero carbon by 2030. By delivering this it demonstrates our desire to include them in decision making, alongside our commitment to achieving the net zero goal. Completing this project will increase the likelihood of achieving this target in multiple ways, resulting in positive environmental changes that will improve the quality of life of all our residents and help to avoid the impacts of climate change.
Gender:	No/Neutral	All of the residents and businesses of Wokingham Borough will be equally and positively impacted by this new aim of Wokingham Borough being net-zero carbon by 2030. By delivering this it demonstrates our desire to include them in decision making, alongside our commitment to achieving the net zero goal. Completing this project will increase the likelihood of achieving this target in multiple ways, resulting in positive environmental changes that will improve the quality of life of all our residents and help to avoid the impacts of climate change.
Disabilities:	No/Neutral	All of the residents and businesses of Wokingham Borough will be equally and positively impacted by this new aim of Wokingham Borough being net-zero carbon by 2030. By delivering this it demonstrates our desire to include them in decision making, alongside our commitment to achieving the net zero goal. Completing this project will increase the likelihood of achieving this target in multiple ways, resulting in positive environmental changes that will improve the quality of life of all our residents and help to avoid the impacts of climate change.
Age:	No/Neutral	All of the residents and businesses of Wokingham Borough will be equally and positively impacted by this new aim of Wokingham Borough being net-zero carbon by 2030. By delivering this it demonstrates our desire to include them in decision making, alongside our commitment to achieving the net zero goal. Completing this project will increase the likelihood of achieving this target in multiple ways, resulting in positive environmental changes that will improve the quality of life of all our residents and help to avoid the impacts of climate change.
Sexual orientation:	No/Neutral	All of the residents and businesses of Wokingham Borough will be equally and positively impacted by this new aim of Wokingham Borough being net-zero carbon by 2030. By delivering this it demonstrates our desire to include them in decision making, alongside our commitment to achieving the net zero goal. Completing this project will increase the likelihood of achieving this target in multiple ways, resulting in positive environmental changes that will improve the quality of life of all our residents and help to avoid the impacts of climate change.
Religion/belief:	No/Neutral	All of the residents and businesses of Wokingham Borough will be equally and positively impacted by this new aim of Wokingham Borough being net-zero carbon by 2030. By delivering this it demonstrates our desire to include them in decision making, alongside our commitment to achieving the net zero goal. Completing this project will increase the likelihood of achieving this target in multiple ways, resulting in positive environmental changes that will improve the quality of life of all our residents and help to avoid the impacts of climate change.

Gender re-assignment:	No/Neutral	All of the residents and businesses of Wokingham Borough will be equally and positively impacted by this new aim of Wokingham Borough being net-zero carbon by 2030. By delivering this it demonstrates our desire to include them in decision making, alongside our commitment to achieving the net zero goal. Completing this project will increase the likelihood of achieving this target in multiple ways, resulting in positive environmental changes that will improve the quality of life of all our residents and help to avoid the impacts of climate change.
Pregnancy and Maternity:	No/Neutral	All of the residents and businesses of Wokingham Borough will be equally and positively impacted by this new aim of Wokingham Borough being net-zero carbon by 2030. By delivering this it demonstrates our desire to include them in decision making, alongside our commitment to achieving the net zero goal. Completing this project will increase the likelihood of achieving this target in multiple ways, resulting in positive environmental changes that will improve the quality of life of all our residents and help to avoid the impacts of climate change.
Marriage and civil partnership:	No/Neutral	All of the residents and businesses of Wokingham Borough will be equally and positively impacted by this new aim of Wokingham Borough being net-zero carbon by 2030. By delivering this it demonstrates our desire to include them in decision making, alongside our commitment to achieving the net zero goal. Completing this project will increase the likelihood of achieving this target in multiple ways, resulting in positive environmental changes that will improve the quality of life of all our residents and help to avoid the impacts of climate change.

Based on your findings from your initial impact assessment, you must complete a full impact assessment for any groups you have identified as having a low or high negative impact. If No impact, or a positive impact has been identified, you do not need to complete a full assessment. However, you must report on this initial assessment and it must receive formal approval from the Assistant Director responsible for the project, policy or service change.

Initial impact assessment approved by

Rhian Hayes

Date: 14 June 2021

TITLE	Proposed Solar Farm - Barkham
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 29 July 2021
WARD	Barkham
LEAD OFFICER	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions - Gregor Murray

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

The purpose of the report is to obtain authority to proceed with the development of a solar farm at Barkham.

