

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF  
THE COUNCIL  
HELD ON 22 JULY 2021 FROM 7.30 PM TO 10.30 PM**

**Members Present**

Councillors: Keith Baker (Mayor), Abdul Loyes (Deputy Mayor), Parry Batth, Rachel Bishop-Firth, Laura Blumenthal, Chris Bowring, Shirley Boyt, Stephen Conway, Phil Cunnington, Peter Dennis, Carl Doran, Michael Firmager, Paul Fishwick, John Halsall, Jim Frewin, Graham Howe, Clive Jones, Pauline Jorgensen, Tahir Maher, Charles Margetts, Andrew Mickleburgh, Gregor Murray, Angus Ross, Ian Shenton, Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey, Wayne Smith, Bill Soane and Alison Swaddle

**18. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were submitted from Maria Gee and Pauline Helliard Symons.

**19. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Minutes of the meeting of Annual Council held on 20 May 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

**20. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The following Members declared a general personal interest relating to items on the Agenda:

Councillor John Kaiser declared a Personal Interest on the grounds that he was a Non-Executive Director of WBC Holdings Ltd.

Councillor Lindsay Ferris declared a Personal Interest on the grounds that he had been a Non-Executive Director of Loddon Homes until 12 July.

Councillor Stuart Munro declared a Personal Interest on the grounds that he was a Non-Executive Director of WBC Holdings Ltd.

Councillor Wayne Smith declared a Personal Interest on the grounds that he was a Non-Executive Director of WBC Holdings Ltd.

Councillor Shahid Younis declared a Personal Interest on the grounds that he was a Non-Executive Director of Loddon Homes.

Councillor Norman Jorgensen declared a Personal Interest on the grounds that he was a Non-Executive Director of Loddon Homes.

Councillor John Halsall declared a Personal Interest on the grounds that he was a Non-Executive Director of Optalis.

Councillor Clive Jones declared a Personal Interest in Item 28 Health Scrutiny Arrangements across Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West, on the grounds that he was a governor of the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust.

**21. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Mayor referred Members to the list of Mayoral Engagements.

The Mayor went on to remind Members of the domestic abuse training which was being held on Monday 26 July 2021 at 7pm via Microsoft Teams, and encouraged all Members to attend.

## **22. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

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

### **22.1 AI Neal asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:**

#### **Question**

The Laurel Park sports field in Earley, currently accommodates parking for 60 cars, but has no facilities to park bicycles.

The Park is poorly connected to Earley's cycling network; the main entrance is in Maresfield, and this runs into a busy main road, Rushey Way, which has no cycle lanes at that point.

The Council has the following policies that encourage cycling:

1. Climate emergency
2. Sustainable Travel
3. Air Quality Action Plan
4. Creating Physically Active Communities
5. Sustainable Environment Strategy

There is also traffic disruption and bad parking in Maresfield and surrounding roads that affects the lives of residents.

In light of the Borough's proposal to build a 3G pitch and an additional 50 car parking places at Laurel Park, can the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure commit to installing significant cycle parking at Laurel Park before any new development takes place?

#### **Answer**

I totally agree with you Mr Neal. You are pushing against an open door.

Consideration will be given to all potential users of the proposed new facility as part of the design development process and appropriate arrangements will be put in place to satisfy the user needs and requirements in line with the current Council policies and national guidance, which will include assessment of means of transport including cycling - the proposals will be available for further public consultation during the planning application process.

#### **Supplementary Question:**

Given that the draft LCWIP Local Cycling and Infrastructure Plan has just been published, and that Laurel Park is not even connected to any of the proposed routes, and given that it is such a major project, that seems a bit of an oversight.

So, can I ask that instead of planning to increase the parking there by 83%, which is what the 50 extra car parking spaces represents, would the increase in use of the Park be better

targeting active travel and public transport? I would invite the Executive Member to commit to a zero increase in car traffic, rather than an 83% increase.

**Supplementary Answer:**

The new improved facilities including the 3G pitch, will require the additional car parking, and of course provision for the cyclists, because the use of that park will increase proportionally and therefore the car parking is necessary.

**22.2 Peter Humphreys asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:**

**Question**

It's somewhat bizarre that whilst WBC is basking in the reflected publicity of its partnership with TVP on the campaign to discourage drivers from passing too close to cyclists, its Highways Department is actively encouraging motorists to overtake within a nanometre of a cyclists' life.

Take New Wokingham Road. As the Executive Member can see from the picture provided WBC have installed red tarmac overlaid with diagonal stripes to dissuade motorists from deviating from their lane to overtake cyclists, encouraging them to barge cyclists off the road as the lanes are now not wide enough for a vehicle and a cycle to pass side by side.

Numerous traffic islands make it difficult for motorists to overtake, those that do either cut in too close to cyclists or pass the wrong side of the islands to avoid slowing down.

Can I surmise the Council view accidents as an NHS problem whilst the extra paintwork is a cost issue purely for residents.

Interestingly as soon as the road crosses into Bracknell Forest, that Council has opted for a conventional single centre line to give cyclists more space.

Are the Council planning to make safe this vanity project before a cyclist is killed?

**Answer**

The traffic management scheme on the New Wokingham Road I am told was installed over a decade ago and was introduced to tackle high vehicle speeds and to encourage speed limit compliance. The approach taken to reduce the effective width of the road using red tarmac and hatching along with the traffic islands to prevent overtaking and the installation of Vehicle Activated Speed signs is a recognised speed management approach and has proved to be successful. Our data shows vehicle speeds to be broadly compliant with the 30mph speed limit, over all periods of the day.

Whilst the red tarmac overlaid with hatched markings does dissuade motorists from deviating from their lane, this is a permitted manoeuvre for drivers when it is safe and legal to do so, when they need to pass a cyclist.

The introduction of the scheme has supported the safety of cyclists by reducing the speed of traffic and the occurrence of only one pedal cyclist collision since the scheme was introduced is testament to the success of the measures on this busy, local distributor road that carries over 8,000 vehicles every day. That I believe is one in ten years.

Central hatched road markings are a recognised form of traffic calming used to discourage drivers from overtaking which can give the impression that the road is narrower than it is in

reality. Placing them on a coloured background can give additional emphasis. As the road is wide enough and, given the ability for drivers to pass cyclists safely, Officers have considered it appropriate when designing the existing scheme to provide narrower lane widths in which there have been no reported safety issues.

**Supplementary Question:**

I think this just highlights the ongoing problems, with no one with cycling experience in the Highways Department. I have ridden that road many times and all it has done is increase the speed of certain motorists who in an attempt to get past will sort of speed up to get to the island, or just avoid them altogether by going on the other side of the road. It has made it considerably more dangerous. As with all the other bizarre cycling schemes such as the cycle path that morphs into a sandpit, the cycle lanes two or three metres long, can you actually commit to employing a proper, experienced cyclist who can review all these desktop, tick box exercise projects, and produce reports to improve safety for all road users?

