



# WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

A Meeting of the **COUNCIL** will be held in the Council Chamber - Civic Offices, Shute End, Wokingham RG40 1BN on **THURSDAY 23 SEPTEMBER 2021 AT 7.30 PM**

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

Susan Parsonage  
Chief Executive  
Published on 15 September 2021

**Note:** Although members of the public are entitled to attend the meeting in person, space is very limited due to the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic. You can however participate in this meeting virtually, in line with the Council's Constitution. If you wish to participate either in person or virtually via Microsoft Teams please contact Democratic Services. The meeting can also be watched live using the following link: <https://youtu.be/weA62HfLRvc>

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

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# WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

## Our Vision

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

### Enriching Lives

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

### Safe, Strong, Communities

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

### A Clean and Green Borough

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

### Right Homes, Right Places

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

### Keeping the Borough Moving

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

### Changing the Way We Work for You

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

To: The Members of Wokingham Borough Council

ITEM NO.	WARD	SUBJECT	PAGE NO.
35.		<b>APOLOGIES</b> To receive any apologies for absence	
36.		<b>MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING</b> To confirm the Minutes of the Council Meeting held on 22 July 2021.	17 - 42
37.		<b>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</b> To receive any declarations of interest	
38.		<b>MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS</b> To receive any announcements by the Mayor	
39.		<b>PUBLIC QUESTION TIME</b> To answer any public questions  A period of 30 minutes will be allowed for members of the public to ask questions submitted under notice.  The Council welcomes questions from members of the public about the work of the Council  Subject to meeting certain timescales, questions can relate to general issues concerned with the work of the Council or an item which is on the Agenda for this meeting. For full details of the procedure for submitting questions please contact the Democratic Services Section on the numbers given below or go to <a href="http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/publicquestions">www.wokingham.gov.uk/publicquestions</a>	
39.1	None Specific	Helen Palmer has asked the Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions the following question:  <b>Question</b> Please will Wokingham Council declare its support for the Climate and Ecological Emergency Bill.  Drafted by scientists, legal experts, ecological economists and environmentalists, the CEE Bill is designed specifically to reverse the climate and ecological breakdown we are facing. The Bill requires the UK to take responsibility for its fair share of greenhouse gas emissions, to actively restore biodiverse habitats, and to stop damaging our natural world through the production, transportation and	

disposal of the goods we consume. In this Bill, the nature emergency is tackled shoulder to shoulder with the climate crisis via an urgent, joined up, whole of government approach.

Due for its second reading next month, the Bill now has support of 115 MPs across 8 political parties and 103 Councils. Will Wokingham Borough become the 104th Council to support the CEE Bill?

39.2 None Specific

Philip Meadowcroft has asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

**Question**

Will the Leader of the Council please describe in precise detail the Council's declared policy, and how it duly guides its Members, on the use of private emails (rather than their official wokingham.gov.uk email addresses) when communicating to any individual, group, or media on matters connected with the Member's status as elected Councillors?

39.3 None Specific

Daniela Esposito has asked the Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions the following question:

**Question**

Wokingham BC declared a climate emergency in 2019. Please could the Council confirm that this declaration applied to both Wokingham Borough and to the Council itself?

40.

**PETITIONS**

To receive any petitions which Members or members of the public wish to present.

41. None Specific

**TENANTS' CHARTER - MODERNISING THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE IN WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL - 2 YEAR ON UPDATE**

[A period of 30 minutes will be allowed for Members to debate this item]

43 - 90

To receive an update report from the Involved Tenants on the progress of the Tenants' Charter and the achievements of the Involved Tenants Partnership working over the past year.

**RECOMMENDATION** That as requested by the Involved Tenants, Council:

- 1) consider the aspirations outlined in the Tenants Charter and continue to work in

partnership with the Involved Tenants to achieve these;

- 2) support the Involved Tenants as they begin to look at updating the full Tenants Charter to better suit the current projects, aims and aspirations of the partnership. The Involved Tenants are requesting this as so much has changed in the past year due to the pandemic and they would like to reflect this in areas that are overachieving and those that require further support.

42. Barkham

**PROPOSED SOLAR FARM - BARKHAM**

91 - 102

[A period of 30 minutes will be allowed for Members to debate this item]

To consider a recommendation from the Executive in relation to the commencement of a solar farm in Barkham.

**RECOMMENDATION** That, subject to securing the necessary planning consents, Executive asks Council to:

- 1) recommend the capital expenditure of the £20,283,000 funded from borrowing as previously set out in the Medium Term Financial Plan;
- 2) approve delegation of decisions around the final extent and configuration of the Solar Farm to the Deputy Chief Executive (S151 Finance Officer) in conjunction with the Lead Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions where scheme amendments will not result in the average annual net income after capital financing costs falling below £200k;
- 3) note the estimated net income (after running costs and capital financing costs) of £12.0m over 25 years (equal to £480k per year on average) will be introduced into the Councils annual budget using an equalisation reserve;
- 4) approve commencement of the Solar Farm at Barkham.

43. None Specific

**TREASURY MANAGEMENT OUTTURN 2020-21**

103 - 112

[A period of 30 minutes will be allowed for Members to debate this item]

To consider the Treasury Management Outturn report for the 2020-21 financial year as recommended by the Audit Committee.

**RECOMMENDATION** That Council is asked to note:

- 1) the Treasury Management Outturn Report 2020-21 which was agreed at Audit Committee on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2021;
- 2) that all approved indicators set out in the Treasury Management Strategy have been adhered to;
- 3) the contents of "Table A", as set out in the report, which shows the net benefit per council tax band D equivalent, from the income generated less the financing costs on all borrowing to date equates to £10.22 per band D for 2020/21. This credit provides income to the Council to invest in its priority services. This net benefit has increased from the £7.20 benefit estimated in the treasury mid-year report;
- 4) that the total external general fund debt is £458m, which reduces to £121m after taking into account cash balances (net indebtedness);
- 5) that although the Council is taking the opportunity of new borrowing at low interest rates in 2020/21, external debt is expected to reduce to c£350m by March 2022 as a result of repayment of legacy debt on maturity;
- 6) the Council's realisable asset value of approximately £400m, of which its commercial assets are estimated at approximately £240m.

44.

**MEMBER QUESTION TIME**

To answer any member questions

A period of 30 minutes will be allowed for Members to ask questions submitted under Notice

Any questions not dealt with within the allotted time

will be dealt with in a written reply

44.1 None Specific Rachel Bishop-Firth has asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

**Question**

Parents of school aged children were pleased to see the law change on school uniform in April when the Education (Guidance about Costs of School Uniforms) Act passed. The new law recognises that leaving school uniform decisions solely to governing bodies did not always work in the best interests of less well-off families, who were often left struggling to pay for school uniforms and basic equipment.

We know that this is a real problem for lower income families in Wokingham. Councillors are hearing about some very high basic uniform costs, and in addition to these, schools have IT requirements. State schools can require children to have, for example, an ipad brand tablet and this is happening in Wokingham.

The Department for Education will now be publishing guidance about the costs aspects of school uniform policies. Will the Council commit to taking the proactive stance that other Councils have done to support all state schools in the Borough in adopting policies which mean that uniform and other education costs are kept truly affordable for all families?

44.2 None Specific Norman Jorgensen has asked the Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions the following question:

**Question**

Could you provide an update on plans to put in place local deliberative processes that will bring our residents into the conversation on how we tackle climate change?

44.3 None Specific Jackie Rance has asked the Executive Member for Business and Economic Development the following question:

**Question**

I was really pleased that the Planning Committee passed the application for Shinfield Studios in July. Could you tell me what conversations the Council is having with the Studios to ensure that there are local employment and skills development opportunities?

- 44.4 None Specific Sam Akhtar has asked the Executive Member for Business and Economic Development the following question:
- Question**  
The pandemic has hit hard for many people, not least in the area of jobs. Can you tell me what plans the Council has to support those who are out of work and to bring new jobs into Wokingham Borough?
- 44.5 None Specific Anne Chadwick has asked the Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions the following question:
- Question**  
What is the Council doing to close the gap in the Climate Emergency Action Plan?
- 44.6 None Specific Michael Firmager has asked the Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions the following question:
- Question**  
A solar farm might be grabbing the headlines, but the Council has numerous other assets at its disposal to install energy generating measures on, car parks, schools, offices, social housing, leisure centres. What has been done to utilise these assets in tackling climate change?
- 44.7 None Specific Imogen Shepherd-DuBey has asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:
- Question**  
I understand that Wokingham Borough Council organises 'Public Funerals', but I am unclear on exactly what that means.
- Please can you explain to me what the process or what happens to someone's remains when someone dies without any family members to organise a funeral for them?
- 44.8 None Specific Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey has asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question:
- Question**  
When will the examination in public for the local plan; if that is not yet available when will the local plan come to the Borough Council for approval?

44.9 None Specific

Jim Frewin has asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

**Question**

As a parent I remember the stress of going back to school after summer holidays. I believe Covid will have increased this stress. For those who have children with special educational needs, the stress is even more significant given the planning and preparation required to ensure the children are emotionally prepared for the back to school. As a Council we gave some parents less than 48 hours' notice of the detail of their school transport changes. Some parents were having to chase the day before to get details.