The strategic outcomes include:

- Development of a solar farm sufficient to offset the councils carbon emissions
- Generation of a return on investment in excess of 5% from development of green infrastructure

The decision is required due to the value of the capital investment required. Key benefits are a significant step towards the Councils stated Climate Emergency ambitions by making our own Corporate Property 'Net Zero' carbon emitters.

The Solar Farm would be a significant statement of intent in the Councils move towards 'net zero'.

RECOMMENDATION

That, subject to securing the necessary planning consents, the Executive asks Council to:

- 1) recommend the capital expenditure of the £20,283,000 funded from borrowing as previously set out in the Medium Term Financial Plan;
- 2) approve delegation of decisions around the final extent and configuration of the Solar Farm to the Deputy Chief Executive (S151 Finance Officer) in conjunction with the Lead Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions where scheme amendments will not result in the average annual net income after capital financing costs falling below £200k;
- 3) note the estimated net income (after running costs and capital financing costs) of £12.0m over 25 years (equal to £480k per year on average) will be introduced into the Councils annual budget using an equalisation reserve.
- 4) approve commencement of the Solar Farm at Barkham

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report proposes the installation of a (up to) 36 Mega Watt Peak Solar Farm on Council owned Farmland in Barkham. This opportunity has the potential to offset the total Carbon Emissions from the Council's operational property portfolio.

The Executive only has authority to agree individual capital schemes up to a maximum of £15m therefore this will require Full Council approval.

BACKGROUND

Wokingham Borough Council announced in 2019, as part of the Climate Emergency commitment, that it would look to become a Net Zero Carbon emitter, across the Borough, by 2030.

WBC published a Climate Emergency Action Plan in January 2020 to achieve this target, which includes the following significant appropriate actions:

- *Construct solar farms for the generation of clean energy for our community*

The Council's corporate asset profile currently stands at 116 Properties, including schools, youth and community centres, flagship corporate properties and smaller premises. All of these properties are in a central buying regime for Energy procurement. Energy usage is continually monitored and based on the last three consecutive years, The council has consumed ; 37,254,743 kWh's energy usage per annum split across Electricity and Gas.