**Supplementary Answer:**

You are completely incorrect Mr Humphreys. There are several experienced and keen cyclists in the Highways Department, and they are actively involved in designing these roads.

**22.3 Daniel Hinton asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:**

**Question:**

Wokingham is a safe and healthy place to live. I'm convinced that the Borough's good health that has recently been reported on is in no small measure due to the sporting facilities the Council offers our residents.

Can you please explain your plans for the sports facilities within the Borough, both already in place and in progress, stating the costs of these sports facilities?

**Answer**

I totally agree with you, we need to keep our residents very healthy. As part of our new draft leisure strategy (2021 – 2025) currently out for public consultation, current plans that are in place for new facilities are:

- Re-development of the Carnival Pool – £23M
- 3G pitch Arborfield Primary School - £800k
- Cantley Park Enhancement - £2.2M
- Cantley Play area - £300k

New facilities that have recently had Executive approval and plans are now in place are:

- New Boxing Fitness Hub - £630k
- Laurel Park 3G pitch - £300k plus £500k from the Football Foundation.

These investments are part of our ongoing commitment to leisure, enhancing the Wellbeing opportunities for the Borough and ensuring Wokingham Borough remains one of the best places to live.

Other investments in our facilities within the leisure area that have been completed are:

- Parking and toilet facilities at California Country Park - £2.1M
- Network of 'Greenways' including attractive walking and cycling routes - £320k
- New activity centre building at Dinton Pastures - £1.8M
- New outdoor play facilities at California Country Park - £300k

Investments completed within the sports facilities are:

- Bulmershe Leisure Centre – £14.5M
- Ryeish Green and Arborfield Leisure Facilities - £4.9M
- Loddon Valley Leisure Centre Refurbishment – £2.2M

So that amounts to just about £53million of investment, which is a very heavy investment that we have invested in our excellent sports facilities to keep our Borough residents very healthy.

**22.4 Jennifer Lissaman asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question:**

**Question**

I chair a small group who are looking improve a local open space. We are aware the Council receives Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) money in respect of new developments within the Borough to fund improvements to roads, transport, schools, leisure centres, open spaces etc.

How can our group find out how much CIL money remains unallocated in our area and what is the process for bidding for this funding?

**Answer**

The Community Infrastructure Levy is fully committed on infrastructure schemes related to the developments which were funded by via our Medium-Term Financial Plan for the next 10 years. Some town and parish councils relevant to that section do receive a proportion of CIL and you might wish to make enquiries with them.

If, however you have specific proposals to improve local open space facilities I recommend that you discuss your ideas with the appropriate team (Green and Blue Infrastructure team) in the Council and they will then provide you with advice on alternative funding solutions, and they will be able to assist in setting out your proposals and working with you in more detail.

That was before I spoke to you this evening. I will take it on board tomorrow and speak to Fran Hobson as I am with her at 12 o'clock and take it on board. You know we have a big tree planting scheme and we have got to find places for 250,000 trees, so that might be a great solution. If it is a case of landscaping, I am sure that someone at the Borough can help you.

**22.5 Helen Palmer asked the Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions the following question:**

**Question**

Two years ago, Wokingham District Council voted unanimously to declare a climate emergency. It was a momentous occasion.

May I thank everyone involved in this. Cutting greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2030 in Wokingham is a formidable task; however, the Council has committed to it.

Next, I would like to quote from the Report and Recommendations of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee's Climate Emergency Task and Finish Group of June 2021:

*"In light of the Government's target of achieving Net Zero by 2050, we sought views on the feasibility of the Council's 2030 target. It was suggested that achieving net zero by 2030 was the safest way to restrict global warming to the Paris target of 1.5 degrees. However, 2030 was only eight years away and the task facing us was enormous. Net zero by 2030 was technically feasible but was unlikely to be politically or financially feasible. Instead, we should focus on making significant progress by the mid-2030s."*

My question is; Can the Council assure me of its commitment to achieving net zero by 2030? "Significant progress by the mid 2030's" is not specific enough, not soon enough and quite simply not good enough.

### **Answer**

Thank you for your question. There are two things that I would say in response to your question. The first is that the Climate Emergency Task and Finish Group report presents the recommendations made following scrutiny of the Climate Emergency Action Plan. The Group acts as a critical friend to the Council, its Officers and myself, and the Council can choose to accept, or not their recommendations. The report you refer to is the recommendations of that group and not necessarily Council policy.

The second thing to say is that Wokingham Borough Council made a commitment to play as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon-neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030. The Council stands by this and is taking this commitment through developing a clear and ambitious Climate Emergency Action Plan that sets the Borough well on the path towards net-zero. The action plan has included a number of major commitments such as the delivery of solar farms, planting 250,000 trees and developing a net-zero local plan, amongst many others.

Since the Council's declaration to tackle the climate emergency, the extensive planning and strategy development phases of the Climate Emergency Action Plan have been undertaken and we are already starting to see the results of that work with the first solar farm at the planning application stage and Dinton Activity Centre nearing completion as a new net-zero Council development.

The Council's own actions along with its statutory powers and responsibilities are important levers to reduce emissions in the Borough but these powers are limited, and we need to look at the wider picture where our role as a community leader and influencer will be equally if not more critical. To reach net-zero across the suite of sectors and activities that we cannot directly control will require partnerships and collaboration as a vital ingredient for success.

More than half of the emission cuts needed rely on people and businesses taking up low-carbon solutions - decisions that are made at a local and individual level. Many of these decisions can be positively influenced by having supporting infrastructure and systems in place.

**Supplementary Question:**

I wondered how you were planning to get people on board with these significant changes in our habits and behaviour, that the citizens of Wokingham need to make?

**Supplementary Answer:**

That is a really fantastic question and actually something that we are going to be talking about slightly later on. Behaviour change is the single most important thing that we can do as a Council, as individuals, as organisations, to combat climate change. I am highly aware of that. When we came back into this new session of Council this year, I switched the focus of the Council's Officers from doing the strategic development phase of our Climate Emergency Action Plan, and making behaviour change our number one priority and our number one focus. I have developed eight areas that I want the Council to focus our attention on. I want us to work with big organisations and small organisations, charities, religious groups, and schools, everybody we possibly can, and use our role as a community influencer to bring people together and then use that opportunity to drive the behaviour change because we cannot do it one or two people at a time. The problem is too big. We have got to start thinking bigger. We have got to start bringing organisations together, and we have got to set a very clear plan with WBC right in the very centre of it.

**22.6 Mike Smith asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question which was answered by the Leader of the Council:****Question**

Following Councillor Halsall's comments at the last Executive Meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> June, and widely reported in the press, about Earley and Wokingham Town Councils not contributing to Covid activities; as an Earley Town Councillor I consider the statement both ill-informed and offensive to the hard-working senior officers, who have been at their posts throughout.