A number of residents have raised their concerns and distress about these very late changes. I tried to contact the relevant Executive members and Senior Officers. I am still waiting for some to respond. I thank those who did.

I understand this process is split across Service areas and Executive members. My question is what happened in this year's Special Education Needs school transport process to cause so much upset and distress to these children and their families?

44.10 Barkham

Carl Doran has asked the Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions the following question:

**Question**

The Barkham Farms solar farm received planning permission earlier this month.

As a member of the Planning Committee, I spoke in favour of the application and was pleased to vote for it.

The Climate Emergency Action Plan, which he will know I have long derided as ineffective, inaccurate and unacceptable, states that target RE12.1 for this specific solar farm project is 7,900 tons of carbon saved per year. That's 197,500 tons of carbon over 25 years.

However, it was stated in the planning application that this solar farm would realise a carbon saving of 92,000 tons over 25 years. That's over 100,000 tons less than the planned target.

Why have you missed this target by more than half?

44.11 South Lake

Laura Blumenthal has asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

**Question**

Residents in my ward are concerned about speeding on Woodlands Avenue. The Council said it would look into installing a VAS sign. Please can you let me know how progress on this is going?

45.

**MINUTES OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS AND WARD MATTERS**

A period of 20 minutes will be allowed for Members to ask questions in relation to the latest circulated volume of Minutes of Meetings and Ward Matters

46.

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

To receive any statements by the Leader of the Council, Executive Members, and Deputy Executive Members.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 4.2.23 the total time allocated to this item shall not exceed 20 minutes, and no Member shall speak for more than 5 minutes

47.

**STATEMENT FROM COUNCIL OWNED COMPANIES**

To receive any statements from Directors of Council Owned Companies.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 4.2.24 the total time allocated to this item shall not exceed 10 minutes, and no Director, except with the consent of Council, shall speak for more than 3 minutes.

48.

**MOTIONS**

To consider any motions

In accordance with Procedure Rule 4.2.11.2 a maximum period of 30 minutes will be allowed for each Motion to be moved, seconded and debated, including dealing with any amendments. At the expiry of the 30-minute period debate will cease immediately, the mover of the Motion or amendment will have the right of reply before the Motion or amendment is put to the vote

48.1 None Specific

**Motion 462 submitted by Shirley Boyt**

This Council aspires to a 70% recycling rate by 2030 and resolves to make it easier for every resident to recycle at every opportunity whether at home or on the move:

1. by replacing all litter bins in the Borough with dual litter and recycling bins commencing with those in local town centres, shopping parades and parks.
2. to provide dual litter and recycling bins on popular walking routes to schools in places not covered in 1 above.

48.2 None Specific

**Motion 463 submitted by Gregor Murray**

Building on our commitment to planting 250,000 new trees, this Council commits to achieving 'Tree Cities of the World' status for our Borough as part of the creation of a Borough wide Tree Strategy.

This will be done by:

- 1) Maintaining clear responsibility within the Council for the care of trees across our Borough.
- 2) Agreeing a policy for the care and management of our forests and trees across the Borough. This must include standards for tree care, where and when they apply and penalties for non-compliance.
- 3) Working with external partners to create and maintain an inventory of the local tree resource so that effective long-term planning for planting, care and removal can be established.
- 4) Setting aside an annual budget for the implementation of the tree management strategy and management plan.
- 5) Holding an annual celebration of our Borough's trees and acknowledge the residents schools, charities and Council staff that contribute to our city tree programme.
- 6) Creating a 'Garden Forest' program to allow residents the opportunity to plant some of our 250,000 new tree commitment in their own gardens.
- 7) Developing a continuous education process aimed at informing residents of the importance of trees, tree planting and tree protection and how best to care for the trees in their own gardens and communities.
- 8) Committing to planting a Covid19 memorial wood

within the Borough, of native trees, as a long-lasting memorial to those who have lost their lives during the 2020-21 Pandemic.

Once the above conditions are met an application for Tree Cities of the World status should be made as soon as possible.

Further information on the Tree Cities of the World status and benefits can be found at

[www.treecitiesoftheworld.org](http://www.treecitiesoftheworld.org)

48.3 None Specific

**Motion 464 submitted by Chris Bowring**

This Council notes that Slough Borough Council has issued a Section 114 notice, meaning that it does not have enough money to meet its spending plans for the year. As such, Slough cannot commit to any new spending, and can only pay for its statutory services.

This Council further notes that Wokingham Borough Council is operating from a healthy financial position, with a prudent level of reserves for extraordinary situations and sensible investments made to generate an income for services.

This Council calls on the Executive to maintain its policies of keeping the Council's balances at adequate levels to fund services and make debt repayments and making investments in our communities that will provide funding for Council services.

Furthermore, this Council commits to ensuring that it is regularly publicising the state of the Council's finances to local residents, to provide reassurance that Council Taxpayers' money is safe in the Council's hands.

48.4 None Specific

**Motion 465 submitted by Ian Shenton**

This Council formally declares an ecological emergency and will:

1. Address ecological issues alongside climate emergency actions and ensure that opportunities to gain co-benefits from addressing both the climate and ecological emergencies are maximised.
2. Add ecological implications alongside those for climate in committee and Council reports.

3. Ensure the delivery of biodiversity and environmental enhancements through our planning policy and development control functions by providing guidance through a biodiversity supplementary planning document.
4. Strive to enable the development of a 20% mandatory biodiversity net gain policy for Wokingham through the new local plan.
5. Create a Developing Nature Toolkit and direct developers to use the toolkit to assist them in demonstrating a net gain in biodiversity, to be used from the very outset of planning new developments, and ideally at the time of selecting sites to acquire for development.
6. Re-establish the Wokingham Biodiversity Forum to allow the Council to collaborate effectively with partners and the wider community.
7. Where possible, embed ecological initiatives within all Council work areas, including Covid-19 recovery projects and programmes.
8. Promote woodland planting and rewilding in the right places and with the right species, peatland restoration, natural flood management, wild flower meadows, and habitat creation and restoration.
9. Work with local, county, regional and national partners to increase wildlife habitats, green infrastructure and natural capital in Wokingham Borough ensuring robust connectivity between them.
10. Manage Council services, buildings and land in a biodiversity-friendly manner, including by reviewing the use of harmful chemicals, such as pesticides and taking opportunities to create new wildlife habitats and corridors.
11. Provide advice for local communities and businesses on how to incorporate biodiversity, green infrastructure and natural capital into Neighbourhood Plans and other initiatives.
12. Encourage residents to take biodiversity measures in their own homes by, for example, wildlife gardening and home composting.
13. Working collaboratively with the Berkshire Local

Nature Partnership, Wokingham Biodiversity Forum, a cross party working group and other stakeholders, produce a local nature recovery strategy and associated action plan with an annual progress report to full Council.

48.5 None Specific

**Motion 466 submitted by Clive Jones**

There needs to be a fundamental change in how we generate and consume energy in all aspects of our lives. Both electricity generation and distribution are undergoing rapid evolution, in both shape and scale. The distribution grid, must now cope with power flows in both directions. In scale, electrification of heat and transport will require a quadrupling of electricity capacity. Local, community-based energy schemes can make a significant contribution to addressing both issues and encourage a sense of local empowerment to tackle climate change.

Community schemes encourage local generation and storage to match local demand thus relieving pressure on the grid. Local schemes would be given new impetus and be able to contribute more renewable energy if local people could buy their electricity directly from local suppliers. But the disproportionate cost of meeting regulatory approvals makes it impossible to be a local energy supplier at a local scale and so, under the current system, this local energy gets sold back to the central grid.

The Local Electricity Bill is a private members' bill with cross-party support that was introduced unopposed in June 2020. If this Bill was passed in Parliament it would give the energy regulator, OFGEM, a duty to create a Right to Local Supply. This would enable local community energy groups to achieve their vision of supplying generated energy back to the local area, help us as a Council to meet our carbon reduction aspirations for the Borough, and also bring multiple benefits to the local community. It is supported by many stakeholders, local authorities, and town Councils and currently has the backing of 208 MPs.

Council Agrees to:

1. Resolve to support the Bill.
2. Authorise the Leader to contact our MPs to discuss their support for the Bill and how they can enable its passage into law.

3. Authorise the Chief Executive to write to the Minister of State for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy, supporting the aims of the Bill and asking for these aims to be taken into account in the forthcoming Energy White Paper.

#### **CONTACT OFFICER**

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**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.  <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.  <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.  <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 Rachelle 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.

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Tenants Charter – Modernising the Customer Experience in Wokingham Borough Council – 2 Year on Update Report</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	Council on 23 September 2021
<b>WARD</b>	None specific
<b>LEAD VOLUNTEER</b>	Steve Bowers – Chairperson of the Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel (Involved Tenant Volunteer)

## **OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY**

In September 2020, the Involved Tenants came to Full Council to outline the benefits to the community and outcomes from the Tenants Charter and Involved Tenants Partnership working has had on the experience of council housing tenants using services.