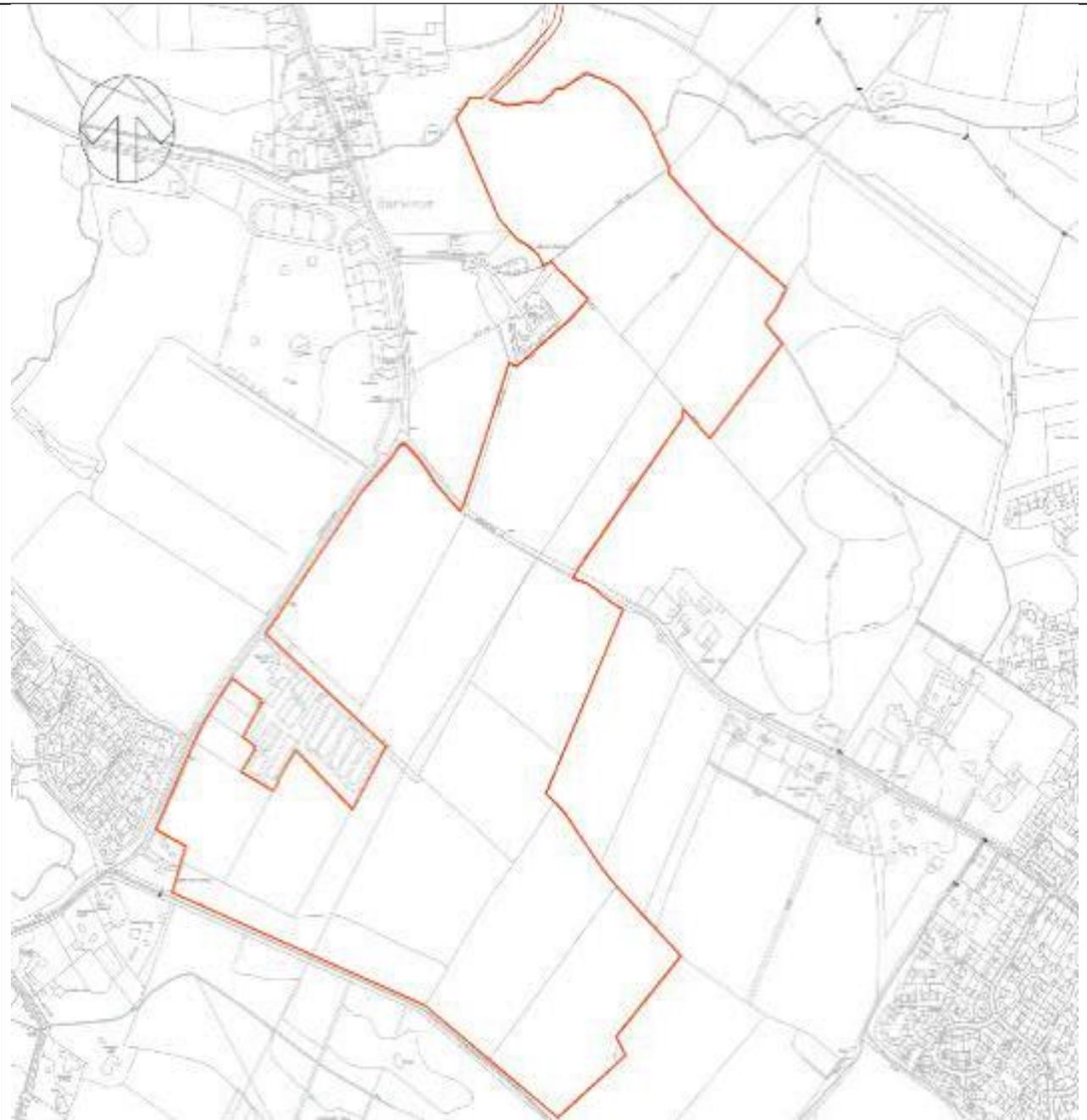
In the first instance, the Council is looking to achieve a quick resolution to provable carbon reduction and 'get its own house in order'. To this end, the potential installation of solar PV (photovoltaic) on farmland in the Council's freehold ownership throughout the Borough is being reviewed.

The first farm site assessed has returned consultancy documentation which would indicate a solar farm of up to 36MWp could be accommodated. This site could generate up to 34,500,000 kWh's per annum.

Importantly the commercial property team are using the construction of the solar farm (alongside other projects we are currently undertaking) to effectively make WBC's emitters. In effect, saving some 11,156 Tonnes of CO2 per annum, upon completion.

Site context and planning

The proposed location of the solar farm at Barkham is indicated here :



A full planning application (reference 211081) has been submitted and is expected to be determined by September 2021. The application includes a full environmental assessment of the impact of the solar farm on the site and surrounding area. It also includes details on tree planting and the installation of greenways across the Council's land as part of a wider scheme of environmental improvements.

Discussions with adjacent property owners/occupiers are ongoing with a view to mitigating the impact of the development wherever practicable to do so. In order to take these discussions into account and accommodate any changes to the site area which may be required following comments from the Local Planning Authority, it is recommended that decisions around the final extent and configuration of the Solar Farm be delegated to the Deputy Chief Executive in conjunction with the Lead Member for Business, Economic Development and Regeneration.

Delivery programme

Subject to planning consent (expected September 2021), delivery of the solar farm will begin shortly afterwards.

The site will become vacant and available for construction to start from the end of September 2021.

The first stage in delivery will be the procurement process of build contractor. Delivery of the project will be managed by WBC's Commercial Property team.

Financial Information

The financial appraisal has been developed using expert advice on costs (and performance) of a solar farm in this location by external consultants with significant experience in this field.

The table below summarises the financial position over a 25 year period which is the estimated life of the asset.

Total income is estimated to be c£59m based on the revenue from exporting the energy. It also takes into account the opportunity cost of lost rent at the site, currently c£34k per year.

Total running costs are estimated to be c£14m and include items such as insurance, maintenance, and management of the site. In addition, the Council will set a side an annual amount known as a 'contribution to sinking fund' which will be used to fund key lifecycle replacements identified in approximately 12 to 13 years' time.

Capital financing costs consist of interest costs from borrowing for 25 years and an annual minimum revenue provision (MRP) to repay the principal borrowing of £20.3m set out in recommendation 1.