Please could lead on Finance tell me exactly how much of the £9.35 million of additional Covid funding received by WBC was forwarded to any of the Town and Parish Councils to assist with the massive reduction in their income due to all facilities being closed down and the additional costs of operating throughout including ETC offices being in use continuously. A very short answer is all that is required thank you.

**Answer**

Thank you, Mr Smith,

The context to my reply was to some preposterous questions posed around the money we have in our budget for our Recovery Strategy. Clearly, organisations target all existing resources where appropriate towards what is most important and include necessary additional budgets to their financial plans, which we did. This is a far more robust and meaningful approach to recovery, as opposed to putting up some lines of bunting for symbolic effect.

Last year all town and parish councils received their full precept from WBC as the collection authority. This will be the same this year. Alas, we do not have the luxury of such security around our primary source of income. Any shortfall in income for the towns and parishes would be from their traded and retail activities. Provided they met the criteria specified by central Government, they would be eligible for appropriate rate relief and the retail grants that this Council paid out on behalf of central Government. Over £166,500 was successfully claimed and paid out to towns and parish councils, of which Earley Town

Council claimed nearly £18,000.

Regarding the £9.35 million; whilst this money was gratefully received, WBC received the lowest amount per head of any unitary authority. This was insufficient to cover the impact of Covid and the needs of our residents; the Executive had to pass a supplementary estimate during the last financial year to use its own funds to meet additional pressures arising from the pandemic. This included getting rough sleepers off the streets, supporting survivors of domestic abuse into safe accommodation, supporting the shielding programme for clinically vulnerable people. It also included aspects of the death management process, such as body storage, public funerals, and crematoria. Importantly it meant this Council continued to provide vital services to residents including adult social care and children's services.

**Supplementary Question:**

According to the Earley Town Clerk we received £8,906 in additional monies, direct from WBC, that is 1/1000<sup>th</sup> of the funding that you received from central Government. I would say that I think that they coped admirably with the unplanned 25% loss of income from their commercial activities and still produced a positive bottom line. They kept their health shop open, and they have not delegated any decisions to officers, and the material activities have included replacing their out-of-date finance IT systems, as well as enhancing the green spaces, which have been so important for mental health over the last 15 or so months. My question is aimed at Councillor Kaiser not Councillor Halsall, would you agree that Earley Town Council has not been asleep for the last 16 months as claimed?

**Supplementary Answer:**

Interestingly enough, your returns suggest that your reserves went up by £300,000 last year. You did receive £18,000. A question and a similar one from your Leader were extremely offensive to the Officers and the Members of the Borough Council who have worked very hard to keep residents safe during the pandemic. I think that you should apologise to our Officers Mr Smith.

**22.7 Louise Timlin asked the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and Communities the following question:**

**Question**

Berkshire Women's Aid and Kaleidoscopic, two well known, specialist, local charities recently lost the bid to provide domestic abuse services to Wokingham Borough despite a strong track record in supporting victims over many years. The organisation Cranstoun has been awarded the tender. Please could WBC detail their experience and track record of success in providing services to victims of domestic abuse?

**Answer**

Dealing with incidents of domestic abuse is taken extremely seriously by the Council. With increased demand on services in this area, Council funding for this contract has been significantly increased.

Arrangements being made by the Council to bring the Public Protection Partnership back under sole control of this Borough, is a major step towards ensuring cases such as domestic abuse can be dealt with both sufficiently and promptly.

I can assure you that the awarding of the contract to Cranstoun, which started on 1 July,

was robustly processed and the decision made follows a scrupulous examination to the services to be offered.

**Supplementary Question:**

That did not answer my question whatsoever so I would really like at some point to have a full and specific answer to that question.

However, I would also like to know – Cranstoun do not currently have a refuge in Wokingham for victims of domestic abuse. Fortunately, Berkshire Women’s Aid are continuing to provide refuge services, but can you tell me when Cranstoun will start to provide refuge services in Wokingham?

**Supplementary Answer:**

Can I first of all explain that at the time that this contract was awarded, I was not in the post that I am in. Therefore, to be able to answer your question honestly and factually, I will need to come back to you with a written answer. I am sorry about that.

**23. PETITIONS**

The following Members presented petitions in relation to the matters indicated.

The Mayor’s decision as to the action to be taken is set out against each petition.

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| Charles Margetts | Charles Margetts presented a petition asking for a sixth form at Bohunt School, containing 1325 signatures.<br><br><b><i>To be forwarded to the Executive Member for Children’s Services</i></b>                                      |
| Bill Soane       | Bill Soane presented a petition relating to issues with parking on Colemansmoor Road containing 54 signatures.<br><br><b><i>To be forwarded to the Executive Member for Highways and Transport</i></b>                                |
| Ian Shenton      | Ian Shenton presented a petition regarding school bus provision for Evendons East and Wescott West school children containing 201 signatures.<br><br><b><i>To be forwarded to the Executive Member for Highways and Transport</i></b> |

**24. HOLDING OF FULL COUNCIL MEETINGS AND REMOTE ATTENDANCE**

The Council considered a report regarding the holding of Full Council meetings and remote attendance.

It was proposed by John Halsall and seconded by Chris Bowring that the recommendations set out within the report be agreed.

John Halsall indicated that the Covid case rate in Wokingham was currently 350 per 100,000, that the daily cases numbers had doubled from 12 July to 19 July and was expected to double over the next week. Most cases were in younger, unvaccinated or singly vaccinated people, but the case rate in over 60’s was also starting to rise. Whilst

two doses of the vaccination reduced the chances of people catching Covid it did not completely remove the risk of passing the virus to others. The same mitigations remained effective, including social distancing, hand washing, good ventilation and wearing face coverings. The Council would continue to proceed cautiously.

John Halsall went on to state that when arranging the Full Council meeting the choices had been to cancel the meeting, to hire an external venue at a cost and significant Officer time, or to hold a politically balanced meeting with reduced physical attendance. Many other councils had suspended meetings and delegated decision making to the Chief Executive. Wokingham had started all its meetings as soon as possible, albeit with some curtailment. John Halsall asked Members to agree the recommendations, with the proviso that normal Full Council meetings return as soon as possible. For 6 months those Members joining the meeting virtually would be considered as attending the meeting.

It was proposed by Clive Jones and seconded by Stephen Conway that recommendation 1 be amended as follows:

*That Council:*

1) *agree that for the remainder of the calendar year, and subject to no objections being received from the Group Leaders in advance of the meetings, full Council will be held ~~in the Council Chamber at Shute End~~ in accordance with public health advice.*

Clive Jones stated that the Government no longer allowed virtual meetings, creating a problem for Full Council meetings. Virtual attendance did not permit councillors to propose or second a Motion or to vote. It was not known how long the current situation would continue and holding Council meetings in their current format was not a long-term solution. Whilst other councils had held meetings off site at a cost, the Liberal Democrats felt that better use could be made of the Shute End building, to enable all Members to attend.

Gary Cowan stated there was not a quick fix. Whilst he understood the proposals, he was uncomfortable that those attending virtually were unable to vote. He questioned whether the Government had been asked to relax the rules around attendance at meetings.