This report looks back on the past year from September 2020 to August 2021 to again outline the benefits to the Community and positive outcomes that the Tenants Charter and Involved Tenants Partnership working has had on the experience of council housing tenants using services. This report also highlights the achievements of this partnership working, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, and future aspirations the Involved Tenants would like to achieve.

Please see the attached report – Tenant Charter – 2 Years on – What have we achieved together.....so far? This sets out all that has been achieved in the last year in partnership with Wokingham Borough Council Housing Services.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The Involved Tenants would like to ask the Council to:

- 1) consider the aspirations outlined in the Tenants Charter and continue to work in partnership with the Involved Tenants to achieve these;
- 2) support the Involved Tenants as they begin to look at updating the full Tenants Charter to better suit the current projects, aims and aspirations of the partnership. The Involved Tenants are requesting this as so much has changed in the past year due to the pandemic and they would like to reflect this in areas that are overachieving and those that require further support.

## **SUMMARY OF REPORT**

The purpose of the report is to formally update the Council on the progress of the work, already completed over the last year, to achieve the aspirations of the Tenants Charter.

This report was developed by the Involved Tenants and has been subject to review and approval by the Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel.

*The charter sets out the views of Wokingham Borough Council's Involved Tenants on what is needed to modernise the customer experience and ensure continuous*

*improvement. It is intended as a series of aspirations, rather than demands, and to stimulate a broader discussion within the council as a corporate body.*

*There are ten key priorities of Wokingham Borough Council tenants in the modernisation of housing services which are detailed in the Tenants Charter:*

- 1. Tackling the stigma associated with being a council tenant*
- 2. Identifying future patterns of tenant need and demand*
- 3. Maximising the accessibility of council services*
- 4. Modernising tenant engagement techniques to increase active involvement*
- 5. Creating an easy 'friction-free' customer experience for tenants*
- 6. Giving tenants greater choice on who does repairs and when*
- 7. Responding to an ageing tenant population*
- 8. Helping tenants manage their personal finances more effectively*
- 9. Greater transparency regarding tenant health and safety inspection results*
- 10. Developing a protocol for the analysis and protection of tenant data*

The formal update report goes through each priority to outline the achievements this year whilst also including future aspirations of the Involved Tenants and ideas of how they would like to get involved in other areas. The Involved Tenants would appreciate any help and support to achieve these.

## **BACKGROUND**

Several factors make it timely to reflect on the future of housing services for council tenants:

- The emerging lessons and review from the Grenfell Tower disaster in 2016 – notably the need for a greater focus on health and safety, tenant involvement in refurbishment schemes and transparency over landlord decision-making.
- The government's Social Housing White Paper and recommendations provided within.
- The Housing Ombudsman Complaints Code changes that have come into effect and require changes to the Complaints Policy and processes.
- The emerging opportunities for digital transformation of service delivery and resident involvement in respect of increased efficiency and an improved tenant customer experience.
- Other social trends such as an ageing population, increasing demand for disability and social care support, increasing customer expectations (particularly amongst younger generations) and the rapid rise of social media and so on.
- The Covid-19 pandemic driving more services and activities online along with a change in the way services have had to be provided in the past year. Many of these changes will remain in place as we continue to be uncertain over an end to the pandemic.

We believe that the council and tenants need to respond to these issues by working together to plan for the modernisation of housing services over the next decade and beyond if:

- Current levels of satisfaction are to be maintained,
- Opportunities to increase efficiency are to be realised and
- Ideas to help the Council achieve Carbon Neutrality by 2030 a reality.

Where suppliers are named, this is for illustrative purposes and does not constitute an endorsement.

Some of the proposals can and have been implemented relatively easily, some will require additional funding, some will be reviewed in the next year and others will require corporate agreement by full council.

#### **List of Background Papers**

Tenants Charter – Modernising the customer experience in Wokingham Borough Council

Tenant Charter – 2 Years on – What have we achieved together.....so far?

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## The Tenants Charter – 2 Years on – the story so far....

### Introduction

Thank you to everyone who has been involved in the work of bringing this to fruition so far. The aim of this report is to highlight the work the Involved Tenants have achieved in partnership with Wokingham Borough Council Housing Service, Members of the Council and local stakeholders through their six working groups (RMG, TING, ILG, TISG, Communications Group and Chairs Group) and TLIP (Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel).

The Involved Tenants have achieved and progressed in a number of topics highlighted in the Tenants Charter. Even during the incredibly challenging year due to the unforeseen COVID-19 pandemic, the involved tenants have continued to work online via Microsoft teams to complete meetings, engage with internal and external stakeholders and produce recommendations for service improvements.

During the last year, the Involved Tenants have prioritised reviewing the regulatory standards, understanding the Housing White Paper, and keeping up to date with new policies being produced. This has allowed the groups to sustain the partnership and be engaged from initial discussions through to implementation.

#### Acronyms:

- WBC – Wokingham Borough Council
- RMG – Involved Tenants Repairs and Maintenance Group
- TING – Tenant Involvement Neighbourhoods Group (formally NCG – Neighbourhoods and Communities Group).
- ILG – Involved Tenants Independent Living Group (Age Specific)
- TISG – Tenant Involvement Strategy Group
- TLIP – Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel
- TPAS – Tenants Participation Advisory Service
- ARCH - Association of Retained Council Housing Tenants Group
- STAR – Survey of Tenants and Residents

### 1. Review of Tackling the stigma associated with being a council tenant

Involved Tenants work hard to break down barriers between themselves as Tenants and anyone who stigmatises them because they live in Social Housing. They do this by:

- Building up partnerships,
- Proving that they have a voice,
- Showing they are professional at what they do,
- Showing they can work together, in partnership, and not against the Council, and
- Aiming to improve and bring in new services to help Tenants everywhere.

#### ACHIEVEMENTS

- **ARCH (Association of Retained Council Housing) Tenants Group** – An Involved Tenant sits on this group and attends meetings online via Microsoft team. ARCH is a National Group – <http://www.arch-housing.org.uk/about.aspx>
  - o See the Person Campaign – they have offered to come to Wokingham Borough Council to introduce the work of the campaign to all Neighbourhoods and Communities staff. This is to be a presentation in partnership with the involved tenants to provide more understanding to staff regarding stigma- <https://seetheperson.org/>. This was due to occur at the June 2021 ‘neighbourhoods and communities’ meeting, this was postponed due to Surge Testing, but we are in contact to organise this going ahead at a future meeting.

- **Involved Tenant Chosen Charities**
  - o Charities we have supported in the past have included: Thames Valley Air Ambulance, Wokingham in Need, First Days, Diana Brimblecombe Animal Rescue Centre, Help for Heroes, and the Poppy Factory.
  - o The Involved Tenants have continued to support charities with charity 'online' coffee mornings.
  
- **Involved Tenants work in Partnership with various groups including:**
  - o Active Groups to help support Tenants across the Borough – such as the Vulnerable Persons (Syrian Refugees) Steering Group and Local Neighbourhood Action Groups (Sonning, Remenham, Hurst, Twyford, Ruscombe, Wargrave, Finchampstead and Wokingham).
  
- **Communications, Engagement and Marketing**
  - o The language that Wokingham Borough Council Staff and volunteers use has been recommended by the Involved Tenants with an emphasis on the use of 'Neighbourhoods and Communities' rather than estates and schemes.
    - The Involved Tenant Communications Group continues to approve all letters going out to more than 10 households. This provides an opportunity for the group to remind staff about the language used, proofread and check for ease of reading.
  - o The Involved Tenants have created a Partnership with Communications, Engagement and Marketing team within Wokingham Borough Council.
  - o Housing Matters:
    - Working in Partnership with the Communications, Engagement and Marketing Team of Wokingham Borough Council – sharing articles with the Borough News, sharing ideas on social media, and working on joint articles to share in all Medias.
    - Working in Partnership with the Local Housing Companies teams to make the magazine relevant to all tenants.
    - The Magazine goes to Tenants of the Wokingham Borough Council, Loddon Homes and BerryBrook Homes along with Councillors, Parish Councillors and Libraries across the Borough.
    - Spring Edition 2021 included an article 'What is and What is not and Involved tenant' which was completed in response to discussions about a stigma of being an Involved Tenant. An extract of this article is shown below:

## What is a Tenant Volunteer, what does it involve and how do I become one?

### Definition of Volunteering

The definition of volunteering that the Wokingham Borough Council Tenant Volunteers have adopted is as follows:

We define volunteering as any activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment and communities. Central to this definition is the fact that volunteering must be a choice freely made by each individual.

This can include formal and informal volunteering across the Housing Service as well as wider community participation and social action. Everyone has the right to volunteer and volunteering can have significant benefits for individuals.

By volunteering to become a Tenant Volunteer and working in partnership with Wokingham Borough Council you can help improve the Housing Service.

You will also learn how the Council works and begin to see the bigger picture and how complicated things can be.

Volunteering can be incredibly rewarding and some of the benefits of being involved are:

- The chance to meet new people
- Social opportunities
- Understanding what is going on in your community and having a positive input
- Gain new skills through training

with the Annual Report.

The first three groups are open to all tenants from Wokingham Borough Council housing and the Local Housing Companies (Loddon Homes and Berry Brook Homes).

