



WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

A Meeting of the **EXECUTIVE** will be held in the Council Chamber - Civic Offices, Shute End, Wokingham RG40 1BN on **THURSDAY 25 NOVEMBER 2021 AT 7.00 PM**

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

Susan Parsonage
Chief Executive
Published on 17 November 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/aBVS0y1yAzw>

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

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WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

Our Vision

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

Enriching Lives

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

Safe, Strong, Communities

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

A Clean and Green Borough

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

Right Homes, Right Places

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

Keeping the Borough Moving

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

Changing the Way We Work for You

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

MEMBERSHIP OF THE 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.
63.		APOLOGIES To receive any apologies for absence	
64.		MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS To confirm the Minutes of the Executive Meeting held on 28 October 2021 and the Extraordinary Executive Meeting held on 12 November 2021	7 - 40
65.		DECLARATION OF INTEREST To receive any declarations of interest	
66.		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	
67.		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

67.1 None Specific

Gary Cowan has asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question:

Question

As part of Wokingham's planning process, statutory conditions are placed on approved development to plant trees and the usual intention of the condition is that should any trees that did not survive within, I believe 5 years must be replaced. Wokingham BC Planning Department will have a full record of the numbers of trees approved by planning conditions.

Professional experts indicate that 25% of new trees planted die and those that survive need attention. As monitoring conditions is a statutory function, I assume the Planning Department have a record of how many of the new planted trees by condition did not survive.

My question is; can the Council provide a complete written record of how many new trees approved by planning conditions over the past 5 years that have not survived and have they all been replaced?

67.2 Shinfield North;
Shinfield South

Jim Frewin has asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question:

Question

Over the past few years Shinfield has been subjected to significant development and a large number of associated planning conditions. Can you please provide a full list of these conditions for the past 4 years that shows signed off compliance status?

67.3 Emmbrook

Rachel Bishop-Firth has asked the Executive Member for Neighbourhood and Communities the following question:

Question

Residents are delighted to see that the building of the Carnival Hub is on track for opening in late summer 2022. Our understanding is that the Carnival Hub facilities will be open on Saturdays, Sundays and evenings, to fit in with the times that residents with weekday work or education commitments will be looking to use them. Can the Council confirm please that the new Library will be open on Sundays and also on weekday evenings in line with the opening times for other facilities?

67.4 Emmbrook Morag Malvern has asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Question

There is a purpose-built youth centre in Wokingham, on Reading Road, which does not seem to offer any regular youth club sessions. Why not?

Matters for Consideration

68.	None Specific	INSTALLATION OF ON-STREET RESIDENTIAL AND COUNCIL-OWNED CAR PARK CHARGEPOINTS	41 - 52
69.	None Specific	RENT SETTING POLICY	53 - 68
70.	None Specific	THERAPY SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE	69 - 82
71.	Arborfield; Barkham; Finchampstead South; Swallowfield	FARLEY HILL PRIMARY SCHOOL ORGANISATION CHANGES	83 - 92

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 28 OCTOBER 2021 FROM 7.00 PM TO 7.50 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: John Halsall (Chairman), John Kaiser, Parry Batth, Graham Howe, Charles Margetts, Stuart Munro, Wayne Smith and Bill Soane

Other Councillors Present

Paul Fishwick
Imogen Shepherd-DuBey

49. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillor Gregor Murray.

Councillor Pauline Jorgensen was unable to attend the meeting in person but took part virtually.

Councillor Laura Blumenthal, Deputy Executive Member for Equalities, Poverty, the Arts and Climate Emergency, attended on behalf of Councillor Murray. In accordance with legislation Councillor Blumenthal could speak on any item but was not allowed to vote.

50. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the Executive meeting held on 30 September 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Leader of Council.

51. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

The following Executive Members declared general personal interests in the items on the agenda:

- Councillors John Halsall and John Kaiser on the grounds that they were unpaid Non-Executive Directors of Optalis Holdings Ltd;
- Councillors John Kaiser, Stuart Munro and Wayne Smith on the grounds that they were Non-Executive Directors of WBC Holdings Ltd.

52. STATEMENT BY THE LEADER OF COUNCIL

The Leader of Council made the following statement:

Since last we met, David Amess has been brutally murdered during a constituency surgery and James Brokenshire lost his battle with cancer. Our thoughts are with their families.

Our hearts also go out to our friend and colleague Gary Cowan in his time of sorrow at the sad loss of Katy, his closest friend, wife and long-time supporter of local democracy.

As the first Council Leader who declared a climate emergency, I am delighted that COP26 will this week address the most important issue facing our world. I am very proud of what we at Wokingham have achieved and will be achieving as our contribution. I hope and pray that there will be tangible outcomes in which we can participate, and which will accelerate our own ambitions.

Covid rates in Wokingham in conjunction with neighbouring Boroughs have steadily been increasing, above the national and southeast average. It seems now to be flattening off. The increasing rates have not affected hospital inpatient rates or death rates from Covid-19.

Most cases in England, Berkshire and Wokingham are in the 11- to 18-year-old group who haven't as yet all been vaccinated.

The Delta variant is circulating widely with national restrictions advisory for face coverings, twice weekly LFT testing for those who work or above primary school age, more testing if you are a contact and isolate if you are positive.

West Berkshire, Wokingham and Reading were all affected by the apparently high rates of false negatives at the Imensa Laboratory.

What can we do? Vaccination is the most important action to promote. Encourage anyone and everyone who is eligible to have all the vaccinations. Boosters are being offered for all those over 50 or clinically vulnerable, health and social care staff, when they reach six months post the second vaccination. If a resident is due for a vaccination and they have not heard from the GP they can either visit a walk-in site or book an appointment through the national booking site. NHS providers are arranging vaccination of their own staff with social care staff using the National Booking Service.

Young people aged 12 to 18 are being offered one dose of vaccination. These also can be booked via the national booking site. The school immunisation service is visiting all schools in turn to vaccinate 12 to 16-year-olds. There will be a significant number of children unable to attend these due to isolating at home with Covid-19. Catch up clinics are being arranged, and they can access the national booking service. This age group cannot visit a walk-in centre.

Wokingham has above national uptake rates of Covid vaccinations.

The only message is that please use face coverings where encouraged to do so and remain cautious in your contact with others.

We have been notified that we shall be subject to a Ward Boundary Review within Wokingham Borough for elections from 2024. Whilst there are options, what is clear is that our current system will have to change. All Councillors have now been briefed on the process and the Council has some work to do to agree a consensus on the way forward.

The extent to which poor financial management has crippled Slough Borough Council makes horrific reading but emphasises how robust controls and disciplines throughout our organisation are essential.

The administration cannot make spending commitments outside the MTFP without a supplementary estimate. Other Members and Officers need to be aware that any such commitments can only be recommendations to the Executive. We were assessing the budget yesterday and will not really know what it means for us for some time.

In common with many other local authorities, we are experiencing cost pressures arising from an over-heated economy and issues with the supply chain. We are experiencing the pressures most acutely within the construction industry in terms of both material costs and

labour. We will also become exposed to the well-publicised increase in utility costs, in particular gas and electricity.

The Council is largely protected from the increase in energy prices for this financial year as the price of supplies has been locked-in within the terms of the contract and the sustainability of the supplier is confirmed. However, there will be a significant impact on the MTFP which we are in the process of formulating following the annual review of charges in the gas and electricity supply. We estimate the impact to be in the region of £600k. Some of our revenue income lines are becoming increasingly challenging this year as they are dependent upon income from asset construction, and I expect we will have to remove the £700k pa additional income target we initially factored in for the next year. From a broader perspective we will need to keep a close eye on general inflationary pressures across the Council, pressures already alerted by the Bank of England Monetary Committee.

We have already conducted an initial review of our Capital Programme for this year and draft proposed Capital Programme for the next three years. It currently tells us that whilst many of the current works in progress are protected by fixed price contracts, it is highly likely that those not yet tendered will see an increase when future bids are received. We have already identified additional pressures on specific capital items of up to £10 million, and this assumes that where we have general work programmes we will have to stop once the budget has been exhausted. It also assumes that we will not be facing a similar demand-led cost increase in the highways sector, which will be another area to closely watch.

It therefore remains incumbent on us to factor these pressures into our financial planning assumptions and take the necessary measures needed to balance our ever-tightening budgets. Good financial management and rigour has been a hallmark of this Council over many, many years and the coming years will provide yet another test for our capable Officers and Councillors. Regrettably well-meaning spending desires arising from committees and working groups outside of the Executive will have to be considered by Executive in this challenging financial context.

The Oaktree School is suffering a delay in the provision which will impact on pupils and the MTFP.

I am particularly sensitive about the Twyford library project as I have initiated it, negotiated it, arranged for funding and planning permission. I am not surprised by others claiming credit, however concocted, as it is a fabulous project. However, as I have been intimately involved with it, it is necessary that it has the greatest scrutiny. In the meantime, I need to point out that there is still an existing library there which has recently been refurbished.

53. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions submitted.

54. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

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

Question

At the 17th September 2020 meeting of Council I asked a Member question, Item 65.3 refers, related to the Winter Maintenance Plan.

The Highways Winter Maintenance Plan indicates that it will be reviewed annually. On that basis, what additional walking and cycling routes will be included in the 2021/22 Plan to ensure that these routes are safe and usable throughout the winter period for pedestrians and cyclists?

Answer

The Highways Winter Maintenance Plan has been reviewed as it is each year and considers the following factors:

- Skidding accidents, where freezing conditions have been cited in Thames Valley Police Personal Injury accident reports
- The location of on-road, shared or dedicated cycle routes
- Bus routes
- Known wet spots
- Bridge-decks, viaducts etc.
- Partnership working with the Highways Maintenance Term Contractor, that is Volker Highways, other departments of the Council and other contractors etc.
- Previous snow events and their impact on the Borough and its residents.
- Comments from parish and town councils, Members and residents.
- Requests for additional salt bins from parish and town councils, Members and residents.
- Car parks; and
- Obviously we have looked at Coronavirus as well.

Based on the number of issues identified in relation to cycling and walking in the Borough during the review we have not identified a need to change our existing approach at the current time. The issue we have got is that the low volume of use and nature of cycle routes in the Borough means that salting dedicated routes would not be effective as re-freezing would be likely to occur shortly after application, because the number of cycles using them is not high enough. We will, of course, continue to monitor cycling levels and if routes are identified that would benefit from salting, they will be added to the secondary salting network.

It is worth noting that we have obtained ten small push along gritters which were purchased last year and have really helped to improve our ability to grit the pedestrian areas evenly and efficiently in our town centres and these could be used on dedicated cycle routes as well.

Supplementary Question

The current HGV driver crisis has impacted on the green waste collection service. How will winter maintenance be continued whilst still maintaining other Council services?

Supplementary Answer

I am not sure it is directly connected to the question but I think it was announced today, if not yesterday, that the green waste collection is back to normal and that we have restarted it and I don't foresee any issues with the gritting.

If you have any issues, of course, Paul I would be very happy to hear from you.

54.2 Imogen Shepherd-DuBey asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question

Looking at the Bus Service Improvement Plan - our new housing estates are filling up with residents and we have bus shelters along the main roads, but as of yet, no bus services to these neighbourhoods.

Understanding that this Council has declared a Climate Emergency, we need good public transport to be an alternative to persuade people out of their cars and that cycling and walking does not work for everyone, especially in bad weather. To be useful, the bus service needs to run in the evenings and at weekends and they were supposed to be available when people started moving in. So, when are we likely to see a regular bus service in these new estates?

Answer

The Bus Service Improvement Plan as you will have seen from tonight's agenda is a high-level strategy, it is not intended to provide detailed amendments and delivery dates for every bus service in the Borough, but you can see from it how much we do actually spend on bus services. It is a considerable amount of money in order to try and encourage people to use bus services and provide appropriate services for them.

Development in Shinfield and Spencer's Wood has already been provided with additional bus services to serve new homes in Croft Gardens and the Thames Valley Science Park. In North Wokingham the 121 service was amended to re-route the bus through Mulberry Grove using S106 funding to cover the costs. Both bus services have developer funding until 2026 to try and establish commercially sustainable services, although the pandemic has had a significant impact on passenger levels and growth.

Currently passenger recovery rates are 65% of the pre-Covid level, bus services need to recover before new services are added. Adding new services when passenger demand is low results in high operational costs and low on-board revenue. Ultimately, where passenger demand is low there is a risk that developer funding will be exhausted before the service can be established so we need to try and introduce it at the right time so that it has got a chance to be established before we run out of developer funding because the last thing we want is to have to withdraw a service because it is not viable at the end of the developer funding.

Bus services for new developments will be addressed as part of the Enhanced Partnership agreement. The Enhanced Partnership agreement will provide greater detail on the frequency and days of operation of bus services along with commitments to delivery dates. The agreement will be available on 1st April 2022. As you will see we have some pretty ambitious targets in terms of improving the bus services, improving integration, improving fares, improving ticketing and really actually making the bus services as good as we can.

Supplementary Question

It is good to know that you are at least thinking about bus services and I realise that it is not a complete thing yet and it is good to know that they are improving.

The thing we have in Wokingham is that there really isn't a very good evening bus service, everything sort of stops about 8pm. I believe the last bus to Woosehill leaves town at 19:05 and if you were a commuter coming out from London that is a little bit early for you. Also, if you are living on Finchampstead Road there is no bus service. In Barkham, I think, the last bus is about 8pm.

If we want people to leave their cars at home this is kind of crucial to the climate emergency; to provide an alternate public transport service that people can choose so that they don't use their cars. I would really like to know what is the plan, particularly in the run-up to Christmas and when there is poor weather? What are the alternatives we are providing for people other than using their cars, particularly in Wokingham?

Supplementary Answer

I agree with you Imogen, my profession is transport and one of the things that is very clear from transport theory and reality is that the more frequent you have services and the more convenient they are, for where people want to go, the more people use them. That is undoubtedly correct, but we do have to get to a position where the bus services are viable and economic.

As you see the Bus Service Improvement Plan will roll out things we have been talking about. Things like the bus service to Winnersh Triangle station which shuts off too early for anybody using it for commuter purposes. Those sorts of things are important to try and see if we can work with Reading Buses, and other bus providers, to make sure that we get services that match, as much as possible, the desire so that they get more passengers, we get more usage and in the end we provide a bus service that is viable. I think that is the key message.

So, I am on the same page as you as far as frequency and timing is concerned but we cannot afford to spend unlimited amounts of money on buses unfortunately. We already spend £810k a year on supporting bus services. We spend almost £1m on concessionary fares and we also spend over a £100k towards community transport and volunteer services. We also spend about £400k from S106 on supporting bus services. These are very significant amounts of money. John has given a very good summary of where the finances of the Council are. We need to get these bus services frequent, and we also need to get them viable so that they are operable and provide the bus companies with a revenue that means that they can continue to deliver them.

55. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING REPORT FY2021/22 - QUARTER TWO

The Executive considered a report setting out the expenditure for the second quarter of the current financial year and the forecast outturn positions for the Council's net revenue expenditure, its General Fund Balance, the Housing Revenue Account and the School's Block funding.

The Executive Member for Finance and Housing advised that in addition to the financial challenges mentioned in the Leader of Council's earlier statement there were also pressure on the schools' budgets and the areas covered by the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), which had a forecast overspend of £9.6m. This figure was likely to rise because of the increase in pension contributions for school staff and the much-deserved salary

increase for teachers. The Council would also have to bear the increase in gas and electricity costs, which was estimated to be in the region of £500k. Councillor Kaiser advised that efforts were being made to reduce the deficit in the Dedicated Schools Grant through the provision of a SEND school, Oaktree. Unfortunately, the DfE had advised that they would be postponing this provision which had the effect of costing the Council £1m pa until the provision was available.

Councillor Kaiser also highlighted the end of September position and the forecast overspend of the revenue budget, as set out in the report, and pointed out that the overspend was only 0.3% of the initial budget, and half of that was due to Covid. In addition, Councillor Kaiser drew attention to the two supplementary estimate requests and the reasons for them.

In relation to the deficit in the DSG Councillor Munro queried whether the deficit would increase year on year, particularly as the Council was responsible for the provision of services but did not have any authority over academies etc? Councillor Kaiser explained that because the DSG was outside the Council's revenue account the deficit could increase year on year but at some point, accountability for it would be required. The Government had stated that more money would be available for schools however it was unknown whether this would assist in reducing this deficit.

