

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF  
THE EXECUTIVE  
HELD ON 27 JANUARY 2022 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.10 PM**

**Committee Members Present**

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

**Other Councillors In Attendance**

Stephen Conway  
Gary Cowan  
Maria Gee  
Clive Jones

**83. APOLOGIES**

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillor Graham Howe.

**84. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Meeting held on 25 November 2021 and the Extraordinary Executive Meeting held on 15 December 2021 were confirmed as correct records and signed by the Leader of Council.

**85. DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

Councillors John Halsall and John Kaiser declared personal and prejudicial interests in Agenda Item 89 Optalis Contract Renewal 2022 as they were Non-Executive Directors of Optalis Holdings Ltd. Councillors Halsall and Kaiser left the Chamber during discussion of the item and did not take part in the vote.

Councillor Charles Margetts declared a personal and prejudicial interest in Agenda Item 89 Optalis Contract Renewal 2022 as he was a Non-Executive Director of Optalis Ltd. Councillor Margetts left the Chamber during discussion of the item and did not take part in the vote.

**86. STATEMENT BY THE LEADER OF COUNCIL**

The Leader of Council made the following statement:

I want to make it clear that all this administration, my party and I are completely opposed to the loss of every blade of grass, tree, shrub, field or greenspace in the Borough. Once it's gone it's gone forever. The verdict of the Borough's "enough is enough" consultation was also clear that the residents of the Borough agree with our stance. I have lived in the Borough for the best part of sixty years. I remember how the rural district of Wokingham was.

Nevertheless, we are not an independent island. We must follow Government mandates, which require us to make provision for a Government determined number of houses. All mainstream political parties have within their manifestos a commitment to build a huge number of houses; the current Government objectives are amongst the lowest of the three national parties.

We have the option to do nothing, which would mean that we have no plan and therefore no defence against speculative development. There is not a square inch of the Borough

which has not been optioned by a developer who would seek to exercise that option by claiming that we have no plan or five-year land supply. The developer would be successful in his application. I have no doubt that we would be faced with housing numbers several times those currently mandated. This is the option that Lib Dem South Oxfordshire took with the result, I understand, of many, many more houses and the original plan reimposed.

The current consultation for the Local Plan Update has now closed. There are at least two more opportunities for residents to make their views known. I have been very pleased to see a very good level of response. I was delighted to see many of my colleagues making strong representations for their wards. It was disappointing that other Councillors confined themselves to making futile political points about the housing numbers. As I have said all mainstream political parties within their manifestos have a commitment to build a huge number of houses, of which the current Government's objectives are amongst the lowest.

I have worked hard and successfully to ensure that our housing numbers were reduced from 1,635 to the current 789 and campaigned successfully, initially alone with the support of John Redwood and Theresa May, to oppose the planned changes to national planning policies. Notwithstanding the consultation, I will continue to press Government to make more changes and encourage our MPs, who are all critical of the housing numbers and planning policies, to join me in so doing. As the Council and Government are of the same party, there is leverage that can be applied. I have written to the Minister and have received an acknowledgement. I am awaiting a meeting date. I have been successful in the past and hope to be so in the future.

Last time we as an Executive met, the new Omicron variant was just known in Wokingham. It has then since dominated our thoughts. The rate of new Covid cases reached a high of just over 1,600 per 100,000 at the beginning of January. Covid led to many families having to change their plans over the festive period. The new year started with a welcome decline in rates although with schools returning and the high transmissibility of the Omicron variant in an unvaccinated (in primary settings), and therefore susceptible population, this decline has been short lived. Rates are now back on the rise and are currently just over 1,350 per 100,000. The current rate reflects the week 13-19 January. We expect this to rise further, as daily case numbers continue to increase. Like the situation at the end of the Autumn term, most cases are now within our school age population and their parents.