### The Independent Living Group - Sheltered Housing

This group is made up of Tenant Volunteers who live in one of the 8 sheltered housing properties in the Borough. They meet to discuss the current and future services for this group of tenants.

They would like Tenants who live in the following properties to volunteer and be part of this group, thus ensuring that a full cross section of the Tenants living in these properties can have their own voice:

Meachen Court, Palmer Court, Sale Garden Cottages, Dickens Court, Harman Court, Polehampton Court,

- **Training**
  - o The Involved Tenants and Tenancy Involvement Team attended a TPAS training course regarding the 'value of Tenant Involvement' which included discussions on tackling the stigma of being a council tenant as well as the stigma of being an Involved Tenant.
  - o Council and staff members are now suggesting trainings' that Involved Tenants can attend along with them. In the past year, these have included Legionella, Fire Safety and Asbestos training.

- **Maximising the appearance of Neighbourhoods**
  - o The Involved Tenants have been considering the appearance of Neighbourhoods, which was identified as an area of concern in the STAR satisfaction survey. Improving neighbourhoods reduces the stigma of living in council housing.
  - o TLIP had an input into the Grovelands Park Project. Discussion was had on the look of the new units being developed, to make them more attractive to Tenants and their Neighbours. Additionally TLIP have received regular reports on this project.
- **Tenant Involvement Strategy Group**
  - o The TISG have developed a Tenant Involvement Strategy Action Plan with links to stigma and maximising accessibility of council housing services.
  - o The TISG members have attended the other Involved Tenant groups and have identified, that although a large amount of progress has been made regarding stigma, there is a stigma of being an Involved Tenant and a stigma of being a sheltered scheme tenant.

## **FUTURE ASPIRATIONS**

- o We want to continue to work in partnership with as many organisations, stakeholders, partners, contractors, staff, and Wokingham Borough Council to break down barriers and continue to grow and evolve.
- o We want to investigate Stigma further, working with the See the Person campaign and looking at papers/research, such as 'It's not okay – Chartered Institute of Housing and See the Person Campaign, 2020', that have already been produced on Stigma. This will help us when reviewing the Tenants Charter.
- o The TISG have identified that being an Involved Tenant and being a Sheltered Scheme Tenant also holds a stigma, due to this, the Involved Tenants want to update this aspiration in the Tenants Charter to reflect these additional stigmas.

## **2. Review of Identifying future patterns of tenant need and demand**

### **ACHIEVEMENTS**

- **STAR Satisfaction Survey**
  - o The letter accompanying the survey was written by the Involved Tenants and all survey questions were agreed with the Involved Tenants.
  - o The STAR Satisfaction survey went out to all Tenant households to provide an opportunity for tenants to express their opinions/experiences of the Housing Service. The STAR Satisfaction survey results were then reviewed with every Involved Tenant Group to provide recommendations to the service.
- **Housing Ombudsman Self-Assessment of Complaints Policy and Processes**
  - o The Housing Ombudsman Self-Assessment and Complaints Code has resulted in a number of changes to the Housing Complaints Policy. The Involved Tenants have been involved through the assessment and engaged in consultation on changes.
  - o The Involved Tenants are currently working with the Tenant Involvement team to set up a Designated Tenant Complaints Panel to replace the current 'stage 2' in the complaints process. This panel will also look at complaints patterns and performance frameworks to identify areas of concern and make recommendations to the service when identified.
  - o The Involved Tenants now have an Involved Tenant sitting on the National Residents Panel for the Housing Ombudsman Service. They report back to the chairs group meetings on the meetings they attend and national patterns in housing complaints.

- **Satisfaction Surveys and Focus Groups**
  - o The Involved Tenants have been working with the Tenant Involvement Team to create a suite of surveys for all service areas. The aim of this is to provide more engagement with Tenants and allow them the ability to talk to the council about their needs and wants.
  - o The Involved Tenants have also been included in the initial setting up of focus groups and documents which the Tenant Involvement team will begin to implement in the next few months.
  
- **Technology**
  - o There has been Sustainable technology encouragement from the Involved Tenants. The Independent Living Group have met with the Asset Management team where the Service Manager came to discuss the use of solar panels on sheltered scheme properties.
  - o 6 Yeosfield – Project to increase the energy efficiency of the property. Solar panels, Air Source Heat Pump and insulation were installed. A video Walkthrough was produced for the March TLIP meeting and is available to be shared at request.
  - o USB charging points – The involved tenants have been involved in discussions regarding USB charging points for Grovelands, New Builds and voids properties.

### **FUTURE ASPIRATIONS**

- We would like to become more involved in the upcoming lettings policy and continue our work on the pet policy and setting up the Designated Complaints Panel.
- We would like to become more involved in scrutinising satisfaction surveys as more adhoc surveys are set up, govmetric data is in place for the Housing teams to use and discovering the opinions of neighbourhood-based focus groups that we have been helping to set up the admin for. The more surveys the teams are able and capable of setting up, the more information and opinions from different tenants/households we will be able to look at and make recommendations based on these.
- The TISG would like support from other involved tenants, WBC staff and the partnership to help review the Tenants Charter going forward and investigating future patterns of tenant need and demand. This will be possible with further, more in-depth, reviews of the 2021 STAR survey results and further involvement in the creation of a suite of focused surveys to tenants once they have used a Housing service.

### **3. Review of Maximising the accessibility of council services**

#### **ACHIEVEMENTS**

- **Involved Tenants Meeting Accessibility**
  - o All Involved Tenants, who wish too, are online and meeting regularly using Microsoft Teams for formal meetings, training and engaging with Wokingham Borough Council Staff. The Involved Tenants have access to IT equipment and support from Tri-Computers to aid with their access into meeting.
  - o An Involved Tenant, who is a member of the Repairs and Maintenance Group, attends weekly online Voids Meetings and regular contractors' meetings through Microsoft Teams during the pandemic.
  - o An Involved Tenant attends the Housing Ombudsman complaints panel which is currently online during the pandemic.
  - o We have an Involved Tenant regularly attending Loddon Homes Board Meetings (as a Non-Executive Director) and Registered Provider Partnership meetings through Microsoft Teams
  - o The Tenant Involvement team are regularly approached by internal and external people who would like to attend Involved Tenant meetings

- **Strategy Group Action Plan**

- Accessibility of services was a key focus of the Tenant Involvement Strategy Group Action Plan with links to maximising accessibility to council services for all.
- The Strategy Group have also been consulted on the new Housing Complaints policy which will be implemented at a later date, the policy includes a Reasonable Adjustments policy to make sure that all tenants can access the complaints process. The group have made very productive suggestions to the team.

- **Customer Journey**

- The Involved Tenants regularly give feedback on what they have experienced when using a service, what went well and what could be improved in the future. This is important as it helps to shape process from the customer's point of view.
- The Involved Tenants have been considering the Housing White Paper and STAR survey results and the focus on ease of the customer journey when using the service. The Involved Tenants are being consulted on processes, focus groups, surveys regarding the customer journey and initial contact (letter sign offs, templates for complaints. Etc.).
- The Involved Tenants were invited to an initial consultation regarding the Wokingham Borough Council Equality Policy, many attended and took part in discussions.

**FUTURE ASPIRATIONS**

- Due to Covid restrictions, there have been increased challenges in 'Maximising the accessibility to council services' as services became accessible online considerably earlier than was expected. This has meant that several the aspirations and aims for accessibility increasing in council services require re-assessment to better suited aims in the upcoming Tenants Charter amendments.
- We are already reviewing all letters coming from the Housing to more than 10 tenants and would like support in continuing this to ensure letters are proofread and written in plain English. This is something that is important to all Tenants, and we are happy to help as much as we can.
- We would like to continue to be consulted on the Customer Journey, getting more involved in this in the next year to make sure it is accessible to all. We would like to be involved in the standardisation of the formatting and language of documents that are sent out from the Council – ensuring that all Tenants and Residents can receive, understand, and open all documents. We would also like to work more closely with the Housing Assistants to make sure that consistent information is given at the first stage (right first time) when tenants call in.
- We would like to make sure that Tenants and Residents are given as many options for engagement as possible, whether that is in person or online, therefore, the involved tenants will be continuing with online meetings and thinking about 'hybrid meetings' into the next year.

**4. Review of Modernising tenant engagement techniques to increase active involvement**

**ACHIEVEMENTS**

- **Involved Tenant Engagement**

- All Involved Tenants, who wish too, are now online and meeting regularly using Microsoft Teams – this includes formal meetings as well as training sessions
- In the last financial year (April 2020 to April 2021), the involved tenants have volunteered 2,868 hours, which is the equivalent to nearly 1.5 full time staff members over the same period!
- Since the beginning of the first lockdown in March 2020, the Involved Tenants have volunteered 3,503 hours, which is the equivalent to nearly 2 full time staff members in the same period, highlighting their dedication in volunteering and assisting the service.

- The Involved Tenant Communications Group have proofread large amounts of letters, sometimes checking groups of 7 letters at a time and within tight timescales to aid the service and make the ways in which the service engage with tenants clear.
- The development of the Involved Tenants Volunteer Policy will modernise tenant engagement and brings a clearer process to becoming an Involved Tenant. This is a living document and will be reviewed regularly.
- A question was placed in the STAR survey asking, 'would you like to become an Involved Tenant?' There were a number of interested tenants who are now going through the process to become formal volunteers.