The net income after capital financing costs is estimated to be c£12m which equates on average to a annual net surplus of £480k. This will contribute to the budget targets identified in the Medium Term Financial Plan.

Estimated Costs / Income over 25 Years	£m
Total Income (Inc. impact of lost rent)	(£59.37)
Total Running Costs (Inc. contribution to sinking fund)	£14.42
Net Income before capital financing costs	(£44.95)
Interest Costs	£12.68
Principal Repayment (MRP)	£20.28
Net Income after capital financing costs	(£11.99)

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)	£16m Capital (£240k) Revenue	Yes	Both
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£4.3m Capital (£480k) Revenue	Yes	Both
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£0 Capital (£480k) Revenue	Yes	Both

Other Financial Information

The financial business case for the solar farm was considered and approved by the Climate Emergency Funding Board on 26th March 21.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

Planning consultation completed.

Public Sector Equality Duty

A Stage 1 EIA has been completed.

Climate Emergency – This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030

Our corporate estate would become 'net zero' immediately following completion.

List of Background Papers

Solar Farm Financial Business Case

Contact Ian Gough	Service Commercial Property
Telephone	Email ian.gough@wokingham.gov.uk

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Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) form: Initial impact assessment

If an officer is undertaking a project, policy change or service change, then an initial impact assessment must be completed and attached alongside the Project initiation document.

EqIA Titular information:

Date:	20 th June 2021
Service:	Commercial Property
Project, policy or service EQIA relates to:	Creation of a Solar Farm
Completed by:	Craig Hoggeth
Has the EQIA been discussed at services team meeting:	Not yet.
Signed off by:	
Sign off date:	

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1. Policy, Project or service information:

This section should be used to identify the main purpose of the project, policy or service change, the method of delivery, including who key stakeholders are, main beneficiaries and any associated aims.

What is the purpose of the project, policy change or service change , its expected outcomes and how does it relate to your services corporate plan:
Purpose: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To develop a solar farm on Council owned farm land in Barkham.• Expected outcomes:• Increased revenue stream.

- Offsetting of Council's Carbon Emissions from its operational estate.

Services corporate plan:

- This aligns with the Council's Climate Emergency and Commerciality agendas.

Outline how you are delivering your project, policy change or service change. What governance arrangements are in place, which internal stakeholders (Service managers, Assistant Directors, Members ect) have/will be consulted and informed about the project or changes:

How is the project delivered:

- Creation of solar farm on council owned farm land in Barkham.

Governance:

- Commercial Property will be responsible for the development and management of the solar farm.

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

- WBC residents.

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

- N/A

2. Protected characteristics:

There are 9 protected characteristics as defined by the legislation:

- Race
- Gender
- Disability
- Gender re-assignment
- Age
- Religious belief
- Sexual orientation
- Pregnancy/Maternity
- Marriage and civil partnership:

To find out more about the protected groups, please consult the EQIA guidance.

3. Initial Impact review:

In the table below, please indicate whether your project, Policy change or service change will have a positive or negative impact on one of the protected characteristics. To assess the level of impact, please assign each group a Positive, No, Low or High impact score:

For information on how to define No, low or high impact, please consult the EQIA guidance document.

If your project is to have a positive impact on one of the protected groups, please outline this in the table below.

For details on what constitutes a positive impact, please consult the EQIA guidance.

Protected characteristics	Impact score	Please detail what impact will be felt by the protected group:
Race:	No Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is not considered any protected group will be impacted by this proposal.
Gender:	No Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is not considered any protected group will be impacted by this proposal.

Disabilities:	No Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is not considered any protected group will be impacted by this proposal.
Age:	No impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is not considered any protected group will be impacted by this proposal.
Sexual orientation:	No Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is not considered any protected group will be impacted by this proposal.
Religion/belief:	No Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is not considered any protected group will be impacted by this proposal.
Gender re-assignment:	No Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is not considered any protected group will be impacted by this proposal.
Pregnancy and Maternity:	No impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is not considered any protected group will be impacted by this proposal.
Marriage and civil partnership:	No impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is not considered any protected group will be impacted by this proposal.