The past month has seen, and continues to see, a flurry of new and changed guidance for us to follow. This is sometimes hard to keep pace with. Officers are working relentlessly to translate new guidance for our residents, through the Community Champion newsletter, via our website and other channels, and supporting our partners and providers working with care settings and educational settings as they navigate the complexities of the new situations.

There was an urgent national Omicron appeal for the public to 'Get Boosted Now', leading up to the end of 2021 and we have been working tirelessly to support health partners on the delivery of the new vaccination programme across the Borough. 67% of residents over the age of 12 have now received their booster vaccine and we continue to work with our healthcare colleagues to ensure that the vaccine offer reaches all our residents across the Borough.

With this backdrop of rising rates and pressure on services the Government's Plan B is being lifted from today. Whilst this removes the mandate to work from home and wear masks indoors, we continue to encourage residents to take precautions where there is the

risk of Covid transmission. We call upon all our residents and partners to be as patient as they can as services are operating under significant staffing pressure.

With one eye on the Spring, there will continue to be much change over the coming weeks whilst case rates remain high and rising; we must remain cautious and continue to employ all measures we can to keep our communities as safe as possible and reduce transmission as much as we can. And lastly on that topic, please continue to encourage everyone to be vaccinated with the three jabs.

On a happier note, for the last six months an organisation called Climate Emergency has been undertaking a benchmarking exercise of all Local Authority Climate Emergency Action Plans, scored against 200 criteria. The results were announced today, and I am very pleased to say that Wokingham ranked 8 out of 183 single tier authorities across the United Kingdom and I offer my congratulations to Gregor Murray, the Executive Member, who has pushed this forward.

We are approaching that time in the year when we present our medium-term budget proposals to full Council. We do this acutely aware of our objectives and responsibilities to the most vulnerable in our community. Last week we agreed to a Council Tax Reduction scheme approving over £4m worth of support to those facing financial hardship. This support sits amongst a whole range of measures we provide to those in need of financial assistance. John Kaiser will expand on this later in the meeting. We are also making great strides in the provision of affordable and social housing in the Borough, much needed particularly amongst our younger adults. The Gorse Ride project being considered at Executive next month is a testament to that.

Although we will continue to do what we can for our vulnerable, we must do this within our overall financial context of the Council. The Chief Finance Officer's statutory draft report sets this out clearly and alerts us to unprecedented times in terms of financial risk and uncertainty. We have the impact of rising inflation, particularly alarming in the procurement of gas and electricity with potential increases of over 80%. We have the ongoing implementation of the Adult Social Care reform for which we have calculated the full impact to be well over £20m to the Council. We have the uncertainty of the Local Government funding system to determine our future Government funding. This takes place under a national levelling up agenda, so it is unlikely to go well for Wokingham. In addition to which we have a host of other financial pressures yet to reveal themselves, such as the true cost of Covid-19 and the outcome of the consultation on the Minimum Revenue Provision, which could increase the cost of debt falling on our General Fund.

So, to quote Donald Rumsfeld '...as we know, there are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know.' I would be inclined to go further than this and suggest our financial future also includes a degree of unknown unknowns, that is to say there are things we will not yet have been aware of.

It is in this context we must formulate our budget proposals and move forward with great caution through the following years. We passionately believe in helping those most in need in our community but can only do this by maintaining our strong financial resilience in the most precarious of circumstances. As my good friend and colleague, John Kaiser, often says "a council which is broke is no good to anyone".

## **87. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions submitted.

## **88. MEMBER QUESTION TIME**

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

### **88.1 Gary Cowan asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question:**

#### **Question**

Approximately 8 months ago, supported by a big fanfare of publicity, Councillor Smith announced a Carbon capture plan, thanks to a £300,000 contribution from the Woodland Trust and an injection of £350,000 of Council capital borrowing.

The plan requires 250Ha of green space and Phase 1 was to set up a project team including a paid manager, develop a tree strategy, work with landowners, Parish and Town Councils.