- **Involved Tenant Training**

- TPAS training on the Value of Tenant Involvement with links to the Housing white paper, Stigma and Maximising tenant involvement etc.
- Housemark Training where the Involved Tenants attended the '10 days of data' training via Microsoft Teams.
- The Involved Tenants attended Equality Training which was WBC led.

- **Other Engagement Opportunities and Meetings**

- Voids Meetings are attended weekly throughout the year by an Involved Tenant.
- The Complaints, Compensation and Compliments Policy – The Involved Tenants have been a part of the complaints policy review process by leading on this project through proof reading and suggesting changes to the wording of the document to make it more user friendly.
- Garage Project – The garage project was the demolition of outdated garages in Bayley, Targett, Wilson and Goddard Courts in Winnersh and the regeneration of these areas into parking spaces which are better suited to the size of modern cars. Involved Tenants made decisions with the Council. The Involved Tenants made the decisions on how Tenants / those effected were to be consulted, all letters sent to Tenants / users were reviewed by the Involved Tenants. Involved Tenants sat on the panel to interview the contractor. An article was produced in Housing Matters Spring 2021, page 43, on this project and is available upon request.
- The formation of a Designated Tenants Complaints Panel – The Involved Tenants are currently putting together a code of Conduct for this panel. The panel will consider complaints which the tenants feel that the Council/Landlord have not dealt with to their satisfaction. The Panel will make recommendations to both the Tenant and Council on the outcome of their decision.
- Regulatory Standards Review with Housemark – The Involved Tenants reviewed the standards with Housemark, making recommendations to the service and considering these against the housing White Paper.

**FUTURE ASPIRATIONS**

- We have noted that there may be a challenge in recruiting new Involved Tenants and are looking at formalising the process to make this clearer to those interested. Unfortunately, a number of those interested decided they were no longer wanted to formally volunteer once they received more information and the observers form. This process is now under review regarding the response times to those interested in becoming an Involved tenant.
- We would like to become more involved with local charities and sponsoring their events in the later part of 2021, whilst we await involvement in the 2022 community Fundays. Unfortunately, the Community Fundays have been put on hold for 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## 5. Review of Creating an easy 'friction-free' customer experience for tenants

### ACHIEVEMENTS

- The **Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel** is a Council constituted Group with members from the five formal Involvement groups covering:
  - o Tenant Involvement Strategy Group,
  - o Neighbourhoods and Communities,
  - o Communications Group,
  - o Independent Living Group, and
  - o The Repairs and Maintenance.
- Other Group Members include:
  - o The Assistant Director for Neighbourhoods and Communities.
  - o The Service Manager of Tenancy Involvement, and
  - o Councillors representing all four parties.
- This Group has co-opted members from a local Housing Association and the Voluntary Sector to ensure expertise and best practice is shared.
- This Group works in partnership with the Council and invites guest speakers and presenters to attend meetings such as:
  - o The Chief Executive – Susan Parsonage
  - o The Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Resources and Assets – Graham Ebers
  - o The Leader of the Council – Cllr John Halsall
  - o Local Housing Companies – Directors of Loddon Homes and Berry Brook Homes
  - o Lead Specialist - Asset Management
  - o Specialist - Policy and Performance
  - o Rental Income Manager
  - o Strategic Housing Management Specialists
  - o Localities and Communities representatives
  - o Housing Management Specialists
  - o Income and Assessments Specialists
  - o Consultants – Housing Revenue Business Plan – Glen Smith and Asset Management Strategy - Richard Medley
  - o Contractors – Reading Borough Council and Robert Heath Heating
- **Customer Journey (also links to Review 4)**
  - o The Involved Tenants regularly give feedback on what they have experienced when using a service, what went well and what could be improved in the future. This is important as it helps to shape process from the customer's point of view.
  - o The Involved Tenants have been considering the Housing White Paper and STAR survey results and the focus on ease of the customer journey when using the service. The Involved Tenants are being consulted on processes, focus groups, surveys regarding the customer journey and initial contact (letter sign offs, templates for complaints. Etc.).
  - o Training and interviewing of front line staff. Involved Tenants sit on all permanent or fixed term contract staff thus ensuring that individuals are aware of tenant involvement and tenant journeys through the service provided.
  - o Reviewing Response times. Involved Tenants monitor Key Performance Indicators each month and set targets each year. For instance, ASB response times were reviewed during Covid to support staff to support tenants during difficult times.
  - o Working with Contractors to ensure response times are monitored and the contracts are adhered to, this is through the monitoring of Key performance indicators, as well as attending contractor meetings

### FUTURE ASPIRATIONS

- We would like continued support and attendance for TLIP as well as timely responses to actions from the Involved Tenant meetings and information to inform the Performance Frameworks.

- As a Group of Involved Tenants, we are happy to continue to work in partnership with WBC staff, councillors, local stakeholders and local housing companies to achieve this aspiration.
- We would like to continue to be consulted on processes, focus groups, surveys regarding the customer journey and initial contact (letter sign offs through the Involved Tenant Communications Group, Etc.).
- We would like to work more closely with the local housing companies (BerryBrook Homes and Loddon Homes) regarding the customer journey and experience.

## 6. Review of Giving tenants greater choice on who does repairs and when

### ACHIEVEMENTS

#### - Meetings and Engagement

- An Involved Tenant, who is a member of the Repairs and Maintenance Group, attends weekly online Voids Meetings and regular contractors' meetings through Microsoft Teams during the pandemic.
- Garage Project – Involved Tenants made decisions with the Council. The Involved Tenants made the decisions on how Tenants / those effected were to be consulted, all letters sent to Tenants / users were reviewed by the Involved Tenants. Involved Tenants sat on the panel to interview the contractor.
- Contractors' meetings – Involved Tenants participated in contractors' meetings for the following but not limited to:
  - Reading Borough Council
  - Voids Contractor - Gilmartin's
  - The new Kitchens and Bathrooms Contractor – R Benson
  - The new External Decorations Contractor – George Jones
- Procurement Involvement. The Involved tenants have been engaged in the tender process including interviews such as for the Housing Matters Designer/distributor and Gas Contractor.

### FUTURE ASPIRATIONS

- Due to Covid restrictions, there have been increased challenges in 'Giving tenants greater choice on who does repairs and when' progress.
- We will be looking at how we can improve the performance framework figures scrutinised in repairs and maintenance group by working in partnership with the Contractors, the Tenants, and WBC to ensure continued learning, reviewing and the improvement of services.
- We would like to ensure that a customer satisfaction survey is issued for every repair and encourage more Tenants to complete and return these.

## 7. Review of Responding to an ageing tenant population

### ACHIEVEMENTS

#### - Independent Living Group

- The Independent Living (age specific) group (Sheltered Housing Tenants) have been set up since 2019. The Independent Living Group is made up of Involved Tenant volunteers who live in sheltered accommodation across the Borough.
- The STAR Survey was split to ensure those currently living in sheltered accommodation have appropriate questions asked. The results were assessed by the group and recommendations to the service given.
- The Independent Living Group have been working on creating a suite of surveys suitable to the sheltered schemes. They have also been looking at the formation of focus groups and forums.
- The Independent Living Group and Strategy Group have begun reviewing the Sheltered Tenants Handbook.
- The Independent Living Group have had guests attend the group including the Friendship Alliance – Link Visiting Scheme, Age UK Berkshire, who have been working to develop ways to tackle loneliness and improve the mental and physical

wellbeing of Wokingham Borough residents have attended the group at different points in the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **FUTURE ASPIRATIONS**

- There is a need to review the Tenants Charter with chapter 7 in mind due to the differences in tenure of the ageing population, e.g., Sheltered Schemes and those living in general needs properties, and therefore, the differences between them.
- It is important to note, that we currently have more of our older Tenants living in the General Needs accommodation, rather than our sheltered housing accommodation.
  - o We would like to work in partnership with Housing Services to look at how the support for these older Tenants can be improved as necessary.
- The stigma of living in Sheltered Accommodation – we are aware that there is a stigma attached to living in sheltered accommodation
  - o We would like to work in partnership with the Council to look at how we can change and improve the views of people that live in and out of sheltered housing.
  - o We would like to continue working with the Housing Services and Localities Team, within the Council, to improve facilities etc. within our sheltered properties across the Borough.
- Sheltered Tenants Handbook – we would like to continue TISG and ILGs review of the Tenants Handbook and associated Sheltered Tenants Handbook.
- Recruitment to ILG – We would like continued support in a recruitment drive for more ILG members and focus group volunteers specific to sheltered accommodation.