Given the importance of the new homes bonus to the Council Councillor Smith queried whether the Council should be taking the matter up with the relevant Government department? Councillor Halsall confirmed that he had alerted the four local MPs to the Council's financial situation including the impact of increased gas and electricity costs, the DSG, the new homes bonus and also the Health and Social Care Bill.

Councillor Kaiser commented that although there were a number of pressures the Council was still in a strong financial position, including having a high level of non-specific usable revenue reserves.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the financial impact of the Covid-19 crisis, as illustrated in the Executive Summary, be noted;
- 2) the overall forecast of the current position of the General Fund revenue budget, Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), as illustrated in the Executive Summary and appendices attached to the report, be noted;
- 3) a supplementary estimate of £151,270 for the Equalities and Diversity programme be approved;
- 4) a supplementary estimate of £250,000 for the re-integration of Trading Standards and Environmental Health to WBC be approved. This money was identified in last year's Medium Term Financial Plan to be spent in 2022/23 however the project costs are forecast to now be spent in 2021/22 rather than 2022/23.

56. CAPITAL MONITORING 2021-22 - QUARTER 2

The Executive considered a report setting out the progress made by the Council in delivering its capital programme in the current financial year and the position as at the end of the second quarter.

The Executive Member for Finance and Housing went through the report and reminded the meeting that the capital budget was used to deliver a large number of projects including roads, schools etc. Councillor Kaiser went on to explain the underspend of £8.1m, which had been achieved through budget savings that had been identified in a number of areas, as set out in the report.

Councillor Kaiser drew Members' attention to the fact that the Public Loans Board was currently consulting on changes to their methodology for lending money and this may result in implications for the Council.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the proposed rephrasing to the Capital Programme following the 'in-year' review, as set out in paragraph 3 and Appendix B, be noted and approved. There is no financial / service impact from the reprofiling of budgets into 2022/2023;
- 2) the position of the Capital Programme at the end of Quarter 2 (to 30 September 2021), as summarised in the report below and set out in detail in Appendix A, be noted;
- 3) the successful application for external funding of £98k, for allocation to new capital schemes to put in place a heat decarbonisation plan for four Leisure Centres, Bulmershe Secondary School and Waterford House (as set out in paragraph 7 of the report) be noted.

57. BUS SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN (BSIP)

The Executive considered a report relating to a proposed Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) which sets out the Council's high-level ambition for future bus services to meet local need.

During her introduction the Executive Member for Highways and Transport explained that this was the next phase of the BSIP which was being driven by a statutory timetable and was required to maintain the Council's current bus service funding from the Government. This phase required the Council to produce and approve a BSIP, which was a high level document that contained some aspirational and ambitious policies, by 31 October 2021. It was noted that discussions had been held with bus companies and other providers to find out the extent of transport that was available in the Borough and what these providers intended to include in their improvement plans.

Councillor Jorgensen advised that by having a BSIP the Council would be able to bid for future funding opportunities as part of the £3bn transitional plan for bus services and other funding may be available based on how ambitious it was felt the BSIP was. The intention was to enable local bus services to recover to pre-pandemic levels and then facilitate continued growth in bus passenger numbers as well as providing the right level of bus provision in the right place that would support continuous economic growth of the whole Borough and the wider Thames Valley region. To this end the Council would be looking at

end to end routes rather than between individual towns and villages. Improving accessibility to transport services and local bus networks and achieving a greener bus network to provide an opportunity to reduce carbon emissions was also due to be considered.

Councillor Jorgensen further advised that the BSIP also included some ambitious targets in relation to journey times, punctuality, passenger growth and customer satisfaction. The delivery policies contained in the BSIP, and set out in the report, were also highlighted.

RESOLVED: That it be agreed that Wokingham Borough Council publish the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) document by 31 October 2021.

58. COMMUNITY DELIBERATIVE PROCESS FOR THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY PROPOSAL

The Executive considered a report setting out a proposal for the delivery of a Community Deliberative Process for Climate Emergency.

The Deputy Executive Member for Equalities, Poverty, the Arts and Climate Emergency introduced the report and reminded the meeting that the Executive had previously decided to engage local residents and businesses in a community deliberative process for the climate emergency. After extensive review a proposal had been developed, as set out in the report.

Councillor Blumenthal confirmed the importance of constantly engaging with residents to get the behaviour change that would be required for the Borough to be net zero carbon by 2030 and this involved listening to their needs, concerns and ambitions. The proposal had been designed to enable the Council to engage with a diverse range of people across the Borough and it was intended that residents would start engaging with the deliberative process in the new year.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the proposal to deliver a Community Deliberative Process for the Climate Emergency through deliberative peer groups and e-panels to engage the community with the Council's response to climate change be approved;
- 2) £46,000 be approved to fund the delivery of Community Deliberative Process for the Climate Emergency as described in the proposal (as set out in Appendix A to the report);
- 3) the key objectives and outcomes of the process for wider engagement with the community to empower stakeholders including but not limited to, Wokingham Borough residents, young people, community groups and the business community to play as full a role as possible in achieving a net-zero carbon borough by 2030 be noted;
- 4) that it be noted that the outcomes and recommendations from the process will be taken to Council next year with the commitment that their feasibility will be explored by Officers. Officers will report back to Council to inform which recommendations will be incorporated into the Climate Emergency Action Plan to support further action.

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**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE EXECUTIVE
HELD ON 12 NOVEMBER 2021 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.05 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: John Halsall (Chairman), Parry Batth, Graham Howe, Gregor Murray, Wayne Smith and Bill Soane

Other Councillors Present

Rachel Bishop-Firth
Stephen Conway
Peter Dennis
Lindsay Ferris
Jim Frewin
Andrew Mickleburgh

59. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillors John Kaiser, Charles Margetts and Stuart Munro.

Councillor Pauline Jorgensen was unable to attend in person but took part virtually.

60. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor John Halsall declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 62, Local Plan Update: Revised Growth Strategy, on the grounds that he was the founder member and was a director of the Campaign for the Protection of Rural Wokingham Ltd and also a member of the Campaign to Protect Rural England.

Councillor Graham Howe declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 62, Local Plan Update: Revised Growth Strategy on the grounds that he was a member of the Campaign for the Protection of Rural Wokingham Ltd.

61. STATEMENT BY THE LEADER OF COUNCIL

The Leader of Council made the following statement:

The rate of new Covid cases within the Borough has been decreasing over half term but remains high. The current rate is 390 per 100,000. The rate within the Borough remains slightly above, but very much in line with, the rates across South-East England and England as a whole. Most cases continue to occur within our school age population and their parents, in line with the rest of the country.

The current rate reflects the cases across the week 28th October to 3rd November, and therefore incorporates half term. We will continue to see a decrease in cases for another week or so but as school activities continue across this half term, we expect the case rate to begin to increase once again. We will work closely with our head teachers and school communities through the Children's Services Taskforce across the term to make schools as safe as possible.

Officers across the Council are working to maximise the effectiveness of the Government's Plan A for our residents; ensuring people are getting tested when it is right for them to do so (rapid lateral flow testing routinely when someone has shown symptoms, and PCR

testing when someone has symptoms or is a contact of a case) and encouraging subsequent isolation. We continue to work with health partners on the delivery of the vaccination programme across the Borough and are promoting the use of preventative measures such as ventilation and face coverings where appropriate.

The coming weeks will see many occasions and celebrations bringing people together in the run up to Christmas. We must remain cautious and continue to employ all measures we can to make these occasions as safe as possible and keep our rates as low as we can as we head into Winter.

Vaccination is the most important action to promote. Please encourage anyone and everyone who is eligible to have all the vaccinations that they are due.

It is that time again when we are required to produce by central Government an updated local plan which will supersede the previous one. This one runs through to 2038 but will require updates along the way to ensure it remains current and delivers the housing numbers as dictated to the Council using the Government formula.

Local Plans are key documents which set out the strategy and associated policies for managing development. Not having a current local plan means that developers can successfully apply for planning permission anywhere. This speculative development occurs with little infrastructure and a greater housing requirement.

Today is only a consultation. Please respond to the consultation either online, by email or by post. We are seeking your views and want to hear what you want to say but please note extraneous actions and petitions do not form any part of the consultation. If you disagree with us, we are very interested in hearing your proposed alternatives.

There are councils near here who have refused the Local Plan process and have had one imposed by the Ministry of Housing and can in extreme cases of non-cooperation result in the loss of the local authority right to determine planning applications.

All English national parties set similar housing targets; Conservatives and Liberal Democrats both at 300,000pa.

Local Plans set out where development should go and the improvements to infrastructure that are required alongside, ensuring residents have access to facilities such as schools and green spaces.

Our current Local Plan, the Core Strategy, was designed to manage development to 2026. It has work well, with most of the development occurring in places where planned and being supported by millions of pounds of investment in infrastructure including new schools, roads, and green spaces. More importantly, it has allowed the Council to refuse and win at appeals against developers proposing unsuitable sites.

Refreshing our Local Plan will mean our planning policies continue to be effective and will be difficult for developers to challenge with inappropriate alternative sites. Without a new plan, there will be less control over where development happens, and it will be much harder to try and improve the infrastructure alongside.

A local plan must enable land to come forward to meet development needs unless there are compelling reasons why this cannot be achieved.

For housing, the Government introduced a standard method which calculates the housing need for each local authority. For Wokingham Borough the housing need currently calculates as 768 new homes each year.

The Council have engaged the leading planning barrister in England and statistician to help understand whether we could progress a case for exceptional circumstances. The outcome was that there are no compelling reasons under the current Government framework to do so.

Whilst the housing need is challenging, the Government proposed revised to their standard method that would have more than doubled our annual requirement to over 1,600 dwellings a year. We campaigned hard and submitted robust technical challenges against the proposal, which was subsequently abandoned by the Government, thankfully.

To be clear, if we progress a local plan which does not enable this amount of housing expected by the Government, it will not pass examination in public, bringing all the negatives of loss of control.

We consulted on a Draft Local Plan in 2020. A central plank of that plan was the creation of a garden town at Grazeley. After agreeing the plan for consultation, a change in legislation resulted in the unexpected extension of the area where emergency plans must be in place around AWE Burghfield to incorporate for the first time both the area of Grazeley as well as the villages of Three Mile Cross and Spencer's Wood. The change means that the Grazeley garden town proposal, and therefore the strategy proposed by the plan, is no longer achievable. This came very much as a surprise as the money for the exploratory work had come from a Government grant.

The clear benefits of refreshing the Local Plan remain. We have therefore been forced to go back and consider alternative approaches.

Central to our thinking on an alternative strategy has been the preference of our residents.

Residents have told us through earlier consultations their preference is for the need for new housing to be met through large scale development, where infrastructure can be provided alongside. They also wish to see use made of previously developed land know as brown field sites.

Large scale developments are often also the best technical solution for providing new housing in ways which respond to the challenge of climate change.

They offer the opportunity to design in sustainability from the outset, including measures to lessen the need to travel by private car, so reducing our carbon footprint and impact on the environment and air quality compared to dispersed development. Large developments also allow to plan for accessible green spaces, drainage management, biodiversity enhancements and renewable energy.

The recommended alternative strategy includes available suitable sites in our town centres for development and makes an allowance for development we can reasonably expect to come forward in our towns and villages. There is however simply not enough available previously developed land, i.e. brownfield land, to meet the housing the Government

expects us to enable. It is not true to suggest there is; that solution simply does not exist and progressing a plan on such a hope would fail at examination.

The recommended strategy therefore recommends the allocation of a large new development on land between Shinfield, Arborfield and Sindlesham, referred to as Hall Farm / Loddon Valley.

This is the most deliverable and sustainable large development option. Others were considered but our judgement is that this is the best opportunity.

It offers the opportunity to provide homes alongside jobs with the area in proximity to the Thames Valley Science and Innovation Park, Shinfield, a key location for economic and jobs growth, the M4 and with good transport links buses and rail.

The Hall Farm / Loddon Valley opportunity also allows the creation of a large publicly accessible green space or park along the River Loddon Valley, an area currently without public access. The river corridor provides a significant opportunity for comprehensive habitat management, restoration and enhancement, improving biodiversity.

The new community would be supported by a comprehensive package of infrastructure to incentivise sustainable behaviours and travel choices. This would include a framework to maximise opportunities for walking and cycling both within the new community and between the surrounding places, including a new connection over the M4 to Earley, primary schools and a secondary school and neighbourhood centres.

Whilst this provides for most new homes within the plan period, and beyond, there is need for development elsewhere across the Borough to meet the Government's housing expectations.

This needs to be proportional and targeted to suitable locations. The new strategy identifies opportunities which are now available within and around our existing major developments, as well as a range of sites on the edge of other towns and villages.

Local Green Space is an options designation that allows communities to identify and protect green areas that are of particular importance to them. The use of Local Green Space will not be suitable in all instances. Guidance is set out in national planning policies.

The Draft Local Plan included proposals for eight Local Green Spaces across the Borough with only a surprisingly small number of areas being nominated by communities.

As communities may not have recognised this opportunity, the Council wrote to all the parish and town councils, and amenity groups across the Borough inviting them to nominate further areas and to explain why they felt these areas were important. I am delighted to say the response was over 100 new areas were nominated.

Officers have reviewed each site against national planning policy and recommend proposing allocations of 71 out of the 100 nominated new Local Green Spaces.

To summarise this is a consultation. It is to discover your views and residents' views and adopt the plan accordingly. We are both on the same side of delivering a target imposed elsewhere. We would like as many residents as possible to respond to this consultation so that we can get the next iteration right. Please respond online, or by letter or by email.

Other channels such as petitions will not be taken into account. We are very interested in what you have to say and if you disagree with us what your alternatives are.

62. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

62.1 Paul Stevens asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question:

Question

Why have Wokingham Borough Council chosen to ignore the views of local residents as expressed in the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan regarding the site of a new "Garden Village" at Hall Farm?

I refer specifically to the following key policies: IRS1, IRS2, IRS3, but also the view that Arborfield and Barkham have no local need for further housing and we have already made significant contribution to the wider need for housing through the SDL at Arborfield Garrison, otherwise known as Arborfield Green.

Answer

The Government require all local authorities to create plans to manage development in their area. A plan must enable land to come forward to meet development needs. With regards to housing, the Government introduced a standard methodology, I appreciate that John has referred to this earlier, which calculates the housing need for each local authority and Wokingham Borough's need calculates as 768 new homes each year.

Meeting this scale of development requires us to make some difficult decisions. We must however make these decisions. Not having an effective plan would mean less control over where development comes forward. It is much harder to invest in improvements to infrastructure such as roads and schools if development is driven by developers in an ad-hoc and dispersed pattern.

Through previous consultation on the local plan, the most supported approach was for development needs to be met through large scale developments, where infrastructure could be planned, funded and provided alongside.

Experience has shown us that large scale developments are often the best solution to meeting development needs in a way that responds to sustainability challenges, including climate change. They also allow us to respond to the lessons of Covid more fully.

To identify the most suitable sites for development, all areas of land promoted by landowners to us for potential development have been assessed. This exceeds over 300 different areas.

The area of land at Hall Farm / Loddon Valley is one of three large scale opportunities we have considered, the others being:

- land situated to the north of Wokingham (between the M4 and A329(M)) known as Ashridge; and
- land to the east of Twyford in Ruscombe Parish.

At least one of these areas is required to meet the housing expectations.

Following technical appraisals by our Officers, with external support from AECOM, and discussions with the cross-party group of Councillors, the recommended strategy proposes the creation of a new sustainable community at land at Hall Farm / Loddon Valley. This is considered to be the most deliverable and sustainable strategic option to meet the Borough needs required for our plan.

It offers the opportunity to provide homes alongside jobs with the area in proximity to the Thames Valley Science and Innovation Park, as well as the Creative Media Hub development that was approved at the Council's Planning Committee meeting on 13th October 2021.

Given the potential scale of the opportunity, the vision is able to extend beyond merely the built development into the wider environment and social benefits of the community. Integral to this vision would be the creation of a large publicly accessible green space or park along the River Loddon Valley, which is an area currently without public access. The river corridor provides a significant opportunity for comprehensive habitat management, restoration and enhancement, improving biodiversity.