Since the scheme's inception in which there seems to be no plan for replacement trees that die, no real update on progress in any of the plans initial intention yet at the same time the Council's own Planning Department continues to recommend the removal of TPO trees to facilitate development.

My question is simply how many of the 250,000 trees have been planted or agreements made to plant to date?

#### **Answer**

As you are aware, through updates provided at the Trees and Biodiversity Task and Finish Group of which you are a member, a project manager to lead the delivery of the 250,000 tree planting project and Tree Strategy, was recruited in September last year and in the four months since they arrived they have been working to deliver Phase 1 of the business plan. A project of this scale requires significant amount of preliminary feasibility and preparation work, involving stakeholder engagement, land negotiations, consultation, and design work, all before delivery can take place. In the last four months Officers have been focussed upon engaging with numerous landowners including schools, towns and parishes, and other third parties to begin negotiations for large scale planting schemes.

In the meantime, smaller scale planting has taken place already on sites in Woosehill Meadows, Shinfield St Mary's, Winnersh Community Orchard and Chiltern Drive. To date, 5,651 very precise number of trees have been planted and by March this year we are expecting to have planted a further 2,145 trees on a number of school sites in the Borough. That is a fantastic start in a very short space of time!

Now we are up and running, we will also be accepting applications for the Garden Forest Initiative as part of the tree planting project, whereby residents can apply to the Council for a tree to plant in their gardens. We have received over 631 applications in the first round of the initiative, and the trees will be provided, for residents to plant, in October this year.

Alongside the delivery of the 250,000 tree planting project, Officers will always be working to develop a new Tree Strategy for the Borough. The Tree Strategy will provide improved direction for the tree management and the Authority's approach across the Borough. It will

help the Borough to better understand the value of WBC's tree assets and provide guidance upon how planting schemes should be undertaken to optimise benefits for carbon sequestration, biodiversity and the local area.

An early engagement survey took place in November 2021, last year, to gather input from stakeholders and residents about some of the key areas that could be covered within the Strategy. This is to be used to assist with the preparation of the Strategy. Following further public consultation on the draft Strategy in 2022, this year the Executive will consider the adoption of the new Tree Strategy in early in 2023.

### **Supplementary Question**

That would appear to be about 10% of the numbers so far identified. With respect to the planting of trees as there seems to be no real plans to build many houses in the north of the Borough, in particular Remenham and Hurst, would it not be just a good idea to sign all remaining trees there so two problems solved? You get trees planted and no houses either and I would call that a win, win.

### **Supplementary Answer**

As you know Gary there are lots of things that you have to look at. That is why a scheme of this size is, as you quite rightly say, it is a massive scheme and yes we are only at the start. I would say, in answer to your question, it all depends on the ground conditions because not all ground conditions will accept trees so it would have to be looked at and considered. But, you also have to consider that the majority of that land would not be in the Council's ownership so it would be down to the landowner.

## **88.2 Clive Jones asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question:**

### **Question**

What will the effect on revenue costs be of cancelling the crematorium project over the next five years?

### **Answer**

There was an indicative £110k net income in 2022/23 and £219k in 2023/24 and that was when the MTFP was agreed in February 2021. As this scheme has now been deleted, and has been ruled out at the viability stage, the income line has now been deleted along with £3.7m worth of expenditure from the 21/22 capital programme, which is £6m over two years. The impact has already been factored into our budget setting work in formulating a balanced budget for 2022/23 and, as you will already know, it has been presented to and considered by Overview and Scrutiny.

Part of this impact, obviously, will help to reduce the need to borrow more money.

### **Supplementary Question**

When the idea of a crematorium was first raised, it was meant to address the need for our residents to have more local cremations and have them in a reasonable time without having the delays often associated with Reading and Easthampstead. Has this need from our residents gone away?