## **8. Review of Helping tenants manage their personal finances more effectively**

### **ACHIEVEMENTS**

- **Rents Team Engagement**
  - o The Independent Living (age specific) group (Sheltered Housing Tenants) were consulted on a pension credit scheme promotion, leaflet, and ways to engage with tenants who may be eligible. The rents team took their discussions on board.
  - o The Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel work in partnership with the Rental Income Team. The Rental Income Team Manager attends the Group on a monthly basis to present an update report on the Rents Team and Income.
  - o Involved Tenants Communications Group consulted by the rents team regarding text messages to tenants for access to Tenancy Sustainment Officers. This is provided through Mobysoft.
  - o The Involved Tenants have strongly recommended a need for a second Tenancy Sustainment Officer. Recruitment for this role has taken place and an Involved Tenant was present at the interview and involved in the process.
- **Other Ways to Engage**
  - o Since late 2020, Housing Matters have been publishing adult education courses. These are all free online/usually face to face courses for those over 19 years old living in Wokingham Borough (with some exceptions). The courses advertised in Housing Matters and provided include Essential Money Management, Skills toolkit (includes numeracy), data literacy, data analyst, managing your money and a CAP money course, helping your child with maths and get ready to get back into work or volunteering. This is an article that will now be produced in every Housing Matters Magazine publication with the courses that are starting soon. Extract of the article in the Spring 2021 edition is below:

## Useful courses from Wokingham Adult Education

Wokingham Adult Education is currently running all courses online until the end of the summer term - so you can do a course from the comfort of your own home! All courses are run by experienced tutors, with small groups of learners, on Zoom and are interactive.



If you've not used Zoom before, we can help you get started and offer support through our UK Online sessions including with basic IT skills

- Making better use of your PC, laptop, iPad, tablet or smartphone.

There is also support for video calling and support for email, Internet Search, Online Safety, Online Shopping and Services etc.

New courses for Summer 2021 include

- Managing your money and a CAP money course
- IT skills for job seekers
- Introduction to working in schools
- Helping your child with maths
- Baby loves Nature
- Coding for beginners
- Building your confidence to get back into work or volunteering
- Get ready to undergo Maths or English qualifications
- Paediatric First Aid
- Digital Skills
- Wellbeing in mind courses including Understanding Anxiety, Self Esteem and Self Confidence

Details of all of our upcoming courses are listed at:  
<https://sites.google.com/view/wokingham-acl> or you can contact us via: [adulteducation@wokingham.aov.uk](mailto:adulteducation@wokingham.aov.uk) or 07785 314603 or

### FUTURE ASPIRATIONS

- Due to Covid restrictions, there have been increased challenges in 'Helping tenants manage their personal finances more effectively' as a large amount of engagement 'in person' events were unable to go ahead.
- We would like to continue to work in partnership with the Rental Income Service Team:
  - o To continue to improve levels of arrears,
  - o To improve services to tenants and ensure they have the support needed to help them achieve their Tenancy sustainment.
- We work closely with the Wokingham Borough Council Communications, Engagement and Marketing team.
  - o Involved Tenants feel it important that we and the Council work in partnership to share more information on the support that is available to people across the Borough to manage their finances more efficiently.
  - o Continue to have regular articles in Housing Matters.
  - o Continue to share articles from Housing Matters to go out in the Borough News.

### 9. Review of Greater transparency regarding tenant health and safety inspection results

#### ACHIEVEMENTS

- **Monitoring**
  - The Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel and the Repairs and Maintenance Group receive a monthly report on Health and Safety issues that have occurred during the previous and that month, along with any measures that have been put in place to lower the risk of these happening again.
  - We work in partnership with the Housing Services Management team to mitigate any further health and safety issues and if the need arises, we look at changing policies and procedures to help support Tenants and Staff members.
- **Gas Compliance**
  - Gas Compliance has remained at 100% since 2016.
    - o Independent Living Group and Repairs and Maintenance Group have had attendance from the WBC Compliance Manager to discuss health and safety in sheltered schemes.
    - o Housing Matters published an article in Spring 2021 regarding Gas safety checks and what to expect during the pandemic. The extract of the article is below:

## What To Expect From our Gas Safety Check During the Coronavirus Pandemic

As a landlord Wokingham Borough Council are legal responsible for the safety of their tenants. Even during the current climates, annually all gas pipework, appliances and flues provided for tenants need to be checked and a Landlord Gas Safety Record completed. All the engineers who carry out these checks and the maintenance throughout the year are registered with Gas Safe, and will carry Identification bearing the company they work for logo, plus the Gas Safe logo, on the reverse of their badges are the qualifications of the engineer. As a tenant what can you expect from your Gas Safety Check.

Around 2 months before your current Landlord Gas Safety Record (LGSR) expires you will receive a letter advising of an appointment date and time for Robert Heath Heating to come and complete your Annual Gas Safety Check.

If you are not able to complete this appointment please contact Robert Heath Heating to rearrange. The person who needs to be in must be over 18 years of age.

On the day of the test the engineer will arrive, he/she will be in corporate clothing and carrying an ID badge, they will be wearing PPE, face mask, gloves.

The engineer will ask that you adhere to government guidelines with social

The Gas Safety Check will last around 30 minutes longer if you have more than one council owned gas appliance.

The engineer will check for damage on or around the gas appliance and pipework. He/She will complete a series of visual and operational checks and also complete tests on the gas appliance, to check compliance with the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations, and that the appliance is operating at the correct operating pressure. This will include checking flues and chimneys are clear from any vegetation and enable the appliance to emit gases and fumes safely to the outside. That all safety devices on the appliances such as cut out devices are working correctly.

The engineer will test all Smoke, Heat and CO Alarms in the property, changing batteries when required. If the alarm has expired or is due to expire within the next year they will replace the alarms. If it is an alarm which is wired into the electrics these will be referred to the council's electrical contractor to replace, but the Gas engineer will leave a battery alarm in its place.

When the engineer has completed all of their tests and the safety check the tenant is normally asked to sign the engineers PDA but this is not in place at the moment due to Covid-19.

Within 28 days of you Gas Safety Check being completed you will receive a copy of your Landlord Gas Safety Record in

### - Risk Assessments

- are completed for all large-scale engagement events including the Community Fun Days and a copy is shared with all staff, contractors, and suppliers in attendance. Consideration of Risk has resulted in the 2020 and 2021 summer Community Fun Days being cancelled due to the risk to staff, the public and volunteers regarding the COVID-19 pandemic.
- a Risk Assessment is completed for Targett Court (Residents Resource Centre) to ensure any risk to visitors and staff is kept to a minimum and this is displayed on the noticeboard within the main areas.

### - The Business Continuity Plan

- The Tenancy Involvement Specialist Team Business Continuity plan was updated prior to lockdown and reassessed as lockdown restrictions eased. This included:
  - Information on potential risks that can affect the health & safety of Involved Tenant Volunteers, staff members, engagement opportunities and to buildings,
  - Any risk in the event that Staff members are ill / away for prolonged periods of time, therefore unable to support Involved Tenants and what plans are in place to ensure continuation, and
  - Risk Assessments for staff members, visitors and Volunteers when re-entering the Council and Community Buildings as the lockdown is eased.
- We as a group of Involved Tenants have voted to keep our meetings online for the foreseeable future and are assessing the fact that keeping an element of the meetings online going forward would benefit the council to help achieve carbon neutrality by 2030.

### FUTURE ASPIRATIONS

- As a group of Involved Tenant Volunteers, we will continue to work with our partners, the Council, Public Health and Central Government and be guided by their advice ensuring we:
  - Adhere to risk assessments – lowering the risk to members of the public, Involved Tenants and Staff.
  - Adhere to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, working with Public Health to consider the risk to community events.
  - Work towards being carbon neutral by 2030.

- Engage with all groups of people across the Borough through online mediums such as Microsoft Teams and SharePoint.
- Equality and diversity impact assessment training is completed by staff and Involved Tenants to ensure these assessments are completed for all activities organised.

## **10. Review of Developing a protocol for the analysis and protection of tenant data**

### **ACHIEVEMENTS**

- General Data Protection Regulations – the Involved Tenants have created and signed a Statement
- The Involved Tenants IT Equipment is independently supported by an external Wokingham Borough Council Contractor:
  - This ensures they are monitored constantly for external risks such as fire wall breaches
  - Involved Tenant Volunteers data is protected through the use of fire walls and constant monitoring

### **FUTURE ASPIRATIONS**

- Due to Covid restrictions, there have been increased challenges in, ‘Developing a protocol for the analysis and protection of tenant data’ and making a large amount of progress this past year.
- The Tenant Involvement Team are currently in the process of recruiting a Digital Apprentice:
  - This staff member will be trained on General Protection Regulations
  - Will adhere to the Volunteering Management Policy, which gives advice on external media engagement
  - Ensure compliance to the Regulatory Standards by opening up more opportunities for Tenants to engage and be part of the decision-making process within Housing Services.
- The Involved Tenants would like to explore this aspiration in greater detail to ensure it continues to be fit for purpose.
- The Involved Tenants would like training on data analysis so that we can work with our partners to suggest, plan, and create projects and policies, to better understand, the needs and aspirations of our tenants.
- The Involved Tenants would like to complete a training on the General Data Protection Regulations so that we can ensure we and our partners comply with these.

## **11. All Projects that the Involved Tenants have been working on this past year**

We would like to bring to your attention the amount of projects that the Involved tenants have been able to be involved in this past year. Even during the COVID-19 pandemic and sole online working/meetings, the Involved Tenants have been able to continue their partnership with Wokingham Borough Council.