I accept that any development needs to lead to change, however the community we propose to create will be high quality. Aspects highlighted in the proposed policy includes a requirement for development to draw on and enhance its context and the considerable natural assets, such as hedgerows, trees, woodland, and incorporate measures to protect and retain the permanent physical and visual sense of separation of Arborfield, Arborfield Cross and Shinfield.

Supplementary Question

The Core Strategy and the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan recognised the importance of restricting development outside the settlement boundaries, or development in the countryside.

Can the Executive Member confirm that the Local Plan Update will take account of the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan and will respect the existing settlement boundaries, and the boundary of the strategic development limits near Arborfield Green, and will not propose additional infill development between settlements or ribbon development along the Arborfield Cross relief road?

Supplementary Answer

Without having the actual Plan I cannot confirm that here now but I will give you a written statement as to the actual area that you are referring to.

62.2 Nigel Penford had asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question but as he was unable to attend the meeting the following written answer was provided:

Question

Why do WBC insist on building on green field sites, with global warming any green space is valuable? Building on green fields is bad; grass absorbs CO₂ all the year round and stores it in the soil. British trees do a good job but only for half the year. Housing also accelerates flooding as grassland absorb water, houses/roads etc.

Another problem is services as long as I have lived in Winnersh the water pressure has slowly gone down, with the new high-tech boilers installed in new build need good water flow. Keep tacking more houses on old infrastructure is bad; sewage, power etc, once the builder has gone, it is the householder who is left with the problem. I am a retired gas heating engineer of fifty years' experience.

Answer

The Government require all local authorities to create plans to manage development in their area.

There are clear benefits in refreshing our local plans. A new plan will mean our planning policies continue to be effective. Without a new plan, there will be less control over where development happens, meaning it is likely to come forward in poorly located places. It will be much harder to try and improve infrastructure alongside if development is driven by developers in an ad-hoc and dispersed pattern; this is not theory. It has happened in the past and many residents expressed their concerns to the Council about this.

A local plan must enable land to come forward to meet development needs unless there are compelling reasons why this cannot be achieved. We have engaged the leading planning barrister and a statistician on this and there are no compelling reasons we could progress.

With regards to housing, the Government introduced a standard method which calculates the housing need for each local authority. For Wokingham Borough the housing need currently calculates as 768 new homes each year.

If we progress a local plan which does enable this amount of housing, it will not pass examination, bringing all the negatives of loss of control.

Turning to the issue of previously developed land, we have sought to maximise all available and suitable sites within the proposed strategy. We review vacant land within employment areas to see whether it could be repurposed for housing and reviewed Council owned land. We have also asked Councillors to use their local knowledge to identify any land they believe was available and suitable within their areas.

These actions have allowed us to increase the number of previously developed sites within the recommended strategy. In addition we have made an allowance for development we can reasonably expect to come forward elsewhere in our towns and villages within our supply calculations.

The hard truth, however, is that there is simply not enough available previously developed land to meet the housing the Government expects. To say there is denies reality. We are therefore required to make difficult decisions.

Through previous consultation on the local plan, the most supported single approach was for development needs to be met through large scale developments, where infrastructure could be planned, funded, and provided alongside.

Large scale developments are also often the best technical solution for providing new housing in ways which respond to the challenge of climate change and minimise other environmental impacts.

They offer the opportunity to design in sustainability from the outset, including measures to lessen the need to travel by private car, so reducing our carbon footprint and impact on the environment and air quality compared to dispersed development. Large developments also allow to plan for accessible green spaces, drainage management, biodiversity enhancements and renewable energy.

62.3 David Lyons had asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question but as he was unable to attend the meeting the following written answer was provided:

Question

What is more important for the Council and Executive Members; maximising house builders' profitability by destroying green open spaces, more flooding of the river Loddon up and down its reaches, or the existing paying and contributing local residents health and wellbeing, local agriculture production, the environment and habitat in which is being damaged and lost by these swathes of soulless new build estates? Surely all brownfield sites should be exhausted and redeveloped before green virgin land is covered in concrete. Brownfield sites have not been exhausted in the slightest.

Answer

The Government require all local authorities to create plans to manage development in their area.

There are clear benefits in refreshing our local plans. A new plan will mean our planning policies continue to be effective. Without a new plan, there will be less control over where development happens, meaning it is likely to come forward in poorly located places. It will be much harder to try and improve infrastructure alongside if development is driven by developers in an ad-hoc and dispersed pattern; this is not theory. It has happened in the past and many residents expressed their concerns to the Council about this.

A local plan must enable land to come forward to meet development needs unless there are compelling reasons why this cannot be achieved. We have engaged the leading planning barrister and a statistician on this and there are no compelling reasons we could progress.

With regards to housing, the Government introduced a standard method which calculates the housing need for each local authority. For Wokingham Borough the housing need currently calculates as 768 new homes each year.

If we progress a local plan which does enable this amount of housing, it will not pass examination, bringing all the negatives of loss of control.

Turning to the issue of previously developed land, we have sought to maximise all available and suitable sites within the proposed strategy. We review vacant land within employment areas to see whether it could be repurposed for housing and reviewed Council owned land. We have also asked Councillors to use their local knowledge to identify any land they believe was available and suitable within their areas.

These actions have allowed us to increase the number of previously developed sites within the recommended strategy. In addition we have made an allowance for development we can reasonably expect to come forward elsewhere in our towns and villages within our supply calculations.

The hard truth, however, is that there is simply not enough available previously developed land to meet the housing the Government expects. To say there is denies reality. We are therefore required to make difficult decisions.

Through previous consultation on the local plan, the most supported single approach was for development needs to be met through large scale developments, where infrastructure could be planned, funded and provided alongside.

Large scale developments are also often the best technical solution for providing new housing in ways which respond to the challenge of climate change and minimise other environmental impacts.

They offer the opportunity to design in sustainability from the outset, including measures to lessen the need to travel by private car, so reducing our carbon footprint and impact on the environment and air quality compared to dispersed development. Large developments also allow to plan for accessible green spaces, drainage management, biodiversity enhancements and renewable energy.

Lastly, I disagree with the comment about soulless housing estates. The new communities we are delivering are vibrant communities, supported by new infrastructure and, from our annual survey of new residents, receive a high level of satisfaction. This is not to say that we need to stop learning and continue to improve where we can.

62.4 Laura Clarke asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question:

Question

How will the impact of the proposed garden village at Hall Farm be assessed in light of the extensive development already underway in Shinfield and Arborfield and how will any cumulative effects be mitigated?

Answer

A range of technical work has been undertaken to help inform all of the impacts of the proposed Hall Farm / Loddon Valley proposal.

The masterplanning approach includes an indicative framework and infrastructure interventions which will have been informed by the transport modelling that has been undertaken. Part of this process includes a high-level viability exercise.

The transport impact of the proposal has been assessed on top of all current local plan (to 2026) developments. With regard to the range of other potential sites flooding modelling has also been undertaken.

As I have stated in response to other questions, the new community would be supported by a comprehensive package of infrastructure to incentivise sustainability behaviours and travel choices. This will include a framework to maximise opportunities for walking and cycling, both within the new community and between the surrounding places, including connection over the M4 to Earley, primary schools and a secondary school and neighbourhood centres.

Notwithstanding the assessment undertaken to support the plan making process, a future planning application would require further detailed modelling. This would help refine our assessment and the necessary infrastructure packages that will be required.

Supplementary Question

Could you please explain if any additional or extra consideration will be included in that Plan and if there are any specific mitigations because of the proximity of the development in the areas of Shinfield and Arborfield?

Supplementary Answer

As I said in my statement this is just an outline proposal at consultation. We haven't got anywhere near that stage. Once we get closer if it goes through consultation this is classed as Regulation 18. If it gets to Regulation 19 it has still got to go through the Inspector and then you have got to go through outline planning. So, at that point all of those considerations will be taken into account.

62.5 Colin Watts asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question:

Question

The scale of the Hall Farm/Loddon Valley SDL is quite extraordinary. It is less than two years since an application for a single dwelling within this area (Ref 193337) was refused in part because of "the effect of the proposal upon the character of the countryside", yet now 4,500 homes are being proposed in the same area.

Why was the character of the countryside important in 2019 but is not important in these proposals in 2021?

Answer

Planning law requires applications to be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The development plan currently comprises our adopted Core Strategy and Managing Development Delivery plans as well as the Berkshire local plans covering minerals and waste matters.

The application you reference was made against our adopted policies, which did not support the proposed development. What we are considering now is different.

As I have explained in previous answers, the local plan will enable land to come forward to meet the development needs, which in the case of housing are set out by Government, unless there is a compelling reason why this cannot be achieved. We have engaged the local planning barrister, I appreciate that this was referred to earlier by John, and a statistician but there was no compelling reasons we could progress. We are therefore required to make some very difficult decisions.

Our current local plans direct development towards specific places. This would work well, providing the certainty of where change is expected and allow us to plan infrastructure alongside.

We would need to decide where to direct development once again. This means that we need to reconsider areas where we have previously steered development away from, because there were better options at the time. Sometimes these areas will not be the best option to any of us.

Supplementary Question

I just wonder do you actually agree though that these proposals will have a significant impact on the character of the countryside?

Supplementary Answer

I think it is how you build the development. We have built some very nice SDLs I mean as you mentioned earlier Arborfield is one; or not you that mentioned it but somebody mentioned it. We have got an SDL at Arborfield, It is all to do with how you develop the site and how you build that and make sure it is a sustainable place to live.

62.6 Mike Heard asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question:

Question

Why was Hurst not considered a suitable location for the new garden village given its close proximity to rail links?

Answer

Three large scale opportunities were identified across the Borough:

- land to the south of the M4 between Shinfield, Arborfield and Sindlesham, known as Hall Farm / Loddon Valley, the site that you were referring to;
- land situated to the north of Wokingham, between the M4 and the A329(M), in the parish of Hurst; and
- land to the east of Twyford in the Ruscombe Parish.

Following a technical appraisal by Officers the recommended strategy proposes the creation of a new sustainable community at Hall Farm / Loddon Valley opportunity. This is considered to be the most deliverable and sustainable strategic option. I have outlined previously the benefits in other questions so I will not repeat them here but I am more than happy to send them to you.

Land promoted elsewhere in the Borough, including other areas of land promoted in Hurst are not large enough to support a comprehensive package of infrastructure necessary to create a new sustainable community.

62.7 Michael Holdstock had asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question which was asked on his behalf by James Burgess:

Question

Are the Council aware that 4.6 hectares of land, forming part of the original Bentley Lane Piggeries (adjacent to the Council's own land at Winnersh Farms) is capable of delivering 100+ housing units and of being accessed and delivered without any impediment from flooding and of the community benefits of including this land, in a wider application as previously proposed?

Answer

All sites promoted for potential development by landowners and developers has been assessed and considered in line with the requirements of national planning policy. The

Officers' technical assessments of all the sites will be published as part of the recommended consultation.

With regards to the land you refer, I assume you are referring to the land to the east of Blackberry Gardens, between it and the A329(M). The Environment Agency flood map shows a large part of this area is in a high risk of flood. The part of the land behind this adjacent to the A329(M) slip road where account would need to be taken of the levels of noise. Linking this land into the draft allocated site would require bridging the area liable to flood at a considerable cost.

The consultation provides everyone the opportunity to respond to our technical assessments. Where someone disagrees with the flood data, clear evidence, in the form of a Flood Map Challenge, would need to be presented and agreed by the Environment Agency.

62.8 Paul Townsend had asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question but as he was unable to attend the meeting the following written answer was provided:

Question

Given the absence of any evidence to support 4,500 homes at Hall Farm, on a number of key topics including transport, infrastructure, flooding, biodiversity, climate change, and viability; on what, exactly, will Members be basing their decision on the Revised Growth Strategy (as opposed to alternatives) being recommended for approval?

Answer

A great amount of detailed work has been undertaken to support the recommended consultation. This includes sustainability appraisal (incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment), a habitats regulation assessment, masterplanning (including high level viability), transport modelling, housing and economic land availability assessment and local green space assessment.

This material has been used to inform decision making to date and will be published as soon as possible and no later than the start of the consultation on 22 November.

62.9 Jim Murphy had asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question but as he was unable to attend the meeting the following written answer was provided:

Question

Officers state that from work they have undertaken assessing the potential sites; Hall Farm / London Valley, displays the most deliverable and sustainable strategic option. I question how this can be when it offers so little in comparison to other more suitable and better located sites.

Except for the fact that this site offers the benefit for WBC to deal with only one readily compliant landowner, I cannot see what other factors cause this site to be selected with such high suitability as to warrant it more suitable than other potential sites. I appreciate that the ability to be able to deliver the plan is one of the key requirements but feel in this instance this one factor must have been disproportionately applied in comparison to the weight give to the other equally important factors.

Therefore, can you please tell what weight, in percentage terms of the overall decision-making criteria, has the benefit of only having to deal with one compliant landowner been the deciding factor in this instance?

Answer

A great amount of detailed work has been undertaken to support the recommended consultation. This includes sustainability appraisal (incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment), a habitats regulation assessment, masterplanning (including high level viability), transport modelling, housing and economic land availability assessment and local green space assessment.

This material has been used to inform decision making to date and will be published alongside the consultation on 22 November. I would encourage you to review this and provide any comments in response to the consultation.

Deliverability is a key consideration when considering where development could take place. National planning policy recognises that there needs to be a realistic prospect of the land being available for development at the envisaged point in time. If sites do not come forward for development, or development is delayed, this can impact the Council's ability to demonstrate a five-year housing land supply or pass the Housing Delivery Test. Failing either of these increases the possibility of unplanned, speculative development.

Deliverability is not the sole reason for the proposed.

Following a technical appraisal by Officers supported by AECOM and discussions with a cross party group of Councillors, the creation of a new sustainable community at the Hall Farm / Loddon Valley is considered to be the most deliverable and sustainable strategic option.

It offers the opportunity to provide homes alongside jobs with the area in proximity to the Thames Valley Science and Innovation Park, Shinfield, a key location for economic and jobs growth.

The Hall Farm / Loddon Valley opportunity also allows the creation of a large publicly accessible green space or park along the River Loddon Valley, an area currently without public access. The river corridor provides a significant opportunity for comprehensive habitat management, restoration and enhancement, improving biodiversity.

The new community would be supported by a comprehensive package of infrastructure to incentivise sustainable behaviours and travel choices. This would include a framework to maximise opportunities for walking and cycling both within the new community and between the surrounding places (including a new connection over the M4 to Earley), primary schools and a secondary school, and neighbourhood centres.

The consultation provides an opportunity for everyone to let us know whether they agree or disagree with our judgement.

63. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

63.1 Gary Cowan had asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question but as he was unable to attend the meeting the following written answer was provided:

Question

My apologies as I cannot attend the meeting, but the Executive proposed plan identifies a new garden village on land south of the M4 between Shinfield, Arborfield and Sindlesham, referred to as Hall Farm / Loddon Valley and the identification of a significant area of additional housing within the South Wokingham Strategic Development Location.

My question is why has Hurst been omitted from consideration when its location perfectly fits the Council's criteria in very many ways for a new garden village as against Hall Farm with its proximity to the flood plain and all its associated risks, not forgetting climate change?

Answer

No land across the Borough has been omitted from consideration. All sites promoted for potential development by landowners and developers has been assessed and considered in line with the requirements of national planning policy.

With regards to land within Hurst, I assume you are referring to the land situated to the north of Wokingham between the M4 and the A309(M) which is within the Parish.

This is one of three large scale opportunities we have considered, the others being:

- land to the south of the M4 between Shinfield, Arborfield and Sindlesham, known as Hall Farm / Loddon Valley; and
- land to the east of Twyford in Ruscombe Parish.

Central to our thinking on the recommended strategy has been the wish to establish an approach that allows for more people to choose to live and work where more journeys can be undertaken in ways that do not add to climate change. Enabling our residents to make the choice for healthier and more environmentally sensitive options such as walking and cycling for shorter journeys, including links to facilities, services, bus stops and train stations will help meet our collective commitments to address climate change.