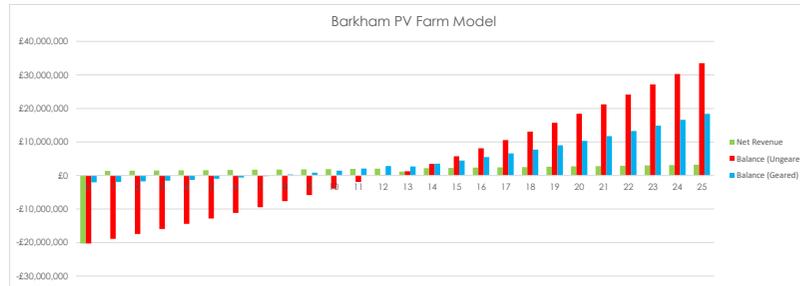
Based on your findings from your initial impact assessment, you must complete a full impact assessment for any groups you have identified as having a low of high negative impact. If No impact, or a positive impact has been identified, you do not need to complete a full assessment. However, you must report on this initial assessment and it must receive formal approval from the Assistant Director responsible for the project, policy or service change.

Initial impact assessment approved by....

Date:....

Barkham 36.6MWp PV Farm

Assumptions	
Size of system	36,610.00 kWP
Imported Energy overnight	154,827 kWh
Generation (kWh/kWp)	943
Exported Energy	34,523,230 kWh
Module degradation	0.40% Per annum
Import electricity price	£ 0.120 pence per kWh
Power Purchase Agreement Export Price	£ 0.045 pence per kWh
EPC Contractor Cost / kWp	£ 400
O&M Costs / kWp per annum	£ 5
Retail Price Inflation (RPI)	2.49%
Annual Fuel Price inflation	3.5%
Year 1 ROI	6.9%
Ungeared IRR	6.3%
Cost of Capital	1.0%
Amount of Loan %	90.0%
Length of loan	25.00 years
Gearred IRR	18%