### **Supplementary Answer**

Parts of the viability was to look at whether or not, it was not just about money, it was about whether or not the area could actually support another crematorium and when we

did the work and we looked at Bracknell, which owns the one as you say, and we looked at the Reading one an additional one would not help. It would not help with the numbers because the reason there has been delay at these crematoriums is because of Covid. It is not because they do not have capacity and once Covid, when it has gone away or once the Covid rules change significantly, they will be able to get back to business as usual and cope with the volume.

All we would do is put additional volume which would mean that we could not justify and the utilisation for the viability. I very much would like to have built it if it could be justified financially. But we cannot the money is just not there.

**88.3 Maria Gee asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question:**

**Question**

The Capital Monitoring report shows reprofiling to date of £244m. What financial effect will this reprofiling have on the revenue costs required to manage these projects next year, in addition to those already planned for 2022/23?

**Answer**

Over the past two years, the Council has seen some unprecedented levels of uncertainty due to Covid-19. This has had an impact in some areas on the capital programme including the ability to source resources, materials and labour for some of the projects however we are still on track to invest £154m this year in the community as highlighted in the Capital Monitoring report. Alongside this, the Council have paused some programmes which will be considered in the future if viable business cases support these going ahead. You have just heard of one which is basically we are looking at solar farms for instance.

Any impact on revenue costs will be minimised and where required we will look to carry forward revenue budgets associated with these projects into future years. The Council continually monitors the impact of the Council's capital programme on borrowing costs and look to minimise these by borrowing when required as projects are delivered rather than ahead of need.

The reprofiling of the capital programme is therefore wholly financially responsible and will enable schemes to be more appropriately delivered and will reduce unnecessary costs in the short term by passporting decisions and implementation into future years. Both when service needs and the financial landscape will be more certain.

I would add that none of this reprofiling has been at the expense of delivering services.

**Supplementary Question**

So, the approved Capital Budget for the year 2021/22 is £204m. As I have mentioned the carry forward to futures years is £244m, which is 120% of the programme for this year. I appreciate that some of this year's projects have been delivered but that must mean that some projects are more than a year behind. Can you agree that it would be better to plan for a more deliverable programme so that residents might have certainty about investments in their communities?

For example, I see that the Montague Park community facility has been delayed yet again and I would regard that as an investment in services. So, I would really like to know when it is going to be delivered?

## **Supplementary Answer**

I cannot tell you when that one will be delivered but if you want, I can write to you about that and explain why that has been delayed.

We live in very uncertain times, and you would not expect this Council to commit until we know where we are going and what is happening. Constantly in the past people have actually said that we have overborrowed, well we are now in a position whereby we feel we are not overborrowing, and we never will overborrow and we will make sure that our capital programme fits what is required at the time. We could not do it any other way. I mean it is just financially prudent to do it that way and of course there are some changes going on with regards to the way that councils can borrow money and the way they invest money and that is out for consultation at the moment, and we do not know the outcome of that yet.

### **88.4 Stephen Conway asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question:**

#### **Question**

My question relates to the Capital Budget Monitoring report. The first recommendation in that report states that there will be no financial impact from the reprofiling of budgets into 2022/23. We live in inflationary times. Factors beyond the Council's control have led to significant inflation in costs since the budget was originally set. Given that progress on projects such as Twyford's new library has been delayed by these inflationary pressures, may I ask whether Recommendation 1 takes full account of inflation, current and projected?

#### **Answer**

Your question is very helpful because it indicates that there are uncertainties. Over the past two years, the Council has seen an unprecedented level of uncertainty due to Covid-19 and in response to this we have introduced a strengthening of our approach which includes the reprofiling of spend into future years.

Globally, inflation is an issue and will have an impact on the Council's capital programme. As presented to the Overview and Scrutiny as part of the budget submission for 22/23, we have looked to mitigate this through introducing £12m of central contingency for capital cost uplift pressures over the next three years.

Within the capital programme, projects also have allowances for a level of price inflation built into the budget, which was always the case.