Following a technical appraisal by Officers with external support from AECOM, and discussion with the cross-party group of Councillors, the recommended strategy proposes the creation of a new sustainable community at the Hall Farm / Loddon Valley opportunity. This is considered to be the most deliverable and sustainable strategic option.

It offers the opportunity to provide homes alongside jobs with the area in proximity to the Thames Valley Science and Innovation Park, Shinfield, a key location for economic and jobs growth.

The Hall Farm / Loddon Valley opportunity also allows the creation of a large publicly accessible green space or park along the River Loddon Valley, an area currently without public access. The river corridor provides a significant opportunity for comprehensive habitat management, restoration and enhancement, improving biodiversity.

The new community would be supported by a comprehensive package of infrastructure to incentivise sustainable behaviours and travel choices. This would include a framework to

maximise opportunities for walking and cycling both within the new community and between the surrounding places (including a new connection over the M4 to Earley), primary schools and a secondary school and neighbourhood centres.

So, in summary the recommended strategy puts forward what we believe is the best option. This includes the creation of a new sustainable community at Hall Farm / Loddon Valley. The land situated to the north of Wokingham between the M4 and the A309(M) has been considered but, in our judgement, it is comparatively less sustainable and deliverable, and as such is not recommended.

The consultation provides an opportunity for everyone to let us know whether they agree or disagree with our judgement.

63.2 Andrew Mickleburgh asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question:

Question

Given the imperative of tackling our Climate Emergency, can you please provide a couple of illustrative examples of how the proposals in the Revised Growth Strategy have been informed by the Climate Emergency?

Answer

The Draft Local Plan we consulted on in 2020 included a suite of policies designed to manage the impacts of development. These included policies to require:

- Net carbon zero developments;
- Biodiversity net gain;
- Affordable housing;
- Quality design;
- Health and wellbeing; and
- Walking and cycling.

Whilst these policies are not part of the proposed consultation, we propose to continue our broad approach and we hope to receive support from the Government's appointed inspector who will examine our plan.

Central to the recommended Revised Growth Strategy it is the wish to manage development in the best option we have to respond to the challenge of climate change and minimise any impacts on the environment.

This is best achieved through large scale developments which offer the opportunity to design in sustainability from the outset, which includes measures to lessen travel by the private car, so reducing our carbon footprint and impact on the environment and air quality compared to dispersed development. Large developments also allow to plan for accessible green spaces, drainage management, biodiversity enhancements and renewable energy.

Supplementary Question

There are of course so many examples that you could have referred to and you cited many of them. But I would like to drill down specifically on the matter of flooding. There are many reasons why the risks of flooding in our Borough will grow significantly during the time period covered by the revised Growth Strategy and beyond. The reasons include the

already evident increase in and severity of extreme weather events locally that is also being experienced around the world and the contribution of some existing, as well as already planned, housing developments to more flooding within our Borough.

Do you have any concerns that building on any of the sites identified in this revised growth strategy could contribute to flooding in any of these sites and/or further afield?

Supplementary Answer

Well, I think as I have said earlier Andrew, we have a very experienced Strategic Planning Team at Wokingham. But not only that we have put our plans out to AECOM and they have got some very experienced, and they are not just experienced locally they are experienced across the country. They are suggesting to us as a group that these are the best sites. If in any of that they were suggesting that these sites are at risk of flooding, then obviously we would have to take that into major consideration.

So, my answer would be that is not something that has been brought to my attention, so no.

63.3 Stephen Conway asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question:

Stephen Conway asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question:

Question

The second draft of the local plan includes many sites that appeared in the first draft. Will the comments made by residents on those sites in the first consultation be carried forward or do they need to submit comments again as part of the second consultation?

Answer

The Draft Local Plan we consulted on, you are quite right, in 2020 proposed 21 smaller sites for residential/mixed development.

Officers have reviewed all those comments, you may be aware that after that we produced a document which was a draft document on the response, to all the consultation and recommend that all of these sites are retained within this Revised Growth Strategy. In some circumstances, the indicative minimum capacity has been changed to reflect the constraints or pursue opportunities for higher densities.

The consultation will be supported by an updated assessment of all sites across the Borough. I would encourage everyone to review the updated assessment and respond to the consultation.

Supplementary Question

Thank you for that. That is very much the advice I would give them too.

Further to this question on the process of consultation, given that many people will want to comment on the new draft, will the Executive agree to extend the consultation period by a week to 24th January?

I ask this because much of the consultation period coincides with the run-up to Christmas itself and the new year. Given that last year Christmas was notoriously cancelled many of our residents will understandably be focussing on family get togethers for much of

December into early January so an additional week would provide some compensation for Christmas distractions.

Supplementary Answer

I don't think that will be an issue. It was a six week consultation and we extended it to eight weeks to go from 22nd November to 17th January but I do not think it will be a problem to extend it by one week.

The Leader of Council responded:

We wish to have as great a response as we possibly can to the consultation. It is a consultation; we are doing it to gather intelligence and to understand the wishes of our residents. So, the higher the level of consultation the better really. But I would add, again, petitions and other demonstrations really are not part of the response to the consultation.

63.4 Lindsay Ferris asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question:

Question

There are a total of 15,513 homes within the consultation to cover the period of the draft local plan to 2036. This is extremely close to the number required within the timeframe. Can you advise how the Council would proceed if a significant number of the housing developments being proposed received significant objections?

Answer

Yes it is 2038, not 2036.

The figure of 15,513 homes is the minimum number of homes required by the Government's standard method over that plan period. The Revised Growth Strategy identifies a land supply which reasonably exceeds this, providing some flexibility for delivery.

The clear benefits of refreshing our local plans. A new plan will mean our planning policies will continue to be effective. Without a plan, there will be less control over where development happens, meaning it is likely to come forward in poorly located places. It will be much harder to try and improve the infrastructure alongside it.

As you know, if we progress a local plan which does not meet the Government's housing expectations it will not pass the examination in public. We have taken advice on this from a leading barrister, and I am sorry I have mentioned this before, and statistician expert.

We will of course review all the comments we receive to the consultation and amend our strategy if necessary, however, let us be clear. There is little scope to remove land from the strategy without having to find suitable land elsewhere. If somebody wishes to object to a particular site, it is equally important for them to tell us where they would support building new homes to meet our plan.

Supplementary Question

It would appear that major objections have already started, even before the consultation has commenced; in particular with a major petition relating to the Pinewood site in Wokingham Without.

Can the Executive Member explain why this popular community site was included for housing in this consultation when many other community sites have been recommended for Local Green Open Space status?

Supplementary Answer

I am glad you brought that up Lindsay as I was going to bring that up later. The point that you are referring to, and if you do not mind I will read it as it is very important because like you I am very frustrated at what is being put out on social media. Page 44, paragraph 6.1.7 states:

“In addition to the sites identified above, it is further proposed to allocate Pinewood, Old Wokingham Road for self-funded regeneration. Pinewood accommodates a number of valued community facilities but the premises on site are of varied quality and they would benefit from investment. Proposals would be drawn up in consultation with the existing occupiers. Some of the income from any housing (and I say any housing) achieved on this site would be invested back into community facilities onsite, or if appropriate, their relocation to a new home.”

So, I do not read that as we are going to build all over that site. I read that, that we are going to plough back money into areas, and I know it is a very valuable site, and we will want to keep it and we will want to look after that site. I am amazed at what has been put out on Facebook, absolutely amazed.

63.5 Jim Frewin asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question:

Question

Can the Executive please explain why the impact on the local plan Grazeley proposal of the AWE Planning Exclusion Zone expansion was unexpected?

Answer

AWE Burghfield is a licensed nuclear installation within the adjoining local authority of West Berkshire District; and I know that you know that.

The Grazeley Town proposal was devised in partnership with West Berkshire District Council and Reading Borough Council, and with the capacity funding from Homes England. Grazeley was awarded Garden City Status by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government. All the masterplanning process involved representatives from AWE.

At the time of researching this option, the land where masterplanning placed building was outside of the Detailed Emergency Planning Zone where the emergency planning arrangements are required in case of an incident.

Whilst we were aware of a change in legislation requiring a review of all arrangements for all nuclear licensed installations in the country, we were only advised that there was a potential change at AWE when we were verbally informed of such by an Officer at West Berkshire Council in December 2019. Until then we were entirely unaware and even at that point the consequences were unknown given the little information we were provided with.

The formal change to the Detailed Emergency Planning Zone was confirmed by West Berkshire Council on 12 March.

A subsequent legal challenge was lodged by the affected landowners. This was dismissed by the courts on 12 February this year.

Supplementary Question

I have been reliably informed that the Council was informed in 2018 of the fact that the Ministry of Defence would actually object to development in that area; so is that information wrong? If you could send me those dates that would help, and I could check them.

Supplementary Answer from the Leader of Council

Jim, can I say that your “reliably informed” was unreliable.

I can say that we were receiving funding from the Government to proceed with the Garden Village in 2019 and I was here on 23 December 2019, just packing up my things, at midday, or two o'clock in the afternoon, when somebody from West Berkshire came along and said that there was a problem, and the problem was not specific, and we were held to secrecy. In fact, I was not supposed to know. So, no it is not true and it came as a real surprise to us and we fought it for three to five months to make sure that it was right and it was only when the MOD was asked, and asked, and asked again by politicians and Officers that they then said we will object and definitively to anything. So, it is not true.

63.6 Rachel Bishop-Firth asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question:

Question

It is clear that residents want the necessary infrastructure in place earlier rather than later. You have miserably failed to get the infrastructure in place before the houses are occupied under your current Local Plan. What can you point to in this new document that will get the infrastructure in place next time?

Answer

Funding for infrastructure in the UK is paid to Councils after the commencement of development, whether this is via S106 or CIL. It is therefore remarkable that Wokingham Borough Council has forward funded and delivered much of the 2010 Core Strategy local plan (which runs to 2026) £574m worth of infrastructure programme as early as it has been brought forward and it has been delivered directly. Not only is this a programme of massive scale, it has also been incredibly successful in transforming the capability of the Council so that it is recognised externally as a delivery authority. This status was recognised in 2016 by a Peer Review where the final report said:

“Wokingham is the Department of Communities and Local Government’s ‘go to’ example of successful delivery of strategic housing development accompanied by the infrastructure to create sustainable communities. This is far from the norm. WBC has demonstrated a strong vision in this area of activity, coupled with leadership and commitment to achieving that vision, and quite rightly the Officers and members of the Council are proud of what has been achieved to date and what is in train.”

Clearly, we would like always to have done more sooner, however I expect the current Peer Review to have similar findings because the Council's performance on infrastructure delivery is spectacular on a national scale, and it is regrettable that this is still not more widely understood particularly within Wokingham itself. The highlights of our programme are

£250m of Highway initiatives: -

- The Eastern Shinfield Relief Road, completed early.
- The Northern Distributor almost complete and the Coppid Beech section is due after 2026.
- Arborfield Cross Relief Road, completed early.
- The Nine Mile Ride Extension, half complete and the other in hand.
- The Station Link Road, early.
- Mere oak Park and Ride complete.
- Thames Valley Park and Ride complete.
- Winnersh Park and Ride in design.
- Barkham Bridge widening.

£226m of Community, Sports and Leisure initiatives:

- 110Ha of new publicly accessible greenspace, country parks and play areas completed and an extra 130Ha to come.
- 20 Miles of greenways, now many KM completed and many more KM in design.
- 12.5Ha comprising around 400 new community allotments.
- California Country Destination play area completed.
- Dinton Activity Centre completed.
- Cantley Destination Play Area in design.
- Finchampstead Designation Play Area.
- Sports hub at Ryeish Green completed.
- Sports hub at Arborfield completed.
- Sports Hub at Grays Farm in design.
- Bulmershe Leisure Centre rebuild completed.
- Five Community Centres at Shinfield, Matthews Green, South Wokingham, Arborfield and Montague Park.

£98m of Schools initiatives; one Secondary and seven Primary:

- Arborfield Secondary, early.
- Montague Park Primary, early.
- Shinfield West, early.
- North Arborfield Primary early.
- Matthews Green Primary under construction.
- Three primary schools to come at Spencer's Wood, South Wokingham and South Arborfield when they are needed.

The route to success has been the delivery capability of Wokingham Borough Council have combined with one of the highest CIL rates in the UK, as well as strategic planning which is fit for purpose. We have no intention of changing this formula in the new plan other than to build on the existing policy, capability and continue with our delivery successes.

Supplementary Question

To fight the climate crisis, we need full local services including doctors and schools, local employment and good public transport links, as well as cycle routes. How does what you are proposing provide any of these things?

Supplementary Answer

I think it is very clear Rachel. I read your statement where it says that we are not providing infrastructure and we have failed miserably. From what I have just read out we are not failing miserably, and all of those items will be taken into consideration as we move forward with this Plan and all the work that Gregor is doing on the climate emergency.

The Leader of Council responded:

We have no capability of increasing the number of medical centres or GPs. It is not within our hands. We are trying to get them to do better but that is all we can do.

63.7 Jackie Rance had asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question but as she was unable to attend the meeting the following written response was provided:

Question

The Executive summary clearly states that local plans must be prepared in consultation with the local community and local stakeholders. As a local Councillor I am not aware of any consultation beyond limited consultation on Halls Farm. Could the Executive please provide a list of all sites on which local community consultations have taken place (except Halls Farm) and how they were evaluated?

Answer

The purpose of this report to Executive this evening is to approve undertaking consultation on the recommended Revised Growth Strategy. This will allow residents, businesses, and other stakeholders to comment on the proposal relating to Hall Farm / Loddon Valley, as well as other proposals and supporting technical assessments, which includes an assessment of all promoted areas of land.

As detailed in the report, the Council has previously undertaken a number of consultations:

- Issues and Options Consultation (August 2016).
- Homes for the Future (November 2018 – February 2019).
- Draft Plan Consultation (February 2020).

Reports of each consultation are available on our website and details a summary of the main issues raised by respondents.

63.8 Peter Dennis asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question:

Question

How does this local plan update with the proposed sites within it, impact current and forthcoming planning applications on those sites, especially ones where prior applications have been rejected?

Answer

Planning law requires applications to be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The development plan currently comprises of our adopted Core Strategy and Managing Development Delivery local plans as well as the Berkshire local plans covering minerals and waste.

Weight may be placed on emerging plans according to their stage of preparation. Emerging plans at consultative stage attract no or very limited weight. Plans which are further progressed attract more weight, with potentially significant weight will be placed on plans which have been submitted for examination or where the Inspector has reported, depending on the context.

We are at the consultative stage in the plan making process. As such I would not expect the recommended consultation to have in itself carry more than limited weight when determining future planning applications.

Supplementary Question

Just to be clear on that with any planning application that is currently going through the process right now then this proposed local plan update will have no weight with it then because it has not reached the consultation.

Supplementary Answer

It will be our adopted policies as they stand right now.

64. LOCAL PLAN UPDATE: REVISED GROWTH STRATEGY

(Councillors John Halsall and Graham Howe declared personal interests in this item)

The Executive considered a report relating to the Local Plan Update which was the document that would guide how development would be managed in most circumstances.

During his introduction the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement drew the meeting's attention to the extensive consultation process that was to be carried out, which would start on 22 November 2021, and was outlined in the report. This included the fact that anyone registered on the existing Planning Policy consultation database and other information databases would be notified about the consultation. In addition, all households in the Borough would receive 'postcard' notification of the consultation, including details of the six engagement events; some of which would be held in person and others virtually.

Councillor Smith highlighted the extensive work undertaken by Officers to try and find brownfield sites within the Borough that could be used for housing. Some of those sites that they did manage to find were currently used for employment purposes and the owners of these sites were not willing to give them up for housing as they were more valuable to them for employment. Giving the difficulty finding available and suitable brownfield sites Councillor Smith urged residents to come forward if they knew of any such sites that the Council had not previously looked at.

As stated earlier in the meeting Councillor Smith confirmed that the end date of the consultation would now be 24th January 2022.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the Local Plan Update: Revised Growth Strategy consultation document (as set out in enclosure 1 to the report) be agreed for consultation;
- 2) the consultation framework, as set out in the report, be agreed;
- 3) that minor changes to the content of the Local Plan Update: Revised Growth Strategy consultation document, and the production of studies and materials produced to support the consultation, be delegated to the Director of Place and Growth in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement.