Stephen Conway commented that the right to vote was fundamental to democracy. The Council Chamber alone was not large enough to accommodate all Members when social distancing. He commented that the amendment did not require the use of alternative venues but provided an opportunity to consider a more creative use of the Council Offices to enable all Members to attend.

John Halsall, proposer of the original recommendations, did not accept the amendment. He stated that the Council had been at the forefront of democracy and had restarted committee meetings earlier than many others. Legal advice had been taken with regards to extending the Council Chamber to the whole of Shute End, for the purposes of holding a Full Council meeting. However, this was not possible. He felt that the original proposal created greater certainty for the next 6 months.

Upon being put to the vote, the amendment was carried.

**RESOLVED:** that

- 1) for the remainder of the calendar year, and subject to no objections being received from the Group Leaders in advance of the meetings, full Council will be held in accordance with public health advice;
- 2) it be noted that in the case where an objection has been received that the Mayor expects the Leader of the Council to arrange meetings with the Group Leaders to discuss matters relating to the holding of the full Council meetings related to those objections; and
- 3) it be approved that any deemed absence for the purposes of section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972 ('the 6-month attendance rule'), for any Member who has joined the meeting by remote means.

## **25. ARMED FORCES COVENANT**

The Council considered a report regarding the Armed Forces Covenant.

It was proposed by Angus Ross and seconded by John Halsall that the recommendations set out within the report be agreed.

Angus Ross commented that he was proud to have served in the Armed Forces and to be the Council's Armed Forces Champion. Whilst the Council had been quick to adopt the Armed Forces Covenant in 2013, it had not followed up in its support of veterans and their families as extensively as some other Councils. He referred to the Employers Recognition Scheme and the fact that Officers had already begun work on achieving the Bronze status of the scheme.

Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey, Gary Cowan and Carl Doran, as forces veterans, all supported the proposals. Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey emphasised that those who had served, should be honoured. Carl Doran commented that whilst he supported striving for the Bronze status of the Employers Recognition Scheme, he felt that the Council could also achieve Silver status.

Bill Soane indicated that when the Armed Forces Covenant had been signed in 2013, he had signed on behalf of Woodley Town Council. He suggested that the Town and Parish Councils also be encouraged to reaffirm their commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant.

**RESOLVED:** That

- 1) Wokingham Borough Council's commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant be restated;
- 2) commitment be made to achieving Armed Forces Bronze Award employer status;
- 3) it be agreed that updates to Council be provided on an annual basis.

## **26. ANNUAL PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2021**

The Council considered the Annual Pay Policy Statement 2021.

It was proposed by John Halsall and seconded by Chris Bowring that the Annual Pay Policy 2021, be approved.

John Halsall indicated that the Pay Policy process was required by the Localism Act 2011.

Rachel Burgess commented that there was no mention of the gender pay gap. Since last year the mean gender pay gap at the Council had increased to 15.6%, which was 11% worse than neighbouring Reading Council. The median gender pay gap was 17.3% compared to Reading's 2.5%.

John Halsall commented that a separate Gender Pay Gap report was considered each year by the Personnel Board. Reading and Wokingham were not comparable because they had different demographics and Reading directly employed a lot more of their staff.

**RESOLVED:** That the Annual Pay Policy Statement for 2021 be approved.

## **27. MEMBER CODE OF CONDUCT**

The Council considered a revised Member Code of Conduct.

It was proposed by John Halsall and seconded by Chris Bowring that the recommendations within the report be approved.

John Halsall indicated that he was proposing the item on behalf of John Kaiser, Chairman of the Standards Committee.

In December 2020 the Local Government Association had published the Model Code of Conduct. It was the role of the Standards Committee to recommend to Council the adoption of the Model Code of Conduct, either in whole or with local amendments, for inclusion in the Constitution. The Standards Committee had considered the Code at their March meeting and agreed to recommend the Code to the Council subject to the following amendments: addition of an appendix on social media usage, reporting concerns to the local authority, the retention of the current registration threshold for gifts and hospitality and an amendment to the section on exempt and confidential information, for Councillors to seek advice from the Monitoring Officer before releasing information which could reasonably be considered to be exempt.

As requested by the Standards Committee at its meeting on 19 July 2021, John Halsall proposed that recommendation 1 be amended to refer to the proposed deletion of paragraph 4.2 of the document and it being referred back to the Standards Committee for further consideration.

Lindsay Ferris indicated that with the removal of 4.2, he was in support of the Code.

**RESOLVED:** That the following be adopted for inclusion in the Constitution:

- 1) the LGA's Model Code of Conduct, as amended by the Standards Committee at its meeting of 8 March 2021 (attached at Annex A to the report), subject to para 4.2 being deleted from the document and referred back to the Standards Committee for further consideration; and
- 2) the guidance on the use social media by Councillors attached at Annex B to the report.

## **28. CHANGES TO THE CONSTITUTION**

The Council considered a report regarding proposed changes to the Constitution.

It was proposed by John Halsall and seconded by Chris Bowring that the recommendations set out within the report be agreed.

John Halsall outlined the proposals, referring in particular to the proposed amendments to the Standards Committee terms of reference and the appointment of Chairmen at Annual Council. He outlined the role of the Standards Committee and the complaints process. John Halsall was of the view that it would be beneficial for the Leader and the Leader of the Opposition to be part of the Committee, to help ensure Members abide by the Nolan principles.

It was proposed by Shirley Boyt and seconded by Carl Doran that the following amendment be made with regards to recommendation 1:

#### 4.2.9.5 Scope of questions [Council – Public Questions]

*The Chief Executive and/or Mayor/Chairman may reject a question if it:*

*c) is substantially the same as a question which has already been put at or submitted to the meeting or at a meeting of the Council or Executive ~~or any other Committee~~, in the past six months;*

#### 4.2.10.5 Scope of questions [Council – Member Questions]

*The Chief Executive and/or Mayor/Chairman may reject a question if it:*

*c) is substantially the same as a question which has been put at or submitted to the meeting or at a meeting of the Council or Executive ~~or any other Committee~~ in the past six months; or*

#### 5.4.29 Scope of questions [Executive – Public Questions]

*The Chief Executive and/or the Leader may reject a question if it:*

*c) is substantially the same as a question which has already been put at or submitted to the meeting or at a previous meeting of the Council or Executive ~~or any other Committee~~ in the past six months;*

#### 5.4.37 Scope of questions [Executive – Member Questions]

*The Chief Executive and/or Leader may reject a question if it:*

*c) is substantially the same as a question which has been put at or submitted to a meeting of the Council or Executive ~~or any other Committee~~ in the past six months;*

Shirley Boyt commented that the amendment would make the question process easier for members of the public and Members.

Carl Doran felt that original proposal was unnecessary and stifled the democratic process.

John Halsall, proposer of the original recommendations, did not accept the amendment.