The capital programme will continue to be monitored closely with continuing reporting to the Executive and recommendations to make modifications where needed. This is part of our ongoing strengthening in financial management arrangements required in such times of uncertainty and again I would just say that I would not hesitate if I feel that the finances of the Council are going off course. I will not hesitate to bring the numbers back and look at the numbers again because we have seen some massive increases, especially around labour and materials. We are not sure whether those increases are short term or whether they are long term, but we will be looking at it again, I expect, half way through the year.

### **Supplementary Question**

Thank you for your answer John, that was helpful and more or less what I expected and hoped to hear.

I noticed in Appendix B of the Capital Budget Monitoring report the delivery of the new Twyford Library is now to be delayed until the financial year 2022/23 and this is not entirely a surprise to me. But the delay, I am sure you will be aware, will be very disappointing to many people in the northern parishes as they have been eagerly awaiting this long promised new library.

Can you give me a more precise indication of when in the financial year, 2022/23, structural work on the building will commence and when the project will finally be delivered?

### **Supplementary Answer**

It is very difficult for me at this moment in time to give you a commitment to that and I would not want to tell you something that we could not meet.

We have lots of other things going on at the moment and I understand how important this is, and how it was promised in times pre-Covid. It was definitely on the agenda to deliver but we have challenges around buses, we have challenges around bulge classes at schools and all those things need additional funding. In your neck of the woods, as you probably know, you have schools, secondary schools, crying out for additional facilities. Now we have to balance all those things Stephen and so it is really difficult, and I could not answer the same question if I was posed it on any project that we have got going on at the moment to be honest with you.

### **89. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING REPORT FY2021/22 - QUARTER THREE**

The Executive considered a report setting out the expenditure, as at 31 December 2021, for the third quarter of the current financial year and the overall forecast of the current position of the General Fund revenue budget, the Housing Revenue Account and the Schools' Block funding.

During his introduction of the report the Executive Member for Housing and Finance stated how proud he was that the Council had worked to minimise the impact of Covid on residents in the Borough. This had been achieved in many ways including the provision of affordable homes to those people in real need of housing. During Covid there had been an increase in the demand for affordable homes, which was due in the main to the high cost of rents in the Borough. The only solution was to deliver more social housing but unfortunately the rise in labour and material costs had made the delivery of social housing difficult and only possible on Council owned land, which included the regeneration of brownfield sites or assets in the Council's control.

Councillor Kaiser advised that he, working with Officers, would do everything he could to irradicate poverty and protect services in the Borough including expanding council tax discount where possible, assisting rough sleepers, and ensuring that the Council's housing stock continued to meet the Decent Homes Standard. He went on to add that in order to support families in crisis the Council was continually keeping under review the effectiveness of the local welfare provision scheme, ensuring ongoing consultation with residents and the voluntary sector to ascertain how those who needed crisis assistance could be fully supported and ensuring signposting and easy access to relevant schemes for those who needed to access them.



Councillor Kaiser highlighted that from a budget of around £150m a forecast overspend at year end was predicted in the sum of £523k, which given the difficulties of the last year and the fact that £388k of the overspend related to Covid expenditure he felt that this was a great achievement by the Officers.

Councillor Margetts highlighted the severe pressure that Officers in Adult Social Care had been under, not only dealing with the Covid response but also business as usual. He therefore wanted to thank those Officers for not only responding to the Covid emergency but also for nearly balancing the budget, despite the huge overspend advised during the first lockdown.

Councillor Murray also echoed the words previously stated as he felt to be overspent by only 0.35% under the conditions and pressures of the last year was a tremendous achievement.

The Leader also mentioned the remarkable job that the Chief Executive and Deputy Chief Executive had done over the last two years.

With regards to recommendation 3) Councillor Halsall highlighted the work being undertaken as part of the Arts and Culture Strategy, including the establishment of the Cultural Alliance and the need to provide support to take the work set out in the Strategy forward.

**RECOMMENDATION** 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) illustrated in the Executive Summary and appendices attached to the report be noted;
- 3) a supplementary estimate for £110,000 (c£55,000 per year) for additional capacity to support the Arts and Culture Strategy over the next two years be approved.