The projects include, but are not limited to:

- Pet Policy initial consultation with ILG and the Involved Tenant Communications Group.
- Code of Conduct and Breaches of Conduct by the TISG.
- Homelessness policy consultation with TISG.
- Domestic Abuse policy consultation with TISG.
- Sheltered Tenants Handbook update initial consultation with ILG and TISG.
- Tenant Involvement Strategy Action Plan with TISG.
- Volunteer Management Policy with TISG.
- Welcome Pack Involved Tenant details with TISG.
- Equalities Policy initial consultation with Involved Tenants invited.

- Regulatory Standards Review overseen by Housemark with each Involved Tenant Group (Communications Group, Strategy Group, Repairs and Maintenance Group, Neighbourhoods and Communities Group, Independent Living Group) for the Chairs Groups and TLIP to review.
- Housing Restructure Review with all Involved Tenants invited to provide recommendations on the Housing Restructure.
- Housing White Paper Review and presentations from each service manager to TLIP.

The Involved Tenants have a number of projects that they will continue to focus on in the next year, these include (but are not limited to):

- The Welcome Pack
- The Involved Tenant Recruitment Process
- The Lettings Policy consultation
- The Pets Policy
- The Sheltered Tenants Handbook
- The General Needs Tenants Handbook
- The Complaints Policy and Tenants Panel Implementation
- The Communications and Engagement Policy

## Conclusions

During the Covid-19 pandemic, we have recognised that there are some things that haven't been able to be achieved to the best of our ability. Review areas 3, 6, 7, 8 and 10 have been challenging due to the COVID-19 pandemic but will be areas of focus moving forward. However, section 11 indicates the amount of projects we have been engaged in this year and, even more importantly, how our Involved Tenant groups have managed to continue holding monthly meetings online. We have continued participating in meetings with contractors, interviews with new staff and completed trainings to aid with the aspirations set out in the Tenants Charter.

Moving forward, there is a need to review and update the full Tenants Charter to better suit the current projects, aims and aspirations of the partnership. We are focused on this as so much has changed in the past year due to the pandemic and we would like to reflect this in areas that are overachieving and those that require further support. This review and update also comes at a time where other factors are affecting the future of housing services including the emerging lessons/review from the Grenfell Tower Disaster (creating a greater focus on Health and safety, tenant involvement and transparency), the Social Housing White Paper, The Housing Ombudsman Complaints code, Digital transformations in engagement, social trends and the COVID-19 pandemic.

A special thanks should go to the members of the Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel, for their continued governance, as well as the scrutiny and challenge of all policies and procedures and their dedication to making improvements to the lives of Tenants across the Borough. We would like to thank Kim Jakubiszyn, Rosalynn Funnell, and Simon Price along with all the Housing teams, for all their hard work and support helping us to achieve so much this year. We look forward to continuing to work together as one team on exciting and new projects, progressing more with the aspirations above. In addition, we would like to thank all of the staff and Councillors for their continued partnership working, which has helped us to achieve so much. We look forward to continuing that partnership.

## Footnote: Thank you from the Tenant Involvement Team

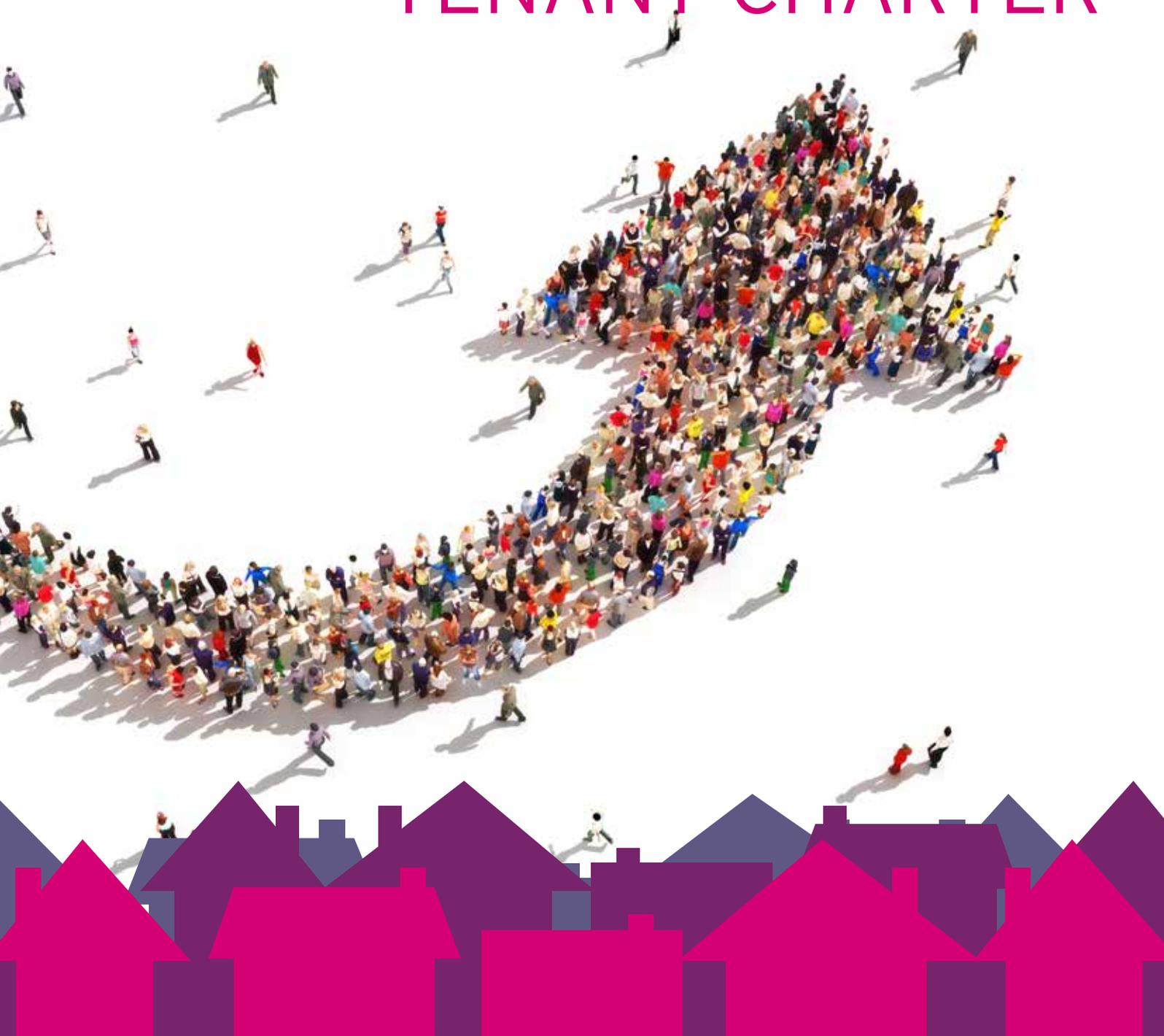
The Tenant Involvement Team would like to thank all of our Formal Tenant Volunteers for giving up their time to work in partnership with the staff and contractors of Wokingham Borough Council. Together we achieve so much and want to recognise their tireless work within the Borough. Since the beginning of the first lockdown in March 2020, they have

volunteered 3,503 hours, which is the equivalent to nearly 2 full time staff members in the same period, highlighting their dedication in volunteering and assisting the service.

# Modernising the tenant customer experience in Wokingham Borough Council



## TENANT CHARTER



# **Modernising the tenant customer experience in Wokingham Borough Council: A tenant charter**

## **Contents:**

The purpose of this Charter

Acknowledgements

Key priorities

Tackling the stigma associated with being a council tenant

Identifying future patterns of tenant housing need and demand

Maximising the accessibility of council housing services

Modernising tenant engagement techniques to increase active involvement

Creating a 'friction-free' customer experience for tenants

Giving tenants greater choice on who does repairs and when

Responding to an ageing tenant population

Helping tenants manage their personal finances more effectively

Greater transparency regarding health and safety inspection results

Developing a protocol for the analysis and protection of tenant data

## The purpose of this Charter

Several factors make it timely to reflect on the future of housing services for council tenants:

- the emerging lessons from the Grenfell Tower disaster in 2016 – notably the need for a greater focus on health and safety, tenant involvement in refurbishment schemes and transparency over landlord decision-making
- the government's housing Green Paper of 2018 which promised enhanced consumer regulation applicable to councils and housing associations and challenged landlords to raise service standards and levels of resident engagement
- the emerging opportunities for digital transformation of service delivery and resident involvement in respect of increased efficiency and an improved tenant customer experience
- other social trends such as an ageing population, increasing demand for disability and social care support, increasing customer expectations (particularly amongst younger generations) and the rapid rise of social media and so on.

We believe that the council and tenants need to respond to these issues by working together to plan for the modernisation of housing services over the next decade and beyond if:

- current levels of satisfaction are to be maintained, and
- opportunities to increase efficiency are to be realised.

This charter sets out the views of Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) involved tenants' views on what is needed. It is intended as a series of *aspirations*, rather than demands, and to stimulate a broader discussion within the council as a corporate body.