Gary Cowan commented that he supported the amendment.

Rachel Burgess stated that questions to Committees were often answered by the Chair of the Committee. She felt that other members of the public should be able to ask a similar question to the Executive Member responsible at either Executive or Council. She went on to state that the amendment would help to improve accountability of the Executive.

Phil Cunnington referred to the word 'may' and commented that questions already asked previously would not automatically be ruled out.

Chris Bowring commented that the original proposal was a tidying up exercise and that if someone asked a question that had previously been asked, they would likely receive the same answer.

Charles Margetts commented that the Chief Executive, Mayor and Chairmen had to use their judgment when considering whether to accept a question.

Prue Bray stated that people often asked the same question at a different meeting because they had not received a satisfactory answer to their original question. She felt that the quality of answers provided varied, and that people should be able to ask a question again if they had not received a sufficient answer.

Jim Frewin felt that having to monitor the questions which were put to all committees would create logistical issues and place additional pressure on Officers.

Gregor Murray commented that Members and members of the public asking a question that had already been asked, would receive the answer previously given.

Upon being put to the vote, the amendment was lost.

Jim Frewin referred to 9.1.1 the composition of the Standards Committee. He believed the Standards Committee should be as neutral as possible and felt that this would not necessarily be the case should the Leader and Leader of the Opposition be committee members.

Imogen Shepherd-DuBey expressed concern regarding permitting the Leader to be a member of the Standards Committee and the election of the Standards Committee chairman at Annual Council.

Gary Cowan agreed that committees such as Overview and Scrutiny and the Standards Committee should be neutral.

Rachel Burgess emphasised that different members of the public may have different supplementary questions based on the answer received to their original question. In addition, she was of the view that committees should be able to elect their own Chairman.

Pauline Jorgensen felt that it was unfair to suggest the Leader of the Council and Leader of the Opposition were not sufficiently impartial to be able to be members of the Standards Committee.

Gregor Murray felt that the original proposal relating to questions would increase rather than decrease democracy.

A request was received to hold separate votes on recommendation 1, recommendation 2 and 4 together, and then recommendation 3.

**RESOLVED:** That the following changes to the Constitution, as recommended by the Monitoring Officer via the Constitution Review Working Group, be agreed:

- 1) Sections 4.2.9.5 Scope of questions [Council – Public Questions], 4.2.10.5 Scope of questions [Council – Member Questions], 5.4.29 Scope of questions [Executive – Public Questions] and 5.4.37 Scope of questions [Executive – Member Questions] be amended as set out in Paragraph 1 of the report;
- 2) Section 8.2.8 Rules of Debate, be amended as set out in Paragraph 2 of the report;
- 3) amendments to Section 4.2.1.1 r and Section 9.1.1 Composition and Membership [Standards Committee], as set out in Paragraph 3 to the report;
- 4) Appendix 11 Channel Panel be added to Section 10 Partnership Working, as set out in Paragraph 4 to the report.

## **29. CLIMATE EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN SECOND ANNUAL REPORT**

The Council considered the Climate Emergency Action Plan Second Annual Report.

It was proposed by Gregor Murray and seconded by Laura Blumenthal that the recommendation within the report be agreed.

Gregor Murray stated that it had been two years since the Council had declared a Climate Emergency and set the aim of becoming a carbon neutral Borough by 2030. The annual report showed that work on reducing the carbon footprint remained a high priority. Highlights mentioned included the launch of the Help to Heat Scheme in October 2020 and the launch of the Community Energy Fund. In addition, the planning application for the first solar farm had been submitted. The school's refit programme had begun, and the carbon neutral Dinton Pastures Activity Centre was near completion. In addition, a live trial of energy efficiency measures had begun in one of the Council's HRA's houses.

Gregor Murray went on to state that climate emergency would be at the heart of the Council's Covid Recovery Plan and 'build back greener' would be a key message to businesses and the community. A paper was due to be taken to the Executive regarding the options for engaging the community in Climate Emergency. Gregor Murray emphasised that behaviour change was vital in order to deliver against climate change and was a key focus. Council was informed of the 'Big Idea', under which the Council would be working to engage local businesses, charities, and religious groups, amongst others to work on collective behaviour change initiatives under eight different areas of behaviour change.

Laura Blumenthal emphasised that the Council could not deliver a carbon neutral Borough alone, and that collaboration with residents and organisations was vital. She urged schools, businesses, churches, and charities to participate in the 'Big Idea'. Laura Blumenthal referred to air quality and to funding secured to scale up air quality monitoring, placing more monitors around the Borough to measure particulate matter.

Sarah Kerr indicated that she had expressed frustration with the way the climate emergency agenda was progressing and how the Working Group was functioning. She stated that whilst the ambition was commendable the Plan did not go far enough and continued to be filled with questionable assumptions and predictions.

Rachel Burgess emphasised that the plan was 67kt short of what was required to achieve carbon neutrality. She felt that the Plan was not clear and that there was a continued

focus on actions that would achieve only small wins in terms of carbon reduction. More ambitious actions were required.

Alison Swaddle stated that she had chaired the cross-party Overview and Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Group, which had worked effectively. She was proud of the Plan and indicated that it had been praised by subject experts.

Parry Bath highlighted further measures to help achieve carbon neutrality and referred to the forthcoming Waste Strategy.

Pauline Jorgensen highlighted work being undertaken around sustainable transport. Multiple new cycleways had been commissioned following route demand analysis work. In addition, a new park and ride had been built and a further two had been commissioned. She went on to refer to the 'Beat the Street' initiative and cycling challenges.

Carl Doran commented that a citizen's assembly would help to provide more focus. He felt that many of the major targets within the Plan were overly vague.

John Kaiser stated that over the last few years, what the Council had achieved, had been curtailed through Covid.

Jim Frewin commented that he recognised that the report was a good attempt to move in the right direction.

Paul Fishwick emphasised the need for improved walking and cycling.

**RESOLVED:** That the Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) Second Progress Report be approved and the targets and actions for carbon dioxide emissions reduction to enable Wokingham Borough Council to play as full a role as possible in achieving a net-zero carbon Borough by 2030, be endorsed.

### **30. HEALTH SCRUTINY ARRANGEMENTS ACROSS BUCKINGHAMSHIRE, OXFORDSHIRE AND BERKSHIRE WEST INTEGRATED CARE SYSTEM**

The Council considered a report regarding the Health Scrutiny Arrangements Across Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West.

It was proposed by Charles Margetts and seconded by Phil Cunnington that the recommendations set out within the report be agreed.

Under the health reforms introduced by Central Government, Clinical Commissioning Groups would be abolished, and health care coordinated by Integrated Care Systems. Wokingham would join the BOB ICS with Buckinghamshire, Berkshire West (Reading and West Berkshire) and Oxfordshire. A joint health scrutiny committee was proposed to scrutinise matters at a regional level, and it was noted that it was intended that it would only meet when required. Charles Margetts commented that the committee could proceed without Wokingham and that it was better to join the committee in order to have a voice. He had met with his counterparts in West Berkshire and Reading and they had agreed that pre meetings would be held prior to meetings of the joint health scrutiny committee to ensure a consistent Berkshire West view. Charles Margetts commented that at the time the report had been produced it had not been clear whether Berkshire West would be part of the BOB ICS. This had since been confirmed.