**90. CAPITAL MONITORING 2021-22 - QUARTER 3**

The Executive considered a report outlining the progress of the Council in delivering its capital programme for the financial year 2021/2022 and the Capital Monitoring report up to 31 December 2021.

The Executive Member for Finance and Housing went through the report and advised the meeting that the capital programme was reviewed on a regular basis to ascertain if any savings could be made. Councillor Kaiser advised that it was possible that in future largescale funds would be required for schools to accommodate additional children within the Borough and therefore some of the non-essential projects may need to be rephased to a future date.

In addition, Councillor Kaiser was pleased to report that the predicted forecast at year end was around £8m under the amount forecast at the beginning of the year. It was noted that although less capital schemes were being delivered, due to material and labour shortages, borrowing was lower.

As advised in the response to Councillor Jones' question the crematorium scheme had been removed from the capital programme, due to the fact that there was capacity in the two neighbouring crematoriums and therefore the project did not now make commercial sense.

**RECOMMENDATION** that:

- 1) the proposed rephrasing to the Capital Programme following the 'in-year' review, as set out in paragraph 3 of the report 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 3 (to 31st December 2021), as summarised in the report and set out in detail in Appendix A, be noted;
- 3) the removal of the new Crematorium scheme from the capital programme be noted and approved. This will remove £3.7m of budget from the 2021/22 capital programme.

**91. CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER'S REPORT**

The Executive considered a report from the Chief Financial Officer highlighting the financial issues facing the Council which were required to be taken into consideration as part of the budget setting process for 2022/23.

When introducing the report the Executive Member for Finance and Housing stated that he felt that the report, written by the Chief Finance Officer, was an excellent piece of work that highlighted the annual budget changes, pressures on service and efficiencies. It was noted that a challenging target of efficiencies of around £5m were being looked at for the next financial year.

In relation to the major financial risks outlined in the report, which included the adult social care reform, Councillor Margetts advised that in order to raise the profile of this issue he was liaising with other Berkshire authorities to encourage them to look at the impact the reforms would have on their finances. As West Berkshire and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Councils faced similar issues to Wokingham the Lead Members from those authorities had written to Savid Javid to highlight the issues the Councils were facing. Whilst the reforms were very welcome in their attempts to review social care there was not currently enough funding available to support the reforms.

Councillor Murray drew attention to the table showing the net annual benefit of £42 per Band D property in 2022/23, £55.21 in 2023/24 and £62.47 in 2024/25 and it was confirmed that this net benefit was income generated from assets and investments. Councillor Kaiser reminded the meeting that the Council was the lowest grant funded unitary authority in the country therefore very little money was received from the Government.

Councillor Halsall highlighted that the Council received around £65m in business rates but only retained around £15m as due to the relevant calculations the remainder had to be given to the Government. Councillor Halsall also drew Members' attention to the Asset Value, Debt Levels and Repayment Profiles table within the report which showed that the

net indebtedness was forecast to be £177m, rising to £300m in 2022/23, then reducing year on year.

**RECOMMENDATION** that:

- 1) the Chief Finance Officer (CFO) report and the issues contained within, including the local government finance settlement and the sections on key risks, be noted and that the Executive consider these when setting the council tax for 2022/23 and agreeing the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP);
- 2) the Council's response to the local government finance settlement, as set out in Appendix Two to the report, be supported;
- 3) the Council's ongoing representations for fairer funding for the residents of Wokingham Borough Council be supported.

**92. OPTALIS CONTRACT RENEWAL 2022**

*(Councillors John Halsall, John Kaiser and Charles Margetts declared personal and prejudicial interests in this item.*

*Councillor Stuart Munro took over the Chair for this item only)*

The Executive considered a report setting out the procurement business case to renew the contract for adult care services with Optalis Ltd.