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Year	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	
Output kWh (including module degradation & module mismatch)		34,523,230	34,350,614	34,178,861	34,007,966	33,837,927	33,668,757	33,500,393	33,332,891	33,166,227	33,000,396	32,835,394	32,671,217	32,507,861	32,345,321	32,183,595	32,022,677	31,862,563	31,703,251	31,544,734	31,387,011	31,230,076	31,073,925	30,918,556	30,763,963	30,610,143	
Annual Revenue																											
Revenue from Export		£1,553,545	£1,607,919	£1,664,197	£1,722,443	£1,782,729	£1,845,125	£1,909,704	£1,976,544	£2,045,723	£2,117,323	£2,191,429	£2,268,129	£2,347,514	£2,429,677	£2,514,715	£2,602,730	£2,693,826	£2,788,110	£2,885,694	£2,986,693	£3,091,227	£3,199,420	£3,311,400	£3,427,299	£3,547,254	
Imported Electricity (Overnight transformers)		-£18,579	-£19,230	-£19,903	-£20,599	-£21,320	-£22,066	-£22,839	-£23,638	-£24,465	-£25,322	-£26,208	-£27,125	-£28,075	-£29,057	-£30,074	-£31,127	-£32,216	-£33,344	-£34,511	-£35,719	-£36,969	-£38,263	-£39,602	-£40,988	-£42,423	
Inverter Replacement Year 13 (3p/w)														-£954,783													
DNO Application	£ 3,000																										
Tender Costs																											
Planning	-£ 100,000																										
Professional Fees (SPV, Planning & Technical)	-£ 100,000																										
EPC Cost of PV Farm including fencing, Client substations		-£14,644,000																									
Grid Connection Cost at 33kV	-£4,470,000																										
Contingency		-£965,850																									
Business Rates (Assumed Zero Sum)																											
Insurance		-£144,000	-£147,874	-£151,851	-£155,936	-£160,131	-£164,438	-£168,862	-£173,404	-£178,069	-£182,859	-£187,778	-£192,829	-£198,014	-£203,343	-£208,813	-£214,430	-£220,198	-£226,121	-£232,204	-£238,450	-£244,864	-£251,451	-£258,215	-£265,161	-£272,294	
3rd Party Asset manager		£36,610	-£37,595	£38,406	-£39,845	-£40,711	£41,806	-£42,931	-£44,086	£45,272	-£46,489	-£47,740	£49,024	-£50,343	£51,697	-£53,088	£54,514	-£55,983	-£57,488	£59,035	-£60,623	-£62,253	£63,928	-£65,648	-£67,414	£69,227	
Operational costs (rates, ins, O&M contract) ***		-£163,050	-£167,974	-£173,031	-£178,223	-£183,555	-£189,031	-£194,654	-£200,428	-£206,358	-£212,447	-£218,699	-£225,120	-£231,714	-£238,485	-£245,438	-£252,579	-£259,911	-£267,441	-£275,163	-£283,073	-£291,281	-£299,684	-£308,288	-£317,094	-£326,208	
Costs																											
Total Revenue	-£20,282,850	£1,390,966	£1,440,816	£1,492,443	£1,545,908	£1,601,278	£1,658,620	£1,718,003	£1,779,501	£1,843,188	£1,909,142	£1,977,444	£2,048,175	£1,166,641	£2,197,277	£2,275,829	£2,357,174	£2,441,412	£2,528,645	£2,618,979	£2,712,524	£2,809,394	£2,909,706	£3,013,583	£3,121,150	£3,232,538	
UNGEARED MODEL																											
Cash flow (£)	-£20,282,850	£1,390,966	£1,440,816	£1,492,443	£1,545,908	£1,601,278	£1,658,620	£1,718,003	£1,779,501	£1,843,188	£1,909,142	£1,977,444	£2,048,175	£1,166,641	£2,197,277	£2,275,829	£2,357,174	£2,441,412	£2,528,645	£2,618,979	£2,712,524	£2,809,394	£2,909,706	£3,013,583	£3,121,150	£3,232,538	
Balance - Ungeared	-£20,282,850	£18,891,884	-£17,451,046	£15,958,425	£14,412,717	-£12,811,439	£11,152,819	£9,434,816	-£7,555,314	£5,812,126	-£3,902,983	£1,925,540	£122,635	£1,289,276	£3,486,555	£5,742,381	£8,119,555	£10,560,947	£13,089,612	£15,708,591	£18,421,114	£21,230,510	£24,140,216	£27,153,799	£30,274,948	£33,507,486	
GEARED MODEL																											
Borrowings		£18,254,565																									
Equity (Capital Outlay)		-£2,028,285																									
Annual Costs																											
Loan Repayment		£730,182.4	£730,183	£730,183	£730,183	£730,183	£730,183	£730,183	£730,183	£730,183	£730,183	£730,183	£730,183	£730,183	£730,183	£730,183	£730,183	£730,183	£730,183	£730,183	£730,183	£730,183	£730,183	£730,183	£730,183	£730,183	
Interest		£182,546	£175,244	£167,942	£160,640	£153,338	£146,037	£138,735	£131,433	£124,131	£116,829	£109,527	£102,226	£94,924	£87,622	£80,320	£73,018	£65,716	£58,415	£51,113	£43,811	£36,509	£29,207	£21,905	£14,604	£7,302	
Operational costs (rates, ins, O&M contract)		£363,660	£373,442	£383,488	£393,804	£404,397	£415,275	£426,446	£437,918	£449,698	£461,795	£474,217	£486,973	£500,073	£513,525	£527,339	£541,524	£556,091	£571,050	£586,411	£602,186	£618,385	£635,019	£652,101	£669,643	£687,656	
Total Annual Costs	-£2,028,285	-£1,276,388	-£1,278,869	-£1,281,613	-£1,284,627	-£1,287,918	-£1,291,495	-£1,295,364	-£1,299,533	-£1,304,011	-£1,308,806	-£1,313,927	-£1,319,382	-£1,325,179	-£1,331,329	-£1,337,841	-£1,344,725	-£1,351,990	-£1,359,647	-£1,367,707	-£1,376,179	-£1,385,074	-£1,394,409	-£1,404,189	-£1,414,429	-£1,425,140	
Revenues		£1,390,966	£1,440,816	£1,492,443	£1,545,908	£1,601,278	£1,658,620	£1,718,003	£1,779,501	£1,843,188	£1,909,142	£1,977,444	£2,048,175	£1,166,641	£2,197,277	£2,275,829	£2,357,174	£2,441,412	£2,528,645	£2,618,979	£2,712,524	£2,809,394	£2,909,706	£3,013,583	£3,121,150	£3,232,538	
Cash flow (£)	-£2,028,285	£114,578	£161,947	£210,830	£261,281	£313,360	£367,125	£422,640	£479,968	£539,177	£600,336	£663,517	£728,794	-£158,539	£865,947	£937,987	£1,012,449	£1,089,422	£1,168,998	£1,251,273	£1,336,345	£1,424,318	£1,515,297	£1,609,394	£1,706,721	£1,807,397	
Balance - Geared	-£2,028,285	-£1,913,707	-£1,751,760	-£1,540,930	-£1,279,648	-£964,288	-£599,163	-£176,524	£303,445	£846,222	£1,442,957	£2,106,474	£2,835,268	£2,676,729	£3,545,676	£4,480,663	£5,493,112	£6,582,534	£7,751,532	£9,002,804	£10,339,149	£11,763,447	£13,278,765	£14,888,158	£16,594,879	£18,402,276	
Outstanding loan		£18,254,565	£17,524,382	£16,794,200	£16,064,017	£15,333,835	£14,603,652	£13,873,469	£13,143,287	£12,413,104	£11,682,922	£10,952,739	£10,222,556	£9,492,374	£8,762,191	£8,032,009	£7,301,826	£6,571,643	£5,841,461	£5,111,278	£4,381,096	£3,650,913	£2,920,730	£2,190,548	£1,460,365	£730,183	