Clive Jones emphasised the need for local scrutiny committees to retain the power to scrutinise local health services which impacted residents.

**RESOLVED:** That

- 1) the proposal for a Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider health issues at the NHS Integrated Care System (ICS) level across Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire; be supported
- 2) scrutiny of health issues at the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care System level be delegated to the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
- 3) the terms of reference for the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee as set out in Appendix A to the report, be approved;
- 4) that it be noted that two Wokingham Members will be appointed to the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (one Conservative and one Liberal Democrat) as advised by the relevant Group Leaders;
- 5) the situation be reviewed should the Integrated Care System (ICS) boundaries change in the future as the situation with ICS boundaries is currently unclear, and it is far from certain that Wokingham will remain in BOB.

### **31. WOKINGHAM BOROUGH WELLBEING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT 2020-2021**

The Council considered the Annual Report of the Wokingham Borough Wellbeing Board 2020-21.

It was proposed by Charles Margetts and seconded by Phil Cunnington that the report be approved.

Charles Margetts highlighted that additional representation had been added to the Board from the voluntary sector.

**RESOLVED:** That the Annual Report Wokingham Borough Wellbeing Board 2020-21, be approved.

### **32. MEMBER QUESTION TIME**

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

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

##### **Question**

In the recent Hall Farm housing workshop which you attended for 4500 plus houses and other infrastructure support, why did the Council Officers and their consultants disregard the impact of Bearwood Lakes dam on their assessment when the dam is a category A dam and the various flood inundation emergency maps from the Borough Council, Peter Brett Associates and the Environment Agency suggest the flooding would extend extensively into the area considered for housing, schools, shops and roads etc. with possible loss of life?

## **Answer**

Not only did I attend the group, but I was in the breakout session with you. It is entirely inaccurate to say that any risk has been disregarded or that any intent to endanger life through these discussions. Quite the contrary. The Hall Farm workshop that you attended acknowledged and considered all the relevant specialist advice and constraints including flooding and emulation. In light of this consideration, and with attention to the appropriate national guidance, it went on to assess the potential options for development as part of the evidence base for our Local Plan Update. In the event that the Council's Executive do agree this site allocation as part of the Local Plan, all relevant national policies and environmental regulations would shape the Plan in making the progress. The final proposals would be addressed through subsequent detailed planning, design, and relevant regulatory processes.

## **Supplementary Question:**

To change Bearwood Lakes into a Category A dam from a Category B dam, factors must have been taken into consideration, as the Council by its own admission use health and safety as the reason to cut down 500 mature trees by Bearwood Lakes, on the pretext of not putting the lives of the construction workers, working there, at risk. Why is health and safety considered ok to protect these construction workers, but although you seem to suggest differently, is disregarded when a burst with 4500 houses below it, would generate loss of life in the future? Recent events in Germany can show how devastating water can be, yet you are suggesting a lot of houses by a source of danger.

## **Supplementary Answer:**

I am not suggesting anything. What I said to you is that it will be taken into account as we go through the process, and I have never suggested that it will be endangering lives. We will take all that as we go through the process and take the Master Planning and when it comes back, we will look at the necessary regulatory processes, as I pointed out.

## **33. EXTENSION OF THE MEETING**

At 10.01pm it was proposed by Stephen Conway and seconded by Clive Jones that, in line with Rule 4.2.8, the meeting be extended by an extra 30 minutes, up to 11.00pm.

Upon being put to the vote, the proposal was lost.

### **33.1 Sam Akhtar asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:**

#### **Question**

Having spoken to some of the residents in my ward, the issue of dog mess has become an increased problem since the start of lockdown. With a number of other Local Authorities putting a cap on the number of dogs to be walked by one person in a park, would the Council support a similar measure in Wokingham Borough (e.g., 5 dogs per person)? We have seen examples in the Borough where some dog walkers are walking ten dogs at one time in a park and are unable to maintain control.

#### **Answer**

The services' approach to dog fouling is to promote responsible dog ownership. Working with residents, the Council's website allows members of the public to create online location reporting. The information from these reports is assessed by Officers and are used to inform them of any area of concern that may require additional patrols. The website also raises awareness and promotes responsible behaviour.

On the aspect of dog walking, dog walkers are identified as being the person responsible whilst in charge of the dog(s) under the Animal Welfare Act 2006. Although professional dog walking is not a licensable activity, and the number walked by the walkers cannot be restricted through licensing conditions, the numbers of dogs walked are primarily set in accordance with non-binding industry standards and/or liability insurance to around four dogs per walker.

Where anti-social behaviour is an issue, the Council can impose limitations using powers set out within the anti-social behaviour legislation.

Although there are currently insufficient numbers of complaints received by the Council to argue limiting dog walking numbers under the Public Space Protection Order route, Officers are actively investigating the application of a cap as well as timescales for implementation within parks and recreational facilities, so watch this space.

**33.2 Rachele Shepherd-DuBey asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:**

**Question**

When is the construction actually going to start on the Winnersh Park and Ride double decking, it was scheduled to start last January?

**Answer**

The expansion of this park and ride site, and the associated surrounding public areas and accesses involve a number of land owners and interested parties, and whilst we had intended to commence construction earlier this year, resolving the interrelated procurement and legal issues has caused some unavoidable delays. It is worth noting that this is a complicated project that involves the Council undertaking works on behalf of and funded by the property company that owns Winnersh Triangle Business Park, Frasers Property. In addition, Frasers Property will be completing some public realm improvements with their own contractor, and we have had to work closely with them to agree programming, cost and land ownership issues.

On a more positive note, the project is progressing behind the scenes and the steelwork required for the decking of the car park has already been ordered and is currently being manufactured. Work on site is now expected to commence fully on 2<sup>nd</sup> August with a large portion of the car park closing until Summer 2022.

**Supplementary Question:**

In January the park and ride had almost no people there. The park and ride itself was cancelled and traffic was almost zero. It could have been done at that point with little or no effect to the local people. Why was it not started then? You said that it was because of all of these other kinds of problems, however, they have never come up in the last five years when this was proposed.

**Supplementary Answer:**

I agree with you, it would have been much better to have started earlier. However, we cannot start work until we have the contract sorted out and until we ensure value for money for the Council.

### **33.3 Shahid Younis asked the Leader of the Council the following question:**

#### **Question**

Could you tell residents what you are doing to entrench fairness and equality of opportunity across the Council?