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TITLE	Installation of Electric Vehicle Chargepoints for On-Street Residential and Council-Owned Car Parks
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 25 November 2021
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Place and Growth - Steve Moore Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions - Gregor Murray Executive Member for Highways and Transport- Pauline Jorgensen

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

The purpose of the report is to gain approval from the Executive for the installation of on-street residential and council-owned car parks EV chargepoints.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive:

- 1) approve the initial small-scale rollout of approximately 36 on-street residential EV chargepoints subject to a local engagement exercise once preferred sites have been identified;
- 2) approve the provision of EV chargepoints in council-owned car parks;
- 3) approve £66,000 of capital borrowing to fund the council's 25% investment subject to securing the remaining 75% through government funding; this borrowing will be recovered through revenues generated by the project;
- 4) note that Wokingham Borough Council would be the owner and operator of the EV chargepoints but the maintenance would be undertaken by an external supplier with expertise in this sector. All costs related to maintenance and management will be covered by the external supplier following a procurement exercise;
- 5) note that the award of the contract for supplier will be dependent on achieving the financial estimations detailed within this report, ensuring zero net cost to the Council;
- 6) note that a further report will be presented to the Executive for approval following an initial 18-month period of operation of the on-street chargepoints to review effectiveness and summarize lessons learned to inform into the future EV strategy.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) 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. Taking into consideration that the road transport sector is the biggest emitter of greenhouse gases, the Council is seeking to take immediate actions towards the decarbonization of the transport system. EVs have a key role to play in reducing greenhouse gases, improving air quality and tackling climate change.

One particular area of concern is providing EV chargepoints for those who do not have off-street parking and are therefore unable to install chargepoints at home. Home charging normally accounts for 80% of an EV owner's charging due to convenience and price, so not having access to this is a major barrier to the EV roll-out.

The role of the council is crucial in encouraging the adoption of EVs and ensuring that on-street parking is not a barrier to realising the benefits of owning an electric vehicle. To enable this, WBC is developing a small-scale project focusing on the installation of EV chargepoint infrastructure in on-street residential locations and council-owned car parks where off-street parking is not available. Any lessons learned from the initial 18-month operation of the project will be reported to Executive and feed into the future EV strategy.

The Council seeks to apply for funding this financial year to the On-Street Residential Chargepoint Scheme currently being administered by the Office for Zero Emission Vehicles (OZEV). The funding available is for 75% of the capital costs of procuring and installing the chargepoints and the associated dedicated parking bays. The proposed locations for the on-street residential chargepoints will be the subject of a further public engagement process in order to ensure there is broad support in the immediate local area.

The remaining 25% will be covered from capital borrowing through the Climate Emergency Investment Board who agreed to fund the proposal. During procurement of the chargepoints assurance will be sought from the suppliers that the investment will be cost neutral or result in some revenue income for the Council.

This paper sets out a detailed description of the project, the likely timescales and capital and revenue impacts.

BACKGROUND

Climate change is one of the most pressing environmental challenges of our time with immediate actions required to reduce or prevent the emissions linked to human activities.

The UK has committed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 28% by 2035 and moving to Net Zero by 2050. Wokingham Borough Council, aligning with the national and international policies, 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.

Transport, in particular cars, is the largest source of emissions (accounting for 27%). Transitioning from petrol and diesel cars to electric vehicles is therefore key to reducing emissions and meeting Net Zero. To enable this, it is essential that there is a comprehensive and competitive EV charging network in place.

The Department for Transport sets out that 80% of all EV charging happens at home and home charging is expected to be central to the future charging ecosystem.

This is in line with the findings of the WBC EV survey that was conducted earlier in the year, as 83% of the respondents (overall 260 respondents participated in the survey) expressed their preference for charging their EVs most of the time at home where they park overnight. This is followed by 8% of the respondents who prefer to use public areas and 2% who chose workplaces as their preferred place to charge their EVs the majority of the time.

On-street slow or fast charging near the home (where EVs can charge overnight), offers a more convenient, easier and cheaper way to charge than relying on rapid hubs (akin to petrol forecourts) or destination charging. Drivers could save over £100 a year by using an on-street chargepoint rather than rapid charging (which typically costs around 60% more than home charging). It also has greater benefits for the grid as when EVs are plugged in they can help manage the intermittency of renewable energy sources by providing flexibility as well as smoothing demand (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/electric-vehicle-charging-market-study-final-report/final-report>).

One particular challenge is providing EV chargepoints for those who do not have off-street parking and are therefore unable to install chargepoints at home. The lack of availability of chargepoint at home is considered a significant barrier restricting the wider adoption of EVs.

In recognition of this challenge, OZEV have created the On-Street Residential Chargepoint Scheme. The scheme gives local authorities access to grant funding which can be used to part fund the procurement and installation of on-street electric vehicle chargepoint infrastructure, to meet residential needs. The funding available is for 75% of the capital costs of procuring and installing the chargepoints and the associated dedicated parking bays (where applicable). There is no provision in the grant for future operation, maintenance, removal, or replacement costs. 75% of the grant is paid upon acceptance of the grant offer, and the remaining 25% paid in arrears upon completion of the project and the claims process.

Despite the fact that the scheme is primarily focused on residential areas with no off-street parking available, OZEV is willing to consider applications for chargepoints situated in car parks owned by the local authority where they meet the criteria of the scheme.

BUSINESS CASE

The role of the council is key in encouraging the adoption of EVs and ensuring that lack of off-street parking is not a barrier to realising the benefits of owning an electric vehicle.

Project Description

To enable this, WBC has developed a proposal for installing on-street chargepoints in residential areas where off-street parking is not available. There are two separate streams to the proposal:

1. A small-scale project focusing on the installation of EV chargepoint infrastructure in on-street residential locations where off-street parking is not available
2. Provision of chargepoints in council-owned car parks enabling local residents to charge their car both during the day and overnight

Any lessons learned from the initial 18-month operation of the project will be summarized in an evaluation report presented to the Executive whilst the main outputs will feed into the future EV strategy.

WBC is liaising with the Energy Saving Trust (EST), gathering evidence to demonstrate existing and future demand for on-street residential chargepoints (this can be proved via chargepoint requests, resident surveys, geospatial analysis plotting streets with high proportion of flats and terraced houses and analysis of EV registrations in local area) and seeks to apply for funding this financial year to the On-Street Residential Chargepoint Scheme.

On-Street Provision

Approximately 36 chargepoints are proposed to be installed in residential on-street areas, the exact location of which would be specified by geospatial analysis combined with the outputs of our recent EV survey and the chargepoint requests received so far. A public engagement exercise will be undertaken upon selection of the chosen on-street residential locations to obtain broad support from the residents and make any amendments to take account of local feedback.

A competitive tender is anticipated later in the year with the awarded supplier providing ongoing input and support on the delivery of the project. The intention is that the council purchases and operates the chargepoints with maintenance undertaken by an external supplier with expertise in this sector, familiar to the users. By monitoring the usage of chargepoints, the council can alter the charging fees determine what incentives might encourage use and control demand, whereas at the same time can regulate load balancing issues, trying to achieve even usage among the entire chargepoint network. By being responsible of the back-office the council can also proactively install and uninstall the charging infrastructure meeting users' needs in a timely manner.

Car Park Provision

Ten council-owned car parks have been identified within the borough which meet the criteria specified by OZEV.

A 3-year pilot, with no long-term commitment is currently being explored at 3 locations within Wokingham (Carnival Pool, Dinton Pastures and Shute End car parks) to investigate the efficiency and effectiveness of Flowbird as a potential supplier. WBC is already using Flowbird as a provider for the parking ticket machines whilst their new technological devices are offering a combined parking and charging element of the payment enabling a seamless and cost-effective experience for the users.

The project is in line with the vision of the Corporate Delivery Plan to Keep the Borough moving and enjoy a Clean and Green Borough now and for future generations to come. The implementation of the project would have a significant potential for abatement of carbon dioxide emissions (CO₂) with the carbon savings being estimated at 7,681 tCO₂e annually.

Cost

The current estimate for the capital cost of the project is approximately £240,000. This is an indicative cost based on informal discussions and research: £155,059 for the residential on-street scheme (the cost encompasses design and project management (£7,200), civils and electrical (£56,446), EV chargepoints hardware (£74,914) and Distribution Network Operators (DNO) power connections (£16,500)) and £85,242 for the car parks (the cost encompasses all hardware and commissioning and set-up. DNO cost is not included).

75% of the capital costs (£180,000) of chargepoints purchase and installation is covered by the On-Street Residential Chargepoint Scheme. The remaining 25% will be covered by capital borrowing through the Climate Emergency Investment Board.

It is therefore anticipated that WBC's commitment to the scheme would be £66,000 (including a 10% contingency) which will cost the Council £11,320pa in interest and MRP (based on a 10-year payback). A business case for the scheme has been completed following the agreed governance process and the funding from the Climate Emergency Investment Board has been approved.

Revenue

Because the Council is providing the capital investment, the operation of these chargerpoints is expected to generate a revenue income that is sufficient at least to cover the councils borrowing costs (based on a 10-year payback). The revenue generated is very much dependent on usage, but it is also impacted by the amount we charge for the energy, and any ongoing cost of maintenance and management.

A number of different financial models have been included in the business case provided to the Climate Emergency Investment Board based on a 10-year operation period. The 10-year period has been chosen due to the longevity of the equipment and taking into consideration that schemes need time to be allowed to bed in; they must be in place long enough for their benefits and disbenefits to be properly evaluated and understood whilst adequate time is required for people to amend their travel behaviour.

The selected financial model would be agreed with the awarded supplier following a procurement exercise, ensuring that the chosen option would be cost neutral or result in some revenue income for the Council.

Timescales

The project duration is estimated at 17 months (which aligns with the requirements of the grant scheme), including the application to the On-Street Residential Chargepoint Scheme currently provided by OZEV, procurement, public engagement on the specific on-street locations identified and installation of the chargepoint infrastructure.

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)	Scheme cost: £240,000 Capital cost to the Council: £66,000 (including 10% contingency)	75% covered by OZEV. The remaining 25% (£66,000) to be covered by capital borrowing	Capital
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	(TBC)	-	Revenue
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	(TBC)	-	Revenue

Other Financial Information

It is anticipated that WBC’s commitment to the scheme would be £66,000 secured from capital borrowing through the Climate Emergency Investment Board plus interest of £11,320 (based on a 10-year payback). As part of the tender process, it will be ensured that the full cost of the scheme is recovered within the 10-year period.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

EV charging public engagement was undertaken between 24/03/2021 and 30/04/2021 via the completion of an online survey. The outputs of the survey along with chargepoints request received so far would be considered for the identification of the exact locations of on-street residential and council-owned car park chargepoints.

Additional public consultation will take place on the specific on-street locations identified prior to any decision to implement.

Regular meetings between the EV working group, EST and DNO are going to be scheduled to follow up and input in developing the approach.

Public Sector Equality Duty
Initial Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been completed, there are no negative issues identified.

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>
Installing new electric vehicle chargepoints across the Borough and encouraging the uptake of electric vehicles are key objectives of the Climate Emergency Action Plan.

List of Background Papers
N/A

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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:	9 th September 2021
Service:	Highways and Transport
Project, policy or service EQIA relates to:	Installation of Electric Vehicle Chargepoints for On-Street Residential and Council-owned Car Parks
Completed by:	Sofia Charalampidou
Has the EQIA been discussed at services team meeting:	No
Signed off by:	Matt Gould
Sign off date:	17 Sept 2021

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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:
The purpose of the scheme is to provide on-street and car park chargepoints in residential streets where off-street parking is not available. Home charging normally accounts for 80% of an Electric Vehicle (EV) owner's charging due to convenience and price, so not having access to this is a major barrier to the EV roll-out. In Wokingham it is estimated that around 27% of residential buildings have little to no access to off-street parking. This translates to approximately 12,160 households needing on-street residential facilities if they wish to charge a vehicle whilst at home. The role of the council is crucial in encouraging the adoption of EVs and ensuring that lack of off-street parking is not a barrier to realizing the benefits of owning an electric vehicle. The project would be in line with the vision of the Corporate Delivery Plan to Keep the Borough moving and enjoy a Clean and Green

Borough now and for future generations to come. The implementation of the project would have a significant potential for abatement of carbon dioxide emissions (CO₂) with the carbon savings being estimated at 7,681 tCO₂e annually.

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:

Wokingham Borough Council intends to apply for funding this financial year to the on-street residential chargepoint scheme which is provided from the Office for Zero Emission Vehicles (OZEV). This funding is available to local authorities covering 75% of the capital costs of procuring and installing the chargepoints and the associated dedicated parking bays. The project will be delivered following a competitive tender with the successful supplier being responsible for the installation and maintenance of the chargepoints. The council will purchase and operate the chargepoints ensuring flexibility in adjustments to charging fees, installation/uninstallation of equipment and incentives to users.

EV Working Group is convening on a regular basis discussing progress and mitigations to any challenges raised. The responsible officers for the project are also liaising with the Energy Saving Trust who are administering the on-street residential chargepoint scheme on behalf of OZEV to ensure the procedures are running smoothly enabling a successful bidding application. Assistant directors and service managers of the related departments (Highway and Transport, Strategy and Commissioning Places and Strategic and Commercial Assets) have been informed and consulted.

Outline who are the main beneficiaries of the Project, policy change or service change?

The main beneficiaries of the project are the residents of Wokingham Borough. The implementation of the scheme will provide equal opportunities for charging between residents who lack off-street parking and those who are able to install private chargepoints at their driveways/garages. According to the finding of an EV survey conducted by Wokingham Borough Council earlier in the year, 83% of the respondents (overall 260 respondents participated in the survey) expressed their preference for charging their EVs most of the time at home where they park overnight. Thereby for those residents that lack of off-street parking having convenient and affordable local public charging will be crucial to EV take-up. Local authorities have a key gatekeeper role to play in planning and facilitating chargepoints in residential areas meeting the needs of the EV users.

Outline any associated aims attached to the project, policy change or service change:

EVs have a key role to play in reducing greenhouse gases, improving air quality and tackling climate change. To enable a smooth transition from petrol and diesel cars to electric vehicles it is essential that there is a comprehensive and competitive EV charging network in place, one that people can trust and they are confident using.

Main aim of the scheme is to provide on-street and car park chargepoints in residential streets where off-street parking is not available. The scheme will enable equal opportunities for charging between residents who lack off street parking and those with access to private garages and driveways. The proposal has been brought forward to support the climate emergency pledge and make Wokingham carbon neutral by 2030. In addition to promote Wokingham as a sustainable town encouraging clean and green travel modes and to provide a great place to live, learn, work and do business.

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	There is no direct impact on that group.
Gender:	No	There is no direct impact on that group.
Disabilities:	Positive	Procurement of infrastructure which facilitates accessibility for disabled drivers.
Age:	No	There is no direct impact on that group.
Sexual orientation:	No	There is no direct impact on that group.
Religion/belief:	No	There is no direct impact on that group.
Gender re-assignment:	No	There is no direct impact on that group.
Pregnancy and Maternity:	No	There is no direct impact on that group.
Marriage and civil partnership:	No	There is no direct impact on that group.

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 Matt Gould

Date: 17 Sept 2021

TITLE	Rent Setting Policy
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 25 November 2021
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Place and Growth - Steve Moore
LEAD MEMBER	Deputy Leader of the Council - John Kaiser

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

The 'Rent Setting Policy' ensures we are regularising the current annual rent setting process, that re-confirms the rent setting is part of the annual Housing Revenue Account budget setting process.

While this is a new policy, the policy requires the council to adhere to the Rent Standard 2020 that in practice, means our approach to rent setting continues without any changes to our historical approach.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive approve the Rent Setting Policy as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, for which the 'Rent Setting Policy' primarily relates to the Housing Revenue Account (2552 properties) plus includes a small number (18 properties) of General Fund properties.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Why has a 'Rent Setting Policy' been produced?

The Rent Standard 2020 now applies to councils (previously this applied to Housing Associations) with the standard being regulated by 'The Regulator of Social Housing'. The policy applies to the circa 2,570 homes owned/managed by the council.

At present, the council sets rents as set out in the government's 'Policy statement on rents for social housing' and 'Rent Standard 2020'. The 'Rent Setting Policy' ensures we are regularising the process, that re-confirms the rent setting is part of the annual Housing Revenue Account budget setting process.