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TITLE	Carbon Capture via the Planting of 250,000 New Trees
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 29 July 2021
WARD	None specific
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Place and Growth - Steve Moore
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement - Wayne Smith

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

The purpose of the report is to gain approval from the Executive for the funding required to begin phase 1 of the 250k tree planting project.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive:

- 1) approve Officers to begin phase 1 of the project, including the recruitment of a project manager, completion of a feasibility study and tree strategy, and start-up of the small woodland planting and community garden planting initiative;
- 2) approve £350,000 of capital borrowing to fund the first phase of the project. The £350,000 requested will ultimately be funded as part of the invest to save scheme for the overall capital project (preliminary calculations show these costs can be comfortably accommodated);
- 3) note the estimated pay back of the full cost of the scheme is likely to be within 4 years of project completion, with an annual surplus thereafter to be confirmed with updated business case;
- 4) note that a further report, including a full Business Case and additional funding requirements, will be presented to the Executive for approval early next year.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On 23rd January 2020 the Council set a target to plant 250,000 new trees in the Borough as part of the Climate Emergency Action Plan. The aim of this target was to increase the amount of carbon captured by trees in the Borough.

Following this decision a project was established to implement this target over the next 5 years, and a proposal was developed for the Climate Emergency Investment Board (CEIB) to review.

The invest to save project proposal was approved by the CEIB on 7th December 2020. A copy of the business case for phase 1 of the project is included in the report below.

The planting of 250k trees is predicted to result in a habitat change that will capture an estimated additional 3.1 kilotonnes (kt) of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e) per year. This number of trees is expected to require approximately 250 hectares of land.

The project will generate income through the sale of Biodiversity Net Gain units and Woodland Carbon Code units. This will provide a surplus to repay the initial investment and also provide funds for the future maintenance of the trees. The projected income will repay the investment within 4 years of the project completion, however the feasibility study will verify and confirm this income.

Officers are now seeking approval to begin phase 1 of the project which will include the recruitment of a project manager, a detailed feasibility study, development of a tree strategy and start-up of the small woodland planting and the community garden forest initiative. The feasibility study and tree strategy collectively will help to ascertain the most suitable land areas within Wokingham to plant 250,000 trees and will provide more certainty on amount of carbon sequestration that will be achievable.

A grant of £300k was recently awarded to the Council from the Woodland Trust to contribute towards the costs of purchasing and planting of the trees. It cannot be used to fund other activities involved in the project such as recruitment, a feasibility study and a tree strategy.

BACKGROUND

On 23rd January 2020 the Council set a target to plant 250,000 new trees in the Borough as part of the Climate Emergency Action Plan. The aim of this target was to increase the amount of carbon captured by trees in the Borough.

Following this decision a project was established to implement this target over the next 5 years, and a project proposal and business case for Phase 1 was developed for the Climate Emergency Investment Board (CEIB) to review.

The proposal was approved by the CEIB on 7th December 2020. A copy of the phase 1 business case is included in the report below.