#### **Answer**

Thank you for your question. Our Community Vision is for Wokingham Borough to be a great place to live, learn, work, and grow and a great place to do business. Wokingham Borough Council's Equality Plan 2021-2025 'Tackling Equality Together' has three key drivers:

- 1) To ensure our Community Vision is successfully delivered for all our residents, irrespective of their background or characteristics.
- 2) To fulfil our duties and responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 as a public body;
- 3) To build and support a diverse, inclusive, and engaged workforce and meet our responsibilities as an employer.

Equality, diversity, and inclusion are essential to the way we operate as a community leader, a service provider, and an employer. Wokingham Borough is fully committed to Tackling Inequality Together and our Equality Plan will drive our commitment, leadership and collaboration over the next four years to build a more equal and inclusive Borough, where all residents are able to prosper and thrive.

The Council will deliver this ambition through its Equality Action Plan; driving the three priorities to ensure fairness and equality of opportunity both across Wokingham Borough and within the Council:

- Listen to and learn from our communities and use this to deliver services that work well for everyone;
- Act on our commitments to equality, diversity, and inclusion in the way we plan, deliver and shape our services
- Build a diverse and engaged workforce, where everyone is respected.

Under key driver number three we commit to promoting equality and diversity amongst our workforce through two specific objectives:

1. We will support staff at all levels of the organisation, including our leadership, to equip them with the right tools to understand how best to tackle inequality and meet the needs of our increasingly diverse community;
2. We will honour the commitments agreed in our Equality Workforce Monitoring Report to help strengthen our approach to equality, diversity, and inclusion in our workplace.

#### **Supplementary Question:**

Can you please share any specific examples of how we are showing our commitment to equality, more widely, in our Borough?

#### **Supplementary Answer:**

The Council has 29 Equality Actions to deliver in the first year of the Plan, 2021/22. The

programme to deliver our Equality Plan is now well underway and the programme board, led by Keeley Clements, met recently. You will be reassured to know that the programme is on track and has been reinforced by the recent appointment of a new Equality Lead Ali Layne-Smith who joins us to bring senior insight, advice, and leadership to this critical area. Whilst the delivery plan is in its early stages, it has started to deliver results. Berkshire Council Equality Group has been founded and is led by Wokingham Borough Council, allowing all the councils across Berkshire to share best practice and gain insight from one another.

Importantly the Council has published an Equality Profile to equip residents, businesses, and Officers, with insight into how the Borough is made up. A new Equalities Intranet page for staff has been created and a new ethnically diverse staff network has been launched. A new applicant tracking system to monitor recruitment activity has been deployed. The Council also wished to wish our Muslim residents and colleagues Eid Al Adha Mubarak on 20<sup>th</sup> June. On 14<sup>th</sup> July we hosted our first ever Youth Council involving local secondary schools. On 2<sup>nd</sup> July we flew the Pride flag and hosted a number of celebratory Pride events. In May, the Council supported Mental Health Awareness Week.

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

**Question**

At the Annual Council meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2021, a member question was raised by Councillor Rachel Burgess (item 12.6 refers).

In response to the question, Councillor Pauline Jorgenson stated, “that the planned National Cycle Network 422 was built in phases and until July 2020 the entire length of the A329 met our standards and recommended best practice”.

However, Local Transport Note 2/08 Cycle Infrastructure Design was published six years before the first phase was started, and in September 2012 LTN 1/12 was introduced.

The guidance issued in these two documents has not been introduced on the phased NCN 422 where the road space could have been reallocated to provide high quality safe cycling and walking routes.

Instead, the Borough Council has consistently delivered a sub-standard cycling and walking network and acknowledged by you in your response, and I quote “that the on / off road layout are less than ideal and unlikely to encourage new cyclists,” therefore spending £6m in the process has been poor value for money, with little change in modal shift to cycling would you agree?

**Answer**

No, I would not agree. The business case was independently assessed by the LEP who part funded the project to be good value for money and the infrastructure we have provided is significantly better than what was there before.

The scheme was developed using the principles of our adopted Cycling Infrastructure Style Guide, which reflected national policies and Department for Transport’s Local Transport Notes (LTN) 2/08 “Cycle Infrastructure Design” and 1/12 “Shared Use Routes for Pedestrian and Cyclists”, and international best practice where applicable and also responds to research and publications such as the Manual for Streets, TRL and local

cyclists.

This is effectively a repeat of the question I answered in May. The documents you mention express a general preference for on-carriageway provision for cyclists over shared routes and states that “where it is decided to introduce a shared use facility alongside a road, it is important that the needs of cyclists who choose to remain in the carriageway are not ignored”. This is what has been delivered.

As you will be aware, we have committed significant investment in cycling and walking infrastructure in the last few years including the Greenways project as well as providing infrastructure on our new roads, which at the time of inception was seen as progressive and ambitious. The Council has committed to follow LTN1/20 wherever possible in our future schemes but upgrading all our existing cycling infrastructure will clearly be a major exercise and programmed over a number of years. We will be reviewing our major active travel routes in the light of the guidance as part of our work developing a Borough wide Local Cycling and Walking Implementation Plan. In addition, we have started detailed design of our first scheme based on the LTN 1/20 guidance, which will form a new route from Woodley to Palmer Park in Reading, this will help give everybody an impression of the level of infrastructure we want to deliver in future.

**Supplementary Question:**

I disagree with the response. Greenways are not a strategic part of the network, and you keep repeating that in several answers which you have given to me.

My question is, so when will this Council put pedestrians and cyclists first in its Highways Design instead of the motorised vehicle?

**Supplementary Answer:**

We will agree to differ, I think. Unlike some Opposition parties, we the Conservatives, believe in carrot rather stick. We are working to make alternatives to the car more attractive and useable, rather than introducing anti car measures. Recent experience with Covid is that reducing congestion not only reduces frustration but also reduces idling and roadside pollution. We will continue to work to improve the cycling and walking infrastructure, and I am committed to that.

**33.5 Shirley Boyt asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:**

**Question**

I understand that the unusually wet weather has played havoc with the grass cutting schedule and I have received a number of complaints on this issue. I would like to be able to reassure residents that their road hasn't been missed, but the only information available is the weekly grass cutting schedule which will say something vague like 'we will continue cutting in Winnersh and commence cutting in Earley'. This is very frustrating.

When can Members and residents expect the 'comprehensive, up to date information on grounds maintenance, routes, performance, and customer feedback using new technology, as part of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Council, via the WBC website,' which was promised in November 2018?

**Answer**

Yes, the weather has played havoc and it has affected the grass cutting schedule. Work is

currently in progress with our IT department to look at ways for our customers to report and track progress of grounds maintenance issues directly on the website. The new system I am pleased to say should be in place by March of next year which is at the beginning of the next grass cutting season, so you should be able to get all of that technology to actually track and report things like that. So yes, the new system should be in place by March next year.

**Supplementary Question:**

I am pleased to hear that this system will be up and running next year because it has been promised for a very long time. I have looked back through various scrutiny meetings and found that it kept being promised, so that is an advantage.