Does the policy show any changes to our current and previous approach?

The attached policy does not involve any changes to the approach to how the council charges rents.

Once approved, the policy can be reviewed each year and be included as part of the annual Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget setting papers. Therefore, there is the opportunity for the policy to be reviewed every year.

The key messages in the attached Rent Setting Policy are the council will continue the existing approach to rent setting.

BACKGROUND

The amount of rent charged is worked out using a government formula that has been in place since 2001. This works out formula rents for each of our properties (a maximum rent is calculated for each individual property that is known as the 'formula rent'), and councils can increase rents in April each year by 1% plus the Consumer Price Index (CPI) figure at the end of the previous September.

What are the key aspects within the policy?

Since the rents could be increased again from April 2020 (rents reduced by 1% for each of the previous four years), councils have applied the 1% plus CPI increase (to support the long-term HRA Business Plan) albeit occasional exceptions are reported in the housing press.

If the September CPI figure is unusually high, the council can if it feels it is financially viable to do so (that includes taking into account of for example, financial resilience, commitment to the anti-poverty initiative, and affordability) make a decision about capping the CPI figure to a lower amount. The council can consider whether to apply this to all tenants rent charges, or whether to apply this cap to just the rents that have already reached formula rent. Any such capping of rents will be included as part of the annual Housing Revenue Account budget setting report.

The current government policy for the 1% plus CPI increase is a five-year policy with the final year being 2024/25 inclusive.

While a council could choose to not apply the 1% increase, could freeze rents, or even reduce rents, the Rent Setting Policy is equally about formally recording four key aspects, being the council:

- will continue to charge social rents so wont charge higher Affordable Rents
- will not charge a higher market rent to tenants with an annual household income of £60k+
- will continue to let new properties at the formula rent (social rent) that means when a property becomes empty, if the rent charged to the previous tenant hasn't yet reached formula rent (maximum rent), the new tenant will be charged formula rent, and
- will not seek 'rent flexibility' where the council could increase formula rent by 5% for general needs properties, and 10% for sheltered housing (the council has 241 sheltered housing properties).

BUSINESS CASE

The council is regularising the current process by having a 'Rent Setting Policy' that is approved by Executive. While this is a new policy, the policy confirms our approach to rent setting continues without any changes to our historical approach.

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

Other Financial Information

The Rent Setting Policy primarily relates to the Housing Revenue Account (2552 properties) rather than General Fund (18 properties). The financial implications in the Table above show a £0 impact, and this applies to both General Fund and Housing Revenue account properties.

The 'Rent Setting Policy' relates to the annual budget setting process for which rents are set in the context of affordability and financial resilience.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

Prior to Executive approval, the council will have consulted our involved tenant groups being the Communications Group, Neighbourhoods Group, Independent Living Group, and Tenant & Landlord Improvement Panel (TLIP).

The Rent Setting Policy will be part of the agenda for future meetings of the Affordable Housing Investment Group (AHIG).

The Rent Setting Policy will be included as part of the annual HRA budget setting papers that are approved by council each year. The HRA budget setting papers are presented to TLIP each year that in effect will provide an annual opportunity to provide comment and challenge regarding the Rent Setting Policy.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty has been taken and an equalities assessment 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*

There isn't a positive or negative impact of the decision being made on the Council's carbon neutral objective.

List of Background Papers

N/A

Contact Duncan Brown	Service Neighbourhoods and Communities
Telephone 07920 203442	Email duncan.brown@wokingham.gov.uk



Rent Setting Policy – 6 October 2021

Rent Setting Policy

1. Introduction

Rent is the main source of revenue for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), paying for the management, maintenance, and modernisation of our existing homes. It is also the primary source of funds for repaying the loans that enabled councils to leave the centralised subsidy system, and for the HRA to build or acquire new council properties.

From April 2020, the [‘Rent Standard’](#) was introduced. This required councils to set rents from 1 April 2020 in accordance with the Government’s [Policy Statement on Rents for Social Housing](#).

The Rent Standard (subject to some exceptions) does not change the way rents are calculated. The reason for this policy is from April 2020, the Rent Standard now applies to councils with the standard being regulated by ‘The Regulator of Social Housing’.

While this policy primarily relates to the council owned HRA homes, this policy also applies to the small number of council owned homes that are part of the General Fund, such as our hostels. The reason for this is the Rent Standard applies (subject to some exceptions) to ‘low-cost rental’ accommodation as defined by section 69 of the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008.

Accommodation is low-cost rental accommodation if:

(a) it is made available for rent, (b) the rent is below the market rate, and (c) the accommodation is made available in accordance with rules designed to ensure that it is made available to people whose needs are not adequately served by the commercial housing market.

The Council’s 30-year business plan is being reviewed and updated. The [Housing Revenue Account Budget 2021/22](#) had already taken account of this policy. The future years Housing Revenue Account Budget that goes to full council for approval will continue to take account of this policy.

This policy will be approved by the [Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel](#), The Executive, and will be part of the agenda items for the Affordable Housing Implementation Group (AHIG) chaired by the Lead Member for Housing.

Consultation - prior to the first approval of this new policy by the Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel (TLIP), the policy will have been presented for consultation to our involved tenant subgroups being the Independent Living Group, Neighbourhoods Group and Communications Group.

This Rent Setting Policy will be reviewed each year and be included as part of the annual Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget report to full council. As the HRA budget report is presented to the Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel, this will ensure there is the opportunity for our involved tenants to provide scrutiny and challenge each year regarding the Rent Setting Policy.

The Assistant Director, Neighbourhoods and Communities is ultimately responsible for ensuring compliance for this policy document. This includes ensuring the council's Finance and Housing Teams set and maintain records of our rents, and that compliance is monitored including ensuring this work is part of testing for the annual internal audit programme.

This policy was adopted by the Executive on TBC 2021.

2. Purpose of this policy

This policy explains how the council will calculate and charge rent for all the residential properties in its Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and its General Fund low-cost rental accommodation, and the factors involved with this decision.

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Ensure that the council adheres to government legislation and regulation when setting rents.
- Provide a clear and consistent framework for setting and reviewing the rents of all properties accounted for in the HRA and General Fund low-cost rental accommodation.
- Provide as much financial certainty for the HRA as possible.
- Maximise the income available to maintain our existing housing stock and to construct or acquire new homes.
- Support the delivery of the HRA Business Plan.
- While financial certainty is required such as to maintain the existing homes for our tenants, the policy includes the ability for the council to cap rents such as if the September CPI figure is unusually high meaning the full CPI increase gets capped.
- Ensure there is a rent setting policy in place approved by Executive and the council has the appropriate governance and assurance mechanisms in place.

3. Scope

This policy applies to all properties and assets that are accounted for in the HRA and General Fund low-cost rental accommodation, including:

- Rented residential accommodation
- Service charges for HRA and General Fund low-cost rental accommodation.

It does not cover:

- Ground rents and service charges for leasehold residential accommodation (HRA properties originally purchased through the Right to Buy)

- Shared Ownership accommodation (the council has 81 shared ownership properties) that is exempt from the Rent Standard
- Pitches we rent at Grovelands Park, Carters Hill Park and Twyford Orchards where the pitch holders provide their own mobile home
- Garages owned by both the HRA and General Fund
- Seven guest rooms within our HRA sheltered housing schemes
- The Local Housing Company properties being Loddon Homes Limited and Berry Brook Homes
- Properties we lease from Private Landlords and let to people supported by Adult Social Services
- Shops and commercial premises.

4. Rent policy background

Since 2001, rents for properties let at Social Rent (being all of the rented homes in the HRA at 31 March 2020) have been based on a formula set by the government.

This creates a 'Formula Rent' for each property that is exclusive of any service charges, which takes account of factors such as the relative value of the property at January 1999, relative local income levels, and the size of the property. A principal aim of this formula-based approach is to ensure that similar rents are charged for similar properties. The operational detail for these calculations can be found in Appendix. B (page 24) at the [link here](#).

For all newly built or newly acquired dwellings, the council will obtain a January 1999 valuation through a desktop review. If comparable rents are not readily available, the council will commission a valuation that will be completed as per the requirements stated in the 'Policy statement on rents for social housing'. All existing January 1999 valuations are loaded to our rent accounting computer system.

Formula Rent is subject to a rent cap based on the number of bedrooms in a property. If Formula Rent would be higher than the rent cap for a particular property, the rent cap is used instead. The rent cap is expected to increase by CPI + 1.5% each year.

In 2011, the government introduced Affordable Rent, which permits rents to be set at up to 80% of market rent (inclusive of service charges). The introduction of Affordable Rent was intended to fund the construction of more new homes at a sub-market rent. Landlords can only let new properties at Affordable Rent where certain conditions apply (that would require a supply delivery agreement between the council and Homes England). Existing vacant properties may be converted from Formula Rent to Affordable Rent in certain circumstances.

From April 2015, the government made it possible for social landlords to charge a full market rent where a social tenant household has an annual income of at least £60,000.

Government policy has limited maximum annual changes to Formula Rent and Affordable Rent levels.

From April 2016, the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016 required social landlords to reduce rents by 1% each year for four years, which had a significant negative impact on HRA Business Planning.

In October 2017, the government announced its intention to set a rent policy for local authority landlords and housing associations that permits annual increases of Formula Rents of up to CPI + 1%, starting from 1 April 2020, for a period of at least five years.

It did not override landlords' statutory obligation to complete the four-year rent reduction required by the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016.

The new policy from April 2020 recognised the need for a stable financial environment to support the delivery of new homes. It provides a degree of reassurance for financial planning in the short term. The increases from 1 April 2020 of 1% plus CPI (at September of the previous year) is a ceiling and councils could apply a lower increase or freeze or lower rents if they wished to do so.

If the September CPI figure is unusually high, the council can if it feels it is financially viable to do so, make a decision about capping the CPI figure to a lower amount. Any such capping of rents will be included as part of the annual Housing Revenue Account budget setting report.

To control this new settlement, rather than legislate, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government required the Regulator of Social Housing to prepare a new Rent Standard to apply from 2020 to all Registered Providers of social housing, including councils.

From 1 April 2020, Registered Providers must comply in full with all the requirements and expectations set out in the Rent Standard. They must also comply with the Rent Policy Statement on Rents for Social Housing 2019 on the setting, increase and decrease of rents and service charges.

5. Legislation and Guidance

- Housing Act 1985 Section 24
- Landlord and Tenant Act 1985
- Local Government and Housing Act 1989
- Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 (a) Section 197
- Guidance on rents for social housing - Department for Communities and Local Government, May 2014
- Rent Standard Guidance - Homes and Communities Agency, April 2015
- Social Housing Rents (Exceptions and Miscellaneous Provisions) Regulations 2016
- Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016
- Direction on the Rent Standard 2019
- Policy Statement on Rents for Social Housing issued by the Secretary of State on 26 February 2019
- Rent Standard 2020 - Regulator of Social Housing, 1 April 2020

6. Relevant council documents

- [The Housing Revenue Account Budget 2021/22.](#)

7. The Policy

The council sets rents for its residential accommodation in the HRA and General Fund low-cost rental accommodation in accordance with the Policy Statement on Rents for Social Housing issued by the Secretary of State on 26 February 2019 and the Rent Standard 2020 issued by the Regulator of Social Housing, on 1 April 2020 and any subsequent amendments in legislation regulation or guidance.

The key points of this policy are:

- a. All properties let under existing tenancies continue to have rent calculated using Formula Rent and maximum rent amounts charged will be a Formula Rent. Where property rental amounts have not yet reached their Formula Rent amount, the 1% increase plus CPI (from the previous September) will continue to be applied until and including 2024/25. Therefore, where a tenant's rent is below formula rent, the council (that is a requirement of the Rent Standard) will continue with annual increases of up to 1% plus CPI (from the previous September).
- b. All existing supported housing, including sheltered housing and other accommodation designated for older people, that becomes vacant and available for re-let will be let at Formula Rent. Our computer system will have formula rent already calculated and loaded for each property, so when a property becomes void, the formula rent is already known and will be re-let at the formula rent. Each year, new formula rents will be loaded to the computer system for the next rent charging year.
- c. The council will not convert existing general needs properties from Formula Rent to Affordable Rent.
- d. This council can after consulting with tenants, set rents at up to 5% above Formula Rent for general needs properties and up to 10% above Formula Rent for supported housing (the council has 241 sheltered housing units that for the purpose of the Rent Standard, are categorised as supported housing). This is known as 'rent flexibility'. The council will not apply 'rent flexibility'.
- e. All other existing general needs dwellings (that are part of the HRA) and general fund accommodation that becomes vacant and available for re-let, and all newly built or acquired general needs dwellings will be let at Formula Rent. The exception is where an existing social tenant completes a mutual exchange.
- f. Formula Rents will continue to increase by CPI + 1% each year from 2020/21 for a period of five years up to and including 2024/25. If the September CPI figure is unusually high, the council can if it feels it is financially viable to do so, (that includes taking into account of for example, financial resilience, commitment to the anti-poverty initiative, and affordability) make a decision about capping the CPI figure to a lower amount. The council can consider whether to apply this to all tenants rent charges, or whether to apply this cap to just the rents that have already reached formula rent, or in another way that has taken account of for

example, financial resilience, commitment to the anti-poverty initiative, and affordability. Any such capping of rents will be included as part of the annual Housing Revenue Account budget setting report.

g. The council will not charge higher rents for social tenants with a household income of above £60,000. The council does not have access to information relating to the income of its secure tenants, who have tenancies for their lifetimes rather than a fixed term and cannot insist that this is provided. No cost-efficient or effective system currently exists for councils to ascertain the true household income of existing tenants.

h. Service charges are separate to rent, and examples are grounds maintenance and block lighting for communal areas. The council has already unpooled service charges, so tenants pay a contribution to the actual costs for their home/block rather than all costs for the whole borough being pooled and divided between all tenants.

The *Policy statement on rents for social housing* encourages the council to keep service charge increases to within CPI + 1%. The council reviews the actual costs being paid and will only recover the actual costs of the services. Service charges will be based, when reasonably possible, on actual expenditure for the preceding financial year. This means that at each annual review, the service charges are set at a 'fixed' amount rather than being 'variable'.

Where new or extended services are introduced, and an additional charge may need to be made, the council will consult with tenants who would benefit from the proposed new service.

8. Rent variation: timing, roles, responsibilities, and authority

The yearly change to rental and service charges are part of the annual HRA Budget Setting process, which is a decision for full council.

The Assistant Director, Neighbourhoods and Communities, has delegated authority to agree all Formula Rents that have to be calculated or changed during the financial year outside the annual budget-setting timetable in accordance with this policy.

9. Monitoring, Review and Evaluation

This Rent Setting Policy will be reviewed each year and be included as part of the annual Housing Revenue Account Budget report to full council. It will be modified as necessary such as to accord with any future council policy change, new legislation, regulation or changes to the legislative and regulatory framework or significant change to the benefits system.

10. Equality and Diversity

We are committed to ensure that this policy does not impact disproportionately on different equality groups. This strategy has been subject to an Equalities Impact Assessment.

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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:	21 May 2021
Service:	Neighbourhoods and Communities
Project, policy, or service EQIA relates to:	Rent Setting Policy
Completed by:	Duncan Brown
Has the EQIA been discussed at services team meeting:	Yes
Signed off by:	Simon Price, Assistant Director Neighbourhoods and Communities
Sign off date:	7 October 2021

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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?
A 'Rent Setting Policy' is a requirement of the 'Rent Standard – April 2020' with this being regulated by the 'Regulator of Social Housing'.

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 etc.) have/will be consulted and informed about the project or changes:

This Rent Setting Policy will be approved by Executive and included as part of each years Housing Revenue Account budget setting process.

The Assistant Director for Neighbourhoods and Communities, Assistant Director Finance, and Lead Member for Housing are all aware a Rent Setting Policy is being produced.

Outline who are the main beneficiaries of the Project, policy change or service change?

The main beneficiaries are our tenants living in our Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and General Fund accommodation.

Outline any associated aims attached to the project, policy change or service change:

The aim is to have a clear policy that meets the requirements of the Rent Standard.

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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.