PHASE 1 BUSINESS CASE

PROJECT NAME: CARBON CAPTURE VIA THE PLANTING OF 250,000 NEW TREES	
Project Description	<p>The project is to develop and implement a comprehensive Carbon Sequestration Tree Strategy for the Borough. This will include the development of a project to meet the Council's target to plant 250,000 trees over the next 5 years as detailed in the Climate Emergency Action Plan, and will go further to look at how the Borough's tree assets as a whole can be managed and utilised to meet the Climate Emergency targets to increase carbon sequestration and improve air quality within the borough. The project will also include measures to develop income streams from the increased carbon sequestration which will off-set the initial investment.</p> <p>It is important to note that the carbon sequestration benefit from planting trees depends more on the area and type of land converted into woodland rather than the sheer number of trees. It is the woodland ecosystems created by this project that will capture and store the carbon; planting avenues or single trees will not secure the same quality of carbon sequestration. The number of trees planted will be a function of the area of such woodland.</p> <p>The scientific method to calculate the likely amount of carbon captured is based on the area of woodland, and for the purposes of this project it is considered that a planting scheme for 250,000 trees will require 250 hectares of land.</p> <p>A number of wider benefits also occur through these proposals, including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) a reduction in flood risk,b) a reduction in air and water pollution, andc) improvements in biodiversity and amenity. <p>The project has been broken down into two phases. The first phase will be to undertake a feasibility study which will be critical to understand and verify the assumptions made in this proposal, and to clarify the cost and likely benefits to be achieved. The second phase will be to implement the</p>

	proposals based on the outcomes of the feasibility study and deliver the benefits outlined in this business case.
Existing tree stock	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WBC currently look after approximately 100k trees. • We currently inspect 27k trees per year using 2 FTE Grade 7 and 6 at a total cost of £68,408 PA; based on council stock of 100k.
Investment sought	<p>Phase 1: Project Start-up, Feasibility Study, Tree Strategy, planting at smaller sites and start-up of “Garden Forest” scheme. (Years 1-2)</p> <p>Total costs of phase: £406,600</p>
	<p>The costs are broken down as follows:</p> <p>1. Resource Requirements: £136,000</p> <p>Consisting of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £55k per annum for FTE Project Manager for the day-to-day management of the project • £13k per annum for specialist consultant support for the development of the Tree Strategy <p>2. Implementation costs: £270,600</p> <p>Consisting of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feasibility study • Tree Strategy • Ground surveys • Design and Environmental Impact Assessments • Advertising • Partnership costs • Tree purchase, planting, ground preparation • 10% contingency <p>A grant of £300k was recently awarded to the Council from the Woodland Trust to contribute towards the costs of purchasing and planting of the trees. This funding can only be spent on purchasing, preparing the ground and planting the trees and cannot be used to fund other activities involved in the project. Therefore, the other implementation activities listed above will require WBC capital funding in order for phase 1 to be completed.</p>
Project Timelines	<p>Phase 1 – Project Start-up, Feasibility Study and Tree Strategy</p>
	<p>Stage 1: Inception (2021)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development and refinement of business case • Approval of project and identification of resources • Appointment of Project Board • Recruitment of resource to manage project <p>Stage 2: Development of the Feasibility Study and Tree Strategy (2021 – 2022)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of requirements for Tree Strategy

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of Feasibility study brief (including land appropriation and/or acquisition) for the planting of 250K trees. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Develop and builds upon existing studies (e.g. WSP) ○ Identify land available and type of habitat ○ Verify likely carbon sequestration ○ Confirm more detailed cost estimates ○ Allows milestone point for decision to continue with full funding. • Tendering for external consultant for feasibility study and Tree Strategy • Delivery of feasibility study and options report • Delivery of the Tree Strategy <p>Stage 3: Small woodland planting (<5 ha) and “garden forest” (2021-2025)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of requirements • Planting of trees within smaller WBC sites • Provision of trees for planting within residential gardens <p>Milestone: Executive decision point following feasibility study to go forward to delivery of Phase 2</p>
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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.

Phase 1 Financial Implications

Phase 1 financial implications	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£136,200	No £12k Woodland Trust grant funding £124,200 shortfall	Capital
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£270,400	No £45k Woodland Trust grant funding £225,400 shortfall	Capital

Other Financial Information
Full cost and income estimates for the full life of the project will be included as part of the detailed business case developed for phase 2

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation
As the project develops, there will be a need to consult with various stakeholders including the Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association, residents, the Town and Parish Councils, and third party landowners.

Public Sector Equality Duty
Not applicable

Climate Emergency – <i>This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030</i>
The decision for funding will allow for part of the Climate Emergency Action Plan to be achieved.

List of Background Papers
None

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