Can you tell me how interactive it might be? Will residents be able to know which areas have been designated for rewilding, so they do not end up phoning their councillors, reporting that the verges have not been cut? Will they be able to suggest areas for rewilding, and will they be able to just interact a little more with it, rather than it being information only for them - Will it be a two-way process for the residents?

**Supplementary Answer:**

Yes, I think it will be a very interactive system that will be put in place, and it will answer all your questions that you have asked in your supplementary.

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

**Question**

This Council, as part of its environmental commitments, needs to ensure that whilst some open spaces like play parks and some roadside verges are regularly cut, it takes the opportunity to improve biodiversity in other public areas by turning them into native wildflower meadows. To ensure that the Council's grass cutting contractor doesn't accidentally cut these areas, and to mitigate any complaints from the public regarding perceived neglect of such areas, will this Council please adopt the blue heart plaque scheme, installing these plaques in wildflower sites and issuing a series of public communications to raise awareness?

**Answer**

That is an excellent suggestion. We are currently looking at ways we can improve biodiversity on Council maintained land. In particular, how we can work with our contractors to clearly identify areas of wildlife value and have clear communication with the public and contractor operatives to make sure these areas designated for biodiversity are understood and maintained appropriately. In some areas this identification may be in the form of a Blue Campaign plaque, but this may not be suitable for all the cases.

We recognise that a larger piece of work is required to get this across the whole Borough, and plan on working more closely with local community groups, towns, and parishes, who are already doing great work for biodiversity. This will enable us to build on local knowledge and help identify and improve wildlife in suitable areas. We will promote the Blue Campaign through communicating with towns and parishes and interested parties.

**Supplementary Question:**

I am really pleased with what you are saying there. Just to build on what Councillor Boyt was saying, we obviously have the opportunity as members of the public to report

problems. We have a system set up and it is more about actually making suggestions, so it will be good if residents can actually go through the Council website and have an easy-to-use function to do that. Can I just have your assurance that there is going to be a very easy process for residents to request the Blue Heart Campaign, and to suggest areas for rewilding please?

**Supplementary Answer:**

You have my assurance.

**33.7 Caroline Smith asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:**

**Question**

In the last two years, children have left school without the usual rituals, parties, balls, and group farewells – what one might call rites of passage, and this is after a very unusual year or two of schooling. Whilst many will go on to university or college which will help support their mental health and wellbeing, my concern are those children left trying to find work in an economy recovering from Covid - what extra help are you providing to support young adults with both job seeking and their mental health over the next year?

**Answer**

These have been challenging years for many children and young people, who have had to endure changes in their modes of education, social isolations, examination results arrangements that sit outside of the norm, and they have done so with huge resilience.

However, for some these challenges have had a marked impact on their emotional wellbeing and mental health; and with the economic challenges that have arisen as a result of the pandemic, job search for young people leaving school is also more difficult.

The Council's NEET, I will explain that one, Not in Education, Employment or Training, in case you did not know, the Prevention Team have worked closely with schools to identify young people who are considered at high risk of becoming NEET at the end of the academic year. These young people will be contacted by a qualified adviser over the coming months and offered support to help them identify their career goals and to create a detailed action plan to support them to achieve this.

The team has been working closely with the Economic Prosperity and Place Team and Jobcentre Plus to develop plans for an employment and skills hub in the town centre, which will provide a one stop shop for anyone looking for work in the whole of the Borough. Young people will be able to access expert advice and support to help them navigate their way into sustained employment or education provided by the NEET Prevention Team. Optalis supported employment, JCP Young Person's Claims Advisor and the national careers service are all accessible to them.

The hub will also provide access to local opportunity providers including colleges, training providers and recruiting employers. Access to computers and the internet will be available to support independent job search. We are finalising our search for premises, but it is hoped that the hub will be open before the end of the year.

**Supplementary Question:**

You mention them picking up children at risk, at school, but what happens when they have left school, and it happens during their job search? Secondly, are you envisaging a bigger

budget to help cover what I foresee as quite a few mental health problems?

**Supplementary Answer:**

The NEET Prevention Team have confirmed that all young people who are eligible for a guaranteed offer of education or training, have received one, and will support those who have not yet received an offer, or who have rejected it, to progress into employment or training.

In addition the Council is part of the national Kickstart programme which offers six month's paid work experience to young people, that is aged 16 to 25, which I think answers your post school question, who are unemployed and we currently have less than thirteen young people on placements throughout the Directorates, and we have more vacancies that we are identifying in the pipeline.

In respect of mental wellbeing support available to children and young people in Wokingham, a range of actions have been taken by WBC and the partners which aim to support and respond to children and young people's needs at the earliest possible opportunity, including extending funding for existing services such as ARC youth counselling, the continued commissioning of the online counselling offer which launched on 1st July 2020 for young people aged 11- 18.

We are undertaking a review of the way that we deliver emotional health and wellbeing support to children and young people across Wokingham and proposing a series of changes that we think will improve the service offer and ensure children receive the right support at the earliest opportunity. We are working with the Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust to provide Tier 2 primary health and mental health services in Wokingham, and a small team of primary health mental health practitioners will be co-located with Children's Services.

**34. MINUTES OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS AND WARD MATTERS**

**34.1 Rachel Burgess asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:**

**Question:**

At the top of Oak Avenue, which is the new road running through the new Keep Hatch Estate, Keep Hatch Gardens, there is a stretch where the Binfield Road has no pavement to link pedestrians between that new estate and the Carina Drive Estate, and quite large residential areas beyond. There is a clear desire line there. You can see the verge is worn with pedestrian footmarks, but a proper pavement would obviously be much more suitable and safer. I have been asking officers about this for about a year now with no noticeable progress, so could I ask the Executive Member to commit to looking into, and progressing this issue, to promote more walking and active travel in Norreys?

**Answer:**

Yes of course Rachel, and if you would not mind sending me the email that you sent the Officers, I will make sure that you get an answer.

**34.2 Stephen Conway asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:**

**Question;**

My question is for the Executive Member for Highways and Transport. She will be aware that I have requested a pedestrian crossing on the Wargrave Road in Twyford, south of the A4 roundabout to enable pupils walking to and from Piggott Senior School to make their journeys more safely. Will she undertake to do all she can to expedite the installation of this crossing?

**Answer:**

Yes, I will look into it.

**35. STATEMENTS BY THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL, EXECUTIVE MEMBERS, AND DEPUTY EXECUTIVE MEMBERS**

Due to time constraints this item was not considered.

**36. STATEMENTS FROM COUNCIL OWNED COMPANIES**

Due to time constraints this item was not considered.

**37. MOTIONS**

**37.1 Motion 458 submitted by Gregor Murray**

Due to time constraints this item was not considered.

**37.2 Motion 459 submitted by Shirley Boyt**

Due to time constraints this item was not considered.

**37.3 Motion 460 submitted by Clive Jones**

Due to time constraints this item was not considered.

**37.4 Motion 461 submitted by Ian Shenton**

Due to time constraints this item was not considered.