Protected characteristics	Impact score	Please detail what impact will be felt by the protected group:
Race:	No	
Gender:	No	
Disabilities:	No	
Age:	No	
Sexual orientation:	No	
Religion/belief:	No	
Gender re-assignment:	No	
Pregnancy and Maternity:	No	
Marriage and civil partnership:	No	

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Note: *the reason for ‘No’ being answered above, is the policy ensures properties have a formula rent for which there is a government formula to calculate this. The aim is to ensure similar properties have similar rents, that ensures rents are fair regardless of protected characteristics. The policy has the option to introduce rent*

flexibility (such as increasing rents by up to 10% above formula rent) for our supported housing (sheltered housing), and to increase rents for high income households. The policy is not taking up either of these options, but if this had been the case, a negative impact could have occurred.

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:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S Price', written over a horizontal line.

Signature:

Simon Price, Assistant Director Neighbourhoods and Communities

TITLE	Therapy Services for Children and Young People
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 25 November 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)

This report:

1. Seeks approval to proceed with the joint procurement of an Integrated Children's Therapy Service for Wokingham in partnership with West Berkshire and Reading Local Authorities.
2. Outlines the internal governance and oversight of the procurement process and subsequent contract monitoring.
3. Proposes delegated authority for contract award, as described within the recommendations below

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive is asked to agree:

- 1) to undertake a joint procurement exercise for an Integrated Children's Therapy Service for Wokingham with West Berkshire and Reading local authorities;
- 2) that the three local authorities jointly procure as a single lot resulting in a single contract signed by the supplier and the three local authorities;
- 3) to delegate authority to the Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the Lead Member for Children's Services, to award the contract to the successful bidder following completion of the evaluation process. The estimated WBC budget is £389,520 per annum.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The SEND Code of practice explains the duties of local authorities, health bodies, schools and colleges to provide for those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) under part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014.

The Council commissions Occupational Therapy, Speech and Language Therapy and Physiotherapy for Children and Young People with an Education Care and Health Plan (EHCP) where therapy has been identified in the Education section of the plan (Section F).

The Council has been exploring the opportunity to work collaboratively with Brighter Futures for Children, Reading and West Berkshire Council to explore a joint commissioning approach for future provision of these services for their local populations. This strategic approach to planning and procuring services in joined up way, is a means for Local Authority partners to deliver value for money, positive outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

Following formal exploration of this collaborative opportunity, Officers are requesting approval to proceed with the joint procurement of integrated speech and language therapy, physiotherapy, and occupational therapy services which fall under the commissioning responsibility of the local authority, with West Berkshire and Reading. This would be with a view to advertising a contract opportunity in February 2022, with a contract commencement date 1st September 2022. These are specialist professional services that cannot be delivered within existing Local Authority structures.

A single contract will be awarded through competitive tendering (open procedure- anyone may submit a full tender). This approach is likely to achieve value for money due to the competitive element. Commissioners will engage with the market and with local stakeholders in advance and use supplier and stakeholder knowledge and feedback to develop the service specification.

The procurement process will be led by Wokingham Borough Council. The single contract will be signed and administered by a Lead Authority on behalf of the partners.

The current WBC budget contribution is £389,520 per annum. Over a five-year period, this would equate to £1,947,600 and over an eight-year period would equate to £3,116,160. The total current budget contributions of all three authorities equate to £1,061,710 per annum. This would equate to £5,308,550 over a five -year period and £8,493,680 over an eight-year term.

The Executive is asked to agree to this request.

BACKGROUND

The SEND Code of practice explains the duties of local authorities, health bodies, schools and colleges to provide for those with special educational needs under part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014.

One of the statutory duties of the Local Authorities for children is the provision of therapy services to children where this is identified in the Education section of an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP)

Provision of Therapy Services is a key component of Wokingham's Special educational, health and social care local offer for children and young people in the Borough with SEN and/or disabilities.

The Council commissions a Children and Young People's Integrated Therapy Service (Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy and Speech and Language Therapy) for children and young people in Wokingham where therapy provision identified in the educational provision section of their Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

The CYPIT service consists of Speech and Language Therapists, Occupational Therapists and Physiotherapists working alongside assistant therapy staff. The CYPIT service is provided by Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust (BHFT)

CYPIT is delivered across mainstream schools, resource bases, special schools and academies across the Borough.

West Berkshire Council and Reading Borough Council also commission BHFT to deliver CYPIT services for their local populations under separate agreements.

BUSINESS CASE Please see Business Case attached as Appendix A.

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)	WBC annual budget £389,520 Combined annual budget across Berkshire West £1,061,710	TBC: This answer to this question will be determined via service model/service specification development	High Needs Block (WBC)
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£389,520		High Needs Block (WBC)

	Combined annual budget across Berkshire West £1,061,710		
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£389,520 Combined annual budget across Berkshire West £1,061,710		High Needs Block (WBC)
Following Financial Year (Year 4)	£389,520 Combined annual budget across Berkshire West £1,061,710		High Needs Block (WBC)
Following Financial Year (Year 4)	£389,520 Combined annual budget across Berkshire West £1,061,710		High Needs Block (WBC)
Following Financial Year (Year 5)	£389,520 Combined annual budget across Berkshire West £1,061,710		High Needs Block (WBC)
Following Financial Year (Year 6)	£389,520 Combined annual budget across Berkshire West £1,061,710		High Needs Block (WBC)
Following Financial Year (Year 7)	£389,520 Combined annual budget across Berkshire West £1,061,710		High Needs Block (WBC)

Following Financial Year (Year 7)	£389,520 Combined annual budget across Berkshire West £1,061,710		High Needs Block (WBC)

Other Financial Information

A commercial model for this procurement is being developed. The financial information above is based on current budgets and potential changes in budgets may arise due to e.g. inflation and/or changes in need over the lifespan of the contract.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

Consultations with Stakeholders and service users will be conducted as part of this procurement. This will include a survey questionnaire for children and young people, parents, carers and guardians and stakeholders across Berkshire West.

Public Sector Equality Duty

An Equality Impact Assessment will be completed on the new service model once it has been developed and after consultation with key partners. No detrimental impacts are anticipated.

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*

Officers will refer to the Council's climate change emergency strategy and action plan in the specification documents under the section of relevant policies, so providers are aware of the strategy and can outline how they may contribute

List of Background Papers

Appendix A included (Business Case)

Contact Kim Wilkins	Service People Commissioning
Telephone	Email kim.wilkins@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 or Level 2:

Type of Procurement	Level 1		Level 2	
	Assistant Director & Director	“Yes”	Assistant Director, Director & Executive Approval	“Yes”
Goods and Services	£50k – £500k		> £500k	
Schedule 3 Services	£50k – £615k		> £615k	Yes
Works	£50k – £4,551k		> £4,551k	

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.

2. Project Information

Project / Contract Title	Children and Young People’s Integrated Therapies
Project / Contract Description	<p>Provision of Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy and Speech and Language Therapy for children and young people in Wokingham where therapy provision identified in the educational provision section of their Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)</p> <p>This service will be jointly commissioned with Brighter Futures for Children Reading and West Berkshire and the procurement process will be project managed by Wokingham Borough Council.</p>
Expected Start Date & Duration (months)	<p>Start date: 01/09/2022</p> <p>Initial term of 60 months (5 years) with options to extend by a further 3 years to a total of 8 years.</p>
Any Extension/s Allowed (months) (e.g.: 1 x 24m / 1 x 12m + 1 x 12m)	It is anticipated that the contract will have options to extend beyond the initial term of 5 years for a further 3 years. This is likely to be on a 12 month or 24 month/12 month combination with a final decision to be taken jointly by all Authorities at a later stage.
Total Ascertainable Value	WBC contribution is £389,520 per annum. Over a five-year period, this would equate to £1,947,600 and over an eight-year period would equate to £3,116,160.

	The total value of the contract including contributions of all three authorities would equate to £1,061,710 per annum, £5,308,550 over a five -year period, £8,493,680 over the eight-year term.
Procurement Procedure (Open, Restricted, other agreed procedure)	The procurement will be by way of open competitive tender. Advised to use OPEN Procedure (regulation 27)
If not an Open or Restricted procedure, has it been approved by Procurement? (state "Yes", "No" or "Not Applicable")	Not applicable
Budget Available (please state the value)	WBC budget contribution £389,520 per annum TBC (see total ascertainable value)
Source of Funding (revenue or capital or specified other)	High Needs Block Funding
Any specific comments or notes associated with the budget	High needs funding is provided to local authorities through the high needs block (HNB) of the dedicated schools grant (DSG). The high needs funding system supports provision for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) from their early years to age 25. Analysis of data and forecasted need, stakeholder engagement feedback and a review of models of good/best practice will inform the options for development of a new local model and service specification.

3. Project Justification

Link to Service or Corporate Objectives:

The SEND Code of practice explains the duties of local authorities, health bodies, schools, and colleges to provide for those with special educational needs under part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014.

Provision of Therapy Services is a key component of Wokingham's Special educational, health and social care local offer for children and young people in the Borough with SEN and/or disabilities.

The service aligns with the strategic objectives set out in the Corporate Delivery Plan: safe, strong, communities and enriching lives.

The Council currently commissions Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust to deliver a Children and Young People's Integrated Therapy Service (CYPIT) (Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy and Speech and Language Therapy) for children and young people in Wokingham where therapy provision has been identified in the educational provision section of their Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)

West Berkshire Council and Brighter Futures for Children, Reading also commission BHFT to deliver CYPIT services for their local populations under separate agreements.

The current contract for the commissioned children and young people's integrated therapy (CYPIT) service is due to expire at the end of March 2022.

The Council has been exploring the opportunity to work collaboratively with Brighter Futures for Children, Reading and West Berkshire Council to explore a joint commissioning approach for future provision of these services for their local populations.

Following formal exploration of the joint commissioning opportunity, Officers propose approval of the joint procurement of integrated speech and language therapy, physiotherapy, and occupational therapy services with West Berkshire and Brighter Futures for Children, with a view to advertising a contract opportunity in February 2022 with a contract commencement date 1st September 2022. Officers will seek to secure LA level formal approvals on current arrangements for the period 1 April 2022 to 31 August 2022.

Services to be commissioned include paediatric speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, and physiotherapy which fall under the commissioning responsibility of the local authority.

A joint commissioning approach is in line with the principles of optimising joint working as agreed by the Berkshire West Integrated Care Partnership (ICP). Jointly commissioning services across Berkshire West presents an ideal opportunity to ensure a whole systems approach with our partners and to provide an improved service across the footprint for the local Wokingham population.

Joint commissioning has the potential to confer a range of benefits, including but not limited to:

- Opportunity to promote a joint strategic approach to planning and delivering children's therapy services in a holistic, joined-up way.
- A means by which local partners can collaborate and share responsibility for delivery of outcomes for children and young people with therapy needs included in EHCPs.
- Alignment of partner resources to effect greater purchasing power in the market.
- Opportunity to improve quality of service and outcomes via development of a robust and standardised service specification, which includes clear quality performance and outcome metrics.
- Improved information sharing between partners on the volumes, spend and performance of therapy services commissioned for children and young people and opportunity for local benchmarking.
- Development of local strategic relationships and partnership building.

It is proposed that one contract will be awarded, and each Authority will have the option for specific local requirements to be added based on local need. Local service design and delivery will be Wokingham specific, catering for the needs of Wokingham children and families. Each Local Authority will contribute funding to cover their costs of the contract.

A single contract will secure combined purchasing power and a higher chance of achieving value for money. This contracting approach also provides an opportunity to improve information sharing and local benchmarking on performance of therapy services between partners based on standardised SLA and KPIs and to consider efficiencies, for example, consideration of management costs and overheads. Providers will also have the opportunity to offer lower costs due to potential economies of scale (lower contract administration cost, more efficient use of human resources etc.).

Measurable local outcomes and KPIs will form part of the single contract so that each Local Authority can objectively assess the impact and effectiveness of the service. The joint procurement and will be managed by Wokingham Borough Council. The contract will be managed by a lead Authority on behalf of the three Authorities. This has been explored further

via the Berkshire West Therapies Commissioning Group and it is proposed that the lead for overarching contract management following contract award also sits with Wokingham Borough Council.

Project Specific Objectives, Appraisal of Options and Project Timetable:

The overall joint procurement strategy, will be based on the following: The three Local authorities will jointly procure as a single lot resulting in a single contract signed by the supplier and the three Las

- The outcome of the procurement will be a single contract with the same provider.
- The Service Specification will contain one core part, and each Authority will have the option for specific local requirements to added based on local need.
- Each Authority will have the ability to set their own local Key Performance Indicators as part of the contract with the provider. The provider will be held to account by the Local Authorities at quarterly contract and performance review meetings with local commissioners.
- It is recommended that the initial contract term is for 5 years. The term of the Contract may be extended by 3 periods of up to 3 years; each period subject to satisfactory performance, funding availability and mutual agreement between the parties.
- Each Authority will have the opportunity to decide whether to extend the contract after the expiry of the initial term or to terminate it. The relationship between the three Authorities and the consequences of any of the Authorities terminating the contract will be regulated by a Memorandum of Understanding.
- The contract will be managed by a lead Authority on behalf of the three Authorities although all will be signed off by each UA.
- It is intended that an Inter Authority Agreement/MOU will set out the basis on which the Lead Authority will manage the Service Contract on behalf of the UAs and each Partners respective obligations.

Options Appraisal:

The recommendation to proceed with a joint competitive procurement of an Integrated Children’s Therapy Service for Wokingham with West Berkshire and Brighter Futures for Reading has been made following an options appraisal of the available approaches to procurement and contracting. The options appraisal was undertaken by the Berkshire West Joint Therapies Commissioning Group.

The following options and the benefits and risks of each option have been considered:

Option 1: One contract awarded with local variations - the contract will be signed and administered by a Leading Authority on behalf of the partners	
<p>Benefits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In line with the principles of optimising joint working, as supported by the Berkshire West Integrated Commissioning Group (ICP) • Combined purchasing power and higher chances of achieving value for money due to the competitive element. • Resource efficiencies gained from commissioning and procurement undertaken jointly. 	<p>Risks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tight procurement timeline. • Risk of delay due to issues with the alignment to other areas, key dates, and decision-making processes. • Risk of unsuccessful procurement if no tenders are received and if suppliers don't see the new opportunity as viable. • Risk that a jointly commissioned service will lose local focus.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity for providers to offer lower cost due to potential economies of scale (lower contract administration cost, more efficient use of human resources etc.). • All three local authorities will have the same provider which presents an ideal opportunity to provide an improved service across the footprint for local populations and to promote alignment across the wider system • Improved resilience within the service, for example in dealing with staff sickness/absences and fluctuations in service needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to agree arrangements for provider payments and managing performance post contract award. <p>Mitigations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The procurement is being led and co-ordinated by Wokingham Borough Council and project management capacity has been built into the process. • Wokingham Borough Council will project manage the joint procurement and will be responsible for coordinating all activities in a timely manner, to finalise all tender documents February 2022. • If no tenders are received, we can legally approach any organisation and negotiate. • Each area will have local control and the contract performance for Wokingham will be monitored on a local basis by the WBC commissioner. • Local focus will be retained by having Wokingham specific key performance indicators which will be monitored quarterly. • An MOU will be developed to confirm the responsibility of the Leading Authority and the other Local Authorities post contract award.
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Option 2 – Joint procurement divided into three lots resulting in three individual contracts awarded

<p>Benefits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wokingham has complete control over the service model and procurement timescales. • Each LA will end up with their own contract as a result of a single procurement process (as opposed to three separate procurement procedures managed by each LA). • No contract management complications as each LA will be managing their own contract. 	<p>Risks: (which can be mitigated through Option 1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less likely to achieve value for money as providers will need to tender for three contracts and may not be able to generate efficiencies when delivering the service. • Likely service duplications due to the service split into three lots/contracts which may result in higher cost. • With the national shortage of therapy staff providers may be not attracted to smaller/lower value contracts. • In terms of managing the performance of the service, we will be in a weaker position to bargain and influence service developments and challenges as a single local authority. • It is possible that Wokingham would have a different provider to Reading and West Berkshire which could negatively impact on integrated pathways for our local children and young people and their families • Reduced resilience within our service.
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Option 3- Wokingham UA level procurement	
<p>Benefits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wokingham has complete control over the service model and procurement timescales. • Wokingham will end up with its own contract as a result of a single procurement process. • No contract management complications as Wokingham will manage their own contract. 	<p>Risks (which can be mitigated through Option 1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less likely to achieve value for money as providers will need to tender for separate contracts (potentially with varying procurement timescales and contract lengths) and may not be able to generate efficiencies when delivering the service. • Potential for service duplications which may result in higher costs. • With the national shortage of therapy staff providers may be not attracted to smaller/lower value contracts. • In terms of managing the performance of the service, we will be in a weaker position to bargain and influence service developments and challenges as a single local authority. • It is possible that Wokingham would have a different provider to Reading and West Berkshire which could negatively impact on integrated pathways for our local children and young people and their families • Reduced resilience within our service.