During his introduction of the report the Executive Member for Business and Economic Development highlighted the amount of work that had gone into the contract. Three years ago Optalis was exclusively focussed on growth however the Council's view was that it should be focussing on quality and value. Two years of negotiations followed with the result that £2.5m was returned to the Council and the company had been restructured which had led to three boards of Directors being reduced to one. Optalis was now a more flexible and agile company, with the Council's operation separated from the overall company which meant that the Council could focus on the service it required for Wokingham residents.

Councillor Munro confirmed that the contract would enable the Council to use Optalis as a provider which would help ensure against rising and variable care costs from other providers and would also enable the development of new services to suit the needs of its residents.

**RECOMMENDATION** that Council be recommended to:

- 1) approve the procurement business case, as set out in the report, to renew the contract to Optalis;
- 2) delegate authority to the Director of Adult Services, in consultation with the Lead Member for Adult Services to;
  - a) approve and complete the contract with Optalis for £7.3mil – 2022-23; and
  - b) undertake all activities required to complete the joint ownership arrangements between RBWM and the Council as set out under the heading 'Future Arrangements'.

- 3) delegate jointly to the Director of Adult Services and the Director of Resources and Assets authority to add to and remove services within Optalis during the term of the contract provided that in each case, up to the total value of £500k:
  - a) the budget for the costs of the services has already been approved as part of the agreed Council Budget;
  - b) the business case has been approved by both Directors;
  - c) the Executive Member with responsibility for Adult Services and the Executive Member with responsibility for Finance have been consulted.
- 4) note the shareholders agreement.

### **93. RUSCOMBE NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN - REGULATION 16 CONSULTATION AND FUTURE EXAMINATION**

The Executive considered a report relating to the proposed consultation on the draft Ruscombe Neighbourhood Plan which if approved would sit alongside the Council's planning policies to help shape how development was managed in that area.

#### **RECOMMENDATION** that:

- 1) a 6-week consultation on the draft Ruscombe Neighbourhood Plan (Appendix 1a and 1b of the report) be approved; and
- 2) an examiner be appointed to independently examine the Ruscombe Neighbourhood Plan, delegating the appointment and submission of the examination documentation to the Director of Place and Growth in consultation with the Lead Member for Planning and Enforcement.

### **94. LEISURE STRATEGY**

The Executive considered a report setting out a proposed Leisure Strategy following consultation.

During his introduction the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure advised that the Leisure Strategy sets out plans to help residents' physical and emotional wellbeing through the Council's extensive leisure offerings and partnership with a wide range of other organisations. The four key priorities of the Strategy were:

- Promoting health and wellbeing of residents;
- Raising participation and reducing levels of inactivity;
- Maintaining and extending accessibility to indoor leisure services; and
- Maintaining and extending accessibility to outdoor spaces.

Councillor Batth reminded Members that consultation on the draft Strategy had been carried out between April-July 2021. The main areas of feedback from residents were that they wanted more sports facilities and classes, more options for young people and more outdoor activities. In response to this feedback the Council had been working with the Youth Council and community teams to develop new programmes and facilities to encourage more young people and teenagers to get active.

In addition, sessions would be targeted for the Borough's black, Asian and minority ethnic communities. The Council would review its current programme of activities and identify sessions which were popular with those communities and encourage more residents to get

involved and get physically active. The offer for older people would also be expanded as set out in the Strategy.

Councillor Batth reiterated the significant health benefits of sports and leisure for everyone including, raising achievement in schools plus being very important in the prevention of mental and physical illnesses.

In addition to the key leisure partners outlined previously Councillor Batth mentioned the strong sports and leisure community at Pinewood and the importance of the Council's relationship with these organisations. He advised that there was a commitment to develop these valuable facilities in the future.

Councillor Kaiser stated that he was glad to see that towns and parishes were mentioned in the partnership delivery section of the Leisure Strategy. Towns and parishes often had funds available and therefore work could be undertaken with them to deliver better services in facilities that they either currently run or assist them in implementing new projects.