PROCUREMENT TIMETABLE

Market engagement	September – October 2021
Service scope and tender documents development	November 2021 – January 2022
Tender Advertising	February 2022
Tender evaluation	April 2022
Contract Award	May – June 2022
Contract mobilisation	July 2022 – September 2022
Contract start date	1 September 2022

Cost Benefit Analysis:

A competitive process will be run to ensure the most economically advantageous tender following a proportionate quality: price evaluation before awarding the contract so that the contract has the greatest opportunity for delivering towards outcomes and performing effectively.

Contract Management:

An integral aspect of the tender process will be to create measurable outcomes and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) so that the impact and requirement of the service can be objectively assessed in the future.

The service specification, which forms part of the contract, will contain locally agreed KPIs. KPIs can include staffing levels, partnership working, customer satisfaction and other indicators which

will ensure that Wokingham maintains high levels of safe service to our children and their families.

The contract will be monitored on a quarterly basis on a Berkshire West footprint. It is proposed that Wokingham Borough Council lead on overarching contract management following contract award.

Local oversight of the service performance will be undertaken by a senior representative from the Wokingham Strategy and Commissioning Team.

4. Approval

Level 1

<i>Position</i>	<i>Department / Directorate</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>
Head of Service			
Director			

Level 2

<i>Date of Executive meeting / approval</i>
Executive Approval

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TITLE	Farley Hill Primary School Organisation Changes
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 25 November 2021
WARD	Arborfield; Barkham; Finchampstead South; Swallowfield;
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Children's Services - Carol Cammiss
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Children's Services - Graham Howe

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

To modify proposals already agreed and partly enacted relating to Farley Hill Primary School to better serve the local community and release a valuable asset from education use for re-use or sale.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive:

- 1) approves formal consultation on the proposal that the proposals agreed by Executive on 30th January 2020 for the expansion of the Farley Hill Primary School in stages on two sites be replaced by a new proposal that Farley Hill Primary School expands to 420 places (plus a nursery) from September 2022, and that the former school site in Farley Hill Village be formally closed;
- 2) endorses proposed changes to 2022/23 School Admission arrangements to ensure that all children living in homes on or in immediate proximity to the Arborfield Garrison Strategic Development Location are within the Farley Hill Primary School Designated Area;
- 3) delegates authority to the Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the Executive Member for Children's Services, to determine the proposal.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On 30th January 2020 Executive approved consultation on a proposal to expand Farley Hill Primary school to 630 places and the occupation of a new school site in Arborfield Village (but retaining the Farley Hill Village site).

It is now proposed to amend this proposal to bring forward the expansion to Farley Hill Primary School to September 2022, to formally close the Farley Hill Village Primary School site and to limit agreed expansion to 420 places plus a nursery, at this point.

In parallel with this action under the School Organisation Regulations, the Council will seek to amend the 2022/23 Admissions Arrangements to include a number of homes that are within or are closely associated with the Arborfield Garrison SDL area (the garrison area) and to confirm the formal school site address for admissions purposes. The Council has no power to amend these arrangements directly but can seek the School Adjudicator's agreement to the change.

As previously agreed, the Farley Hill Primary School relocated to the new Arborfield Village primary school premises in September 2021. The school was oversubscribed, and the majority of children admitted in September are resident in the garrison area. The majority of the admitted children living in the garrison area live in the south of the garrison area. A significant number of children living in the north of the garrison area could not be admitted to the school, including children living around the new school site. Expansion to 60 places and confirmation of revised admissions arrangements would enable children living in the north to be admitted to the school and do as much as is in the Council's gift to ensure that children living in the south of the garrison area continue to be admitted.

The earlier decision enabled the future growth back into the old school site. However, analysis of applicant numbers indicates there are more than sufficient children living on the garrison area to fill an enlarged school (and there were insufficient children living in the rural area that the school serves to fill one class per year) so reopening the site would lead to children being driven out of the garrison to Farley Hill Village. This would be contrary to the interests of both garrison and Farley Hill Village residents. It is therefore proposed that this link is formally broken, so the Council can seek a long-term use for the current Farley Hill site.

It is noted that the Coombes CoE Primary School has a reduced admission number of 60 for the 2022/23 year (compared to 75 in earlier years). This reduction helps mitigate the risks of local oversupply of places associated with the proposed expansion of Farley Hill School. Given its location in a major development area, with the construction of new homes and new resident families expected by September 2022, it is possible that all local places will be required.

If the expansion and other changes are not agreed the likely consequences are:

- A very high risk of there being too few school places available in the South-West schools planning area as roll numbers rise as the development of the garrison continues and additional families move to the area.
- A risk of further damage to the relationship between the Council and the new Arborfield Green community and associated wider adverse publicity, because local residents with children have a reasonable expectation that built capacity will be available for use.
- The longer-term future of the former Farley Hill Primary School site in Farley Hill cannot be resolved.

These risks must be set against the risk of additional capacity in Farley Hill Primary School (a popular school) leading to damaging deficits in other local schools.

The proposal entails no additional spend from the Council's General Fund. It would though require financial support from the Dedicated Schools Grant Growth Fund and future expansion (beyond 420 places) would require agreement to additional capital spend. The Growth Fund is part of the Dedicated Schools Grant Schools Block. It is agreed by Schools Forum and its purpose is to enable the creation of new school places through school expansion and the opening of new schools.

The Director of Childrens Services, acting in consultation with the Executive Member for Childrens Services will consider all responses received, including from parents, local

schools and from the School's Forum concerning the use of the growth fund for this purpose.

BACKGROUND

As set out above the Council has partly enacted proposals agreed on 30th January 2020 regarding Farley Hill Primary School. It is now proposed that these arrangements be modified to bring forward expansion to 2022 and to release the Farley Hill village school site.

These changes are prescribed changes under the School Organisation (prescribed alterations to Maintained schools) (England) Regulation 2013, which can be determined by the Council, after the completion of a statutory consultation process. These are linked to proposals made under the School Admissions (Admission Arrangements and Co-ordination of Admission Arrangements) (England) Regulations 2012. These proposals relate to changes to the 2022/23 admissions arrangements, including increasing the determined admission number to 60 (for that year alone), confirming that measurements will be made from the current school site and that residents in a number of new homes associated with the garrison are included in the school's Designated Area. These changes cannot be agreed by the Council and can only be made by the School Adjudicator.

It is anticipated that alongside consultation on the new school organisation arrangements, the Council will take steps to withdraw the previously determined arrangements.

There are two key reasons for proposing these changes. These are that early expansion will meet local community needs and that releasing the former school site enables beneficial use to be made of a valuable asset.

When allocations to the Farley Hill Primary School were made in 2021, a number of local residents were concerned that many local children could not be admitted to the school, including children living around the new school site in the northern part of the SDL area. This was because (a) the original admission number of 30 was retained (because of concerns over the impact of early expansion of the Farley Hill Primary School on other local schools) and (b) measurements used to prioritise children in the admissions process were made from the original Farley Hill Village site (as this was the address at the point the 2021/22 admission arrangements for the school were determined) and this site is to the south of the garrison area.

Parental concern was expressed through both direct contact with the council and also through the media. If the school does not expand as proposed it is likely there will be further adverse publicity and a more organised campaign to ensure that all available places at the new school are offered. Alternative offers would be of schools in nearby communities that most parents will see as schools that are only accessible by car, whether or not they are by law within walking distance of their homes.

Analysis of allocations made by September 2021 showed that 90 children lived in homes with garrison area post codes, and 53 of these has first preference applications for the Farley Hill Primary School. If 2022 figures follow this pattern, it is likely that without an expansion of the number admitted, children from wither the north or the south of the garrison area would not be admitted to the school. This would undoubtedly expose the council to further public criticism.

Expanding the school will enable an increased number of children from the garrison area (from both the north and south areas) to be admitted. This might not mean that all

garrison children would be admitted, or even that all allocations would be to garrison resident children, but it would mean that the Council had done all it could to answer local needs.

Releasing the current school site means that the asset can be repurposed or sold and the Council does not carry the burden of maintaining and protecting the current premises in case of possible re-use. Legal advice has confirmed that the S106 agreement and the site hand over agreement (the new premises are on a site provided through a S106 agreement and much of the funding comes from the same source) do not preclude this action or create a financial risk to the council (risk of reclaim of S106 monies).

Agreeing the expansion as planned would require funding from the Dedicated Schools Grant Growth Fund. This budget is approved by the Schools Forum and their view on the use of the fund for this purpose (noting that other school places are likely to be available, if not necessarily places at schools within distances parents are normally prepared to walk) will need to be taken into account by the Director.

It is not proposed that the proposal should be brought back to the Council's Executive after the consultation exercise is complete. However, it may be necessary to amend the proposal, in the light of responses received or additional information becoming available between the determination of this report by Executive and the completion of the statutory consultation exercise by the Council (noting that "on time application" for September 2022 Reception places have to be made between 13/11/21 and 15/01/22). In this case it may be necessary to bring a new proposal to Executive to consider.

Appendix one shows the school sites in the context of the Arborfield Garrison and other local schools.

BUSINESS CASE

While the current School Roll Projections do not support immediate expansion, these are limited in that they are based on data from January 2021 and do not take account of the full possible impact of new home development. In particular the arrival, of new families in the development and younger children who have already arrived aging into the 2022/23 Reception admission cohort. Both are important because our new home survey data points to a significant number of younger children (including children in the early years cohorts) moving into new developments.

While there are two other schools within statutory walking distance (of most homes, at least) of the garrison, they are at a distance where national and local evidence points to most parents making the school trip by car, rather than walking. Relying on these schools to provide school places for the garrison would create additional school run traffic.

Given the current circumstances, the only identified option would be to retain the current admission number and to retain the former site for possible re-use. This is not recommended because this would not meet local needs and would entail the Council in further spend to maintain an inactive asset.

The risks are (a) that application numbers may fall back rather than increase and (b) of objections from key local stakeholders. Although both are real the risk of having insufficient local places is seen as outweighing the risk of over supply.

The timetable for school organisation changes would be:

Task Name	Start	Finish
Preparation of consultation documents	Mon 04/10/21	Fri 15/10/21
Pre notice consultation	Mon 18/10/21	Fri 12/11/21
<i>Exec Meeting</i>	<i>Thu 25/11/21</i>	<i>Thu 25/11/21</i>
Formal Notice	Thu 25/11/21	Wed 29/12/21
Decision	Thu 30/12/21	Wed 12/01/22
Statutory information	Thu 06/01/22	Wed 26/01/22

The timetable for school admissions changes would be.

Task Name	Start	Finish
Preparation of application case	Mon 04/10/21	Fri 15/10/21
Pre notice consultation & information	Mon 18/10/21	Fri 05/11/21
Application to the SA	Mon 08/11/21	Mon 08/11/21
<i>Admissions on line opens</i>	<i>Sat 13/11/21</i>	<i>Sat 13/11/21</i>
SA decision (8 weeks allowed, no formal time)	Mon 08/11/21	Fri 31/12/21
<i>Closing date for admissions</i>	<i>Sat 15/01/21</i>	<i>Sat 15/01/21</i>
<i>Offer day</i>	<i>Sat 16/04/22</i>	<i>Sat 16/04/22</i>

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)	£50K	Yes	From the DSG Growth Fund
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£50K	Yes	From the DSG Growth Fund

Other Financial Information

The DSG Growth Fund is an allocation made from the Schools Block each year to support new and growing schools. Approval of the total value of the Growth Fund is required annually through Schools Forum as part of Schools Block budget setting. Modelling undertaken to date indicates a significantly increased Growth Fund requirement for the 2022/23 financial year in comparison to that in recent years, and work is therefore ongoing with the Schools Block Task & Finish Group (a sub-group of Schools Forum) to review this prior to final approval being sought in January 2022.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation
Statutory process with a formal Notice in a local newspaper, on line information and involvement of local stakeholders

Public Sector Equality Duty
Equalities Impact Assessment to be completed

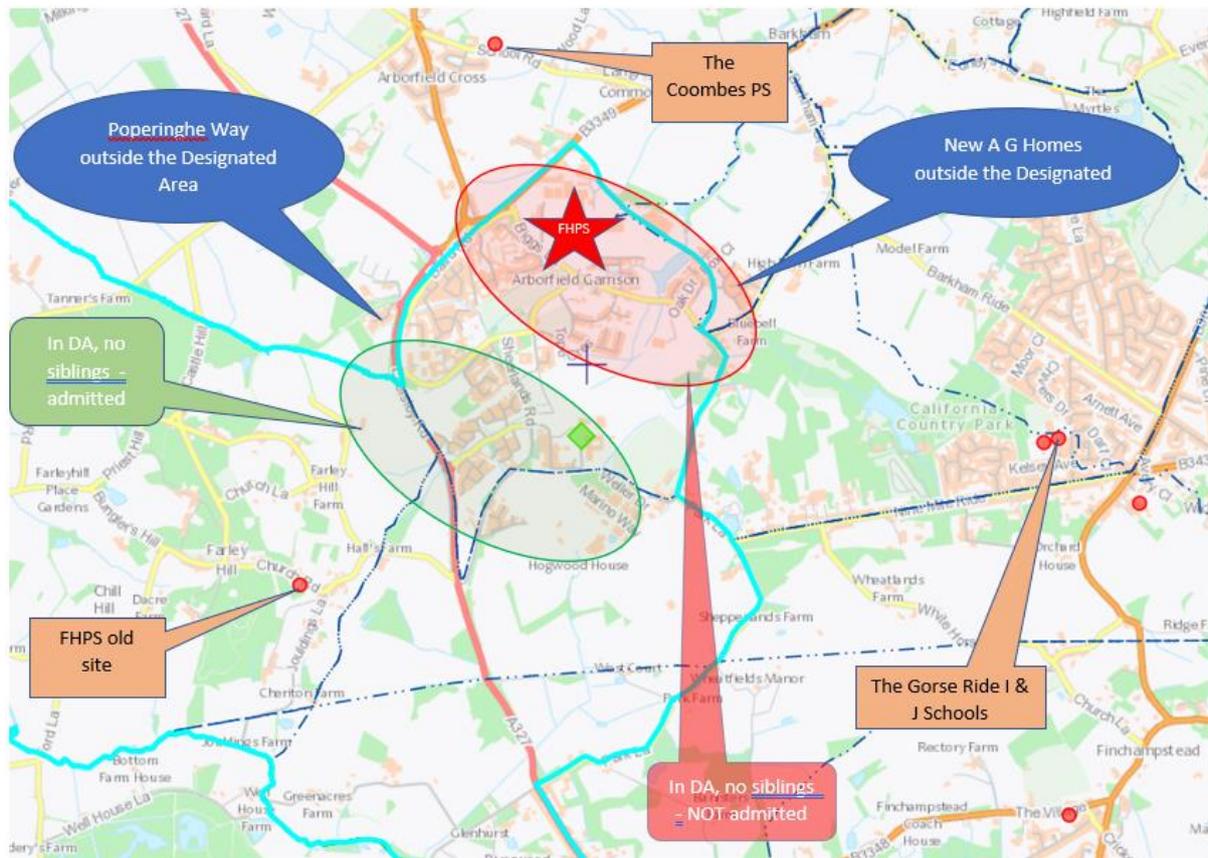
Climate Emergency – <i>This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030</i>
This would help by enabling additional children to walk to school.

List of Background Papers
None

Contact Piers Brunning	Service Learning Achievement and Partnerships
Telephone Tel: 0118 974 6084	Email piers.brunning@wokingham.gov.uk

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Appendix One: School sites and local context



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