**RECOMMENDATION** that:

- 1) the principles and content of the Leisure Strategy be endorsed;
- 2) the Leisure Strategy and action plan, with the amends incorporated following consultations and feedback from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, be approved.

**95. WHOLE COUNCIL ELECTIONS**

The Executive considered a report setting out a proposal to launch a consultation with stakeholders on moving to a whole council (all-out) electoral cycle.

The Leader of Council reiterated the financial pressures that were facing the Council now and in the future. These included the Adult Health and Social Care Bill which would cost around £27m, the likelihood of losing the New Homes Bonus of £4m, settling the Negative Schools Grant of £10m as well as other inflationary pressures and cost increases which represented more than £50m of increases. Therefore, as the Council's finances were likely to be severely stretched there was a need to look at areas where savings could be made in order to protect Council services.

Councillor Halsall advised that one area that was currently being considered was the Council's electoral cycle i.e moving from the current process which was the election of a third of Councillors each year, apart from the fourth year, to whole Council elections, an election every fourth year for all Councillors. Moving to whole Council elections could potentially save £4.5m over a four-year cycle.

It was noted that the Boundary Commission was currently undertaking an electoral (boundary) review and as part of this process the Council was required to consider the electoral system it wished to use. The options were:

- Continue with election by thirds (an election every year apart from the fourth) of one third of the wards. All wards would have to be three councillor wards, which was a change to the current process.

- Whole Council elections (an election every fourth year) for all seats which could be either one councillor, two councillor or three councillor wards reflecting communities or all single councillor wards.

Because the Boundary Commission believed that every resident should have equal access to democracy, they wanted all voters to have the opportunity either to vote every year or every four years. The current process meant that if you lived in Arborfield you only got to vote once every four years but if you lived in Shinfield you had the ability to vote every year. Elections by thirds was also very expensive and highly disruptive.

Councillor Halsall confirmed that as a consequence of the Boundary Commission's electoral review whole Council elections would have to take place in 2024. He further advised that most Councils had either moved to whole Council elections or were moving to them. It was noted that MPs were elected for a maximum of five years and PCCs, town and parish councils and mayors were all elected every four years.

As set out in the report Councillor Halsall highlighted that there would need to be a public consultation on whether to change the Council's electoral cycle and to this end the Executive was being asked to recommend to Council that a consultation take place. A special Council meeting would be required to be held in the Summer to consider whether to change the Council's electoral cycle. It was noted that a two thirds majority at that meeting would be required to make the change.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That Council be recommended to agree to launch a consultation with stakeholders on moving to a whole council (all-out) electoral cycle.

## **96. CENTRAL AND EASTERN BERKSHIRE JOINT MINERALS AND WASTE PLAN: MAIN MODIFICATIONS CONSULTATION**

The Executive considered a report relating to a proposal to consult on the Central and Eastern Joint Minerals and Waste Plan: Main Modifications (The Joint Plan) and supporting documents.

The Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement went through the report and reminded the meeting that the Examination in Public had taken place during September/October last year at which a number of modifications came forward. This report was therefore asking for Executive to recommend to Council the main modifications and supporting documentation for consultation. Councillor Smith confirmed that, despite posts to the contrary on social media, there were no sites in Wokingham Borough contained in the Plan.

**RECOMMENDATION** that Council be recommended to:

- 1) agree the Central and Eastern Berkshire Joint Minerals and Waste Plan: Main Modifications and supporting documentation for publication and public consultation;
- 2) authorise community engagement on the Central and Eastern Berkshire Joint Minerals and Waste Plan: Main Modifications and associated supporting documents to take place for at least 6 weeks from February 2022 onwards;
- 3) authorise the Director of Place and Growth, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement, to agree minor amendments necessary to

the Central and Eastern Berkshire Joint Minerals and Waste Plan: Main Modifications and other supporting documents prior to consultation.