Where this Charter refers to new digital technologies, explanatory text boxes explain the tech options available to WBC and how the council and its tenants can benefit. Where suppliers are named, this is for illustrative purposes and does not constitute an endorsement.

Some of our proposals can be implemented relatively easily, some will require additional funding and others will require corporate agreement by full council.

***We recommend that WBC's progress in terms of addressing this Charter is formally reviewed in two years' time.***

## **Acknowledgements**

This Charter has been produced by the involved tenants of Wokingham Borough Council (WBC).

The Charter was commissioned, managed and signed-off by Steve Bowers, Chair of the Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel.

Technical input for, and the drafting of, the Charter was undertaken by Ross Fraser.

Special thanks are due to Simon Price, Hannah Linder and Kim Jakubiszyn of the WBC housing department for assistance in this project and their ongoing commitment to effective tenant engagement in the Borough.

## Key priorities

There are **ten key priorities** of WBC tenants in the modernisation of housing services:

1. Tackling the stigma associated with being a council tenant
2. Identifying future patterns of tenant need and demand
3. Maximising the accessibility of council services
4. Modernising tenant engagement techniques to increase active involvement
5. Creating an easy 'friction-free' customer experience for tenants
6. Giving tenants greater choice on who does repairs and when
7. Responding to an ageing tenant population
8. Helping tenants manage their personal finances more effectively
9. Greater transparency regarding tenant health and safety inspection results
10. Developing a protocol for the analysis and protection of tenant data

*We now set out our aspirations in respect of these key priorities.*

## 1. Tackling the stigma associated with being a council tenant

Many tenants recall the days when council housing was sought-after and provided accommodation for different social classes, united in the need for a family home. Even today, the offer of a home in the Council's new developments is an exciting life-enhancing opportunity.

Sadly, over the last forty years the image of council housing has suffered and it is seen by many – particularly the media - as second-class accommodation comprised of run-down neighbourhoods inhabited by feckless crime-prone layabouts.

Nine in ten (91%) social housing tenants say they are portrayed negatively by the media



SEE THE PERSON.  
#RespectTheIndustry

This stigma impacts on the life chances of council tenants and on their self-esteem.

We would like to see WBC tackle the issue of stigmatisation through:

- a proactive media campaign to challenge negative perceptions of council housing in the local and regional media – partly through generating regular information for the media on how tenants actively maintain their communities and help support disadvantaged residents. The media work would also involve the speedy correction of inaccurate information
- an overhaul of the language used by councillors and council staff when referring to council housing – abandoning all references to 'estates' in favour of more positive terms such as 'communities' or 'neighbourhoods'
- specifying a requirement - in commercial and employment contracts – that contractors, service delivery partners and employees treat tenants fairly and do not stigmatise them
- maximising the attractiveness of future housing schemes by increasing the level of tenant involvement in their design, amenities, transport links and so on
- a more proactive council lead – working with local tenants - in the monitoring of appearance and maintenance of neighbourhoods

- investment in activities – like community fun days – that celebrate local communities and enhance tenant self-esteem
- ensuring that all data on the tenant and their home to be held in a single digital customer record

#### **Single digital customer record**

- The ability for customers to view the data the council holds on them is a legal right since the introduction of GDPR
- The integrated single customer record makes it easier for tenants to access the data
- The record will be the core of WBC's engagement with its tenants
- It will drive recognition of the need to personalise all services to tenants
- The record will cover all data on the tenant and their home and will be updated in a timely manner
- The tenant can view the record in digital form at any time - upon request - and amend if inaccurate
- WBC will inform the tenant of any update that it makes to the record
- With prior tenant consent, relevant details from the tenant/property record will be made available to WBC staff/contractors, such as whether the tenant has a disability, any special cultural factors to be considered when visiting the property and so on

## 2. Identifying future patterns of tenant housing need and demand

Planning the future means recognising demographic trends such as an ageing population, more single adult households, increased ethnic diversity of residents and so on and matching this demand with new housing supply.

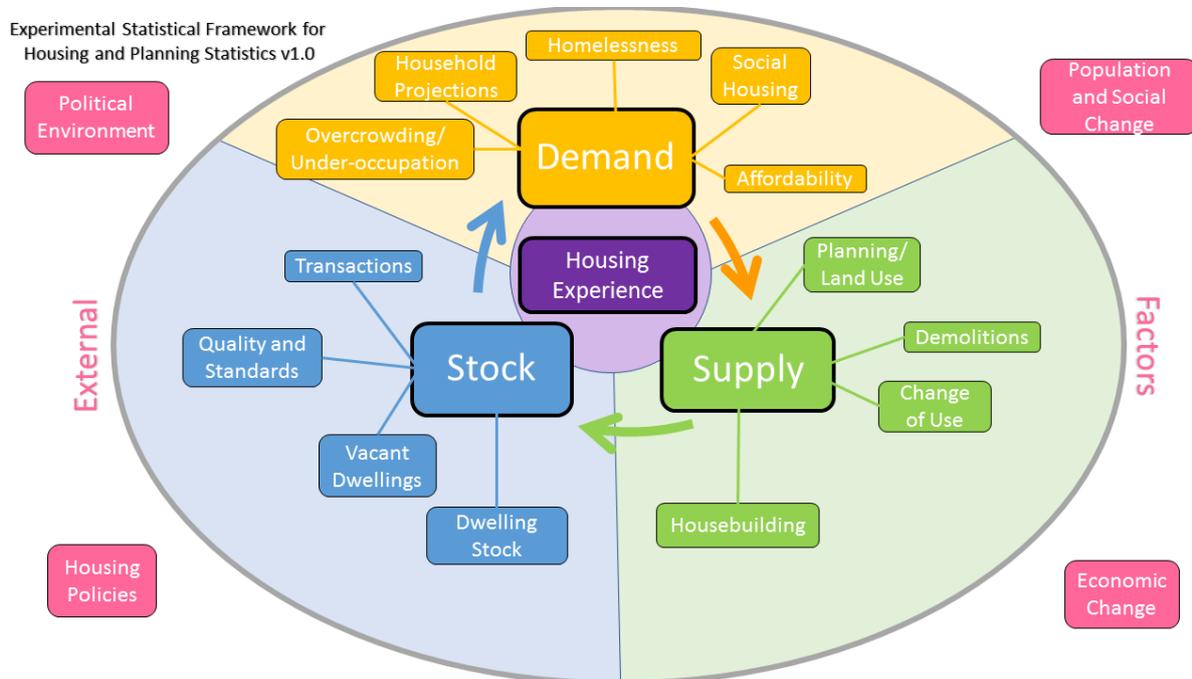


Diagram source: Government Statistical Service

It also involves recognising changing inter-generational housing and service experience aspirations. In simple terms, our children and particularly our grandchildren will have different expectations in terms of the housing service they want.

We would like to see WBC tackle the issue of future patterns of housing demand through:

- greater choice about the type of housing and the tenancy terms being offered - not everyone wants the same thing
- building new homes and refurbishing others to a 'fit for a lifetime' as a core design standard - adaptable homes that mean tenants don't have to move in response to age or disability
- ensuring that new or refurbished homes are designed to eco standards – including but not limited to installation of solar panels, power walls, rainwater butts and so on
- We also aspire to greater tenant involvement in the design of research into future tenant housing need and demand.

We believe that council planning will be improved where:

- tenants have a greater role in planning policy development – through tenant representatives becoming members of the council's Strategic Development Location Group

- tenants can play a key role in analysing the research data that informs planning policy, particularly regarding projections of future housing need amongst current council tenants
- We would like involved tenants to be formally consulted on allocations and lettings policy and practice – especially in any review of the ‘banding system’.

### 3. Maximising the accessibility of council housing services

We would like to see WBC take practical steps to improve the accessibility of council housing services. We welcome the new Customer Delivery Officer (CDO) initiative but think WBC can and should go further.

Some of these steps involve changing how existing resources are deployed – others involve the use of new technology.

#### *Changes to use of existing resources*

- Extend council office opening hours – including Saturday opening
- Freephone for all calls to council switchboard (like the freephone service that already exists for reporting repair requests)
- Minimising call waiting times for housing services by ensuring that the Customer Delivery Officer function is fully staffed – particularly at peak times

#### *Use of new technology*

- Introduction of a digital inclusion strategy to ensure that no tenants is left behind by the digital transformation of service delivery
- Provision of a laptop/iPad and free Wi-Fi for all sheltered housing schemes
- Introduction of reporting apps – for repairs, Anti-social behaviour (ASB), neighbourhood condition – allowing photos of issues to be uploaded by tenants (as residents can already do in respect of reporting issues related to roads and highways)
- Introduction of ‘virtual customer service assistants aka *chatbots*’ to answer frequently asked questions (FAQ’s), direct customers to sources of information, perform simple tasks etc.in order to help tenants who have physical or learning disabilities or simply speed up call centre queues for everyone
- Adoption of a *Cloud-first IT environment* – making it easier to undertake data analysis, develop bespoke apps, free up time for digital transformation and so on

## Reporting apps

A reporting application (app) is a self-contained programme with an interface that helps the user accomplish reporting tasks by managing the display of data in a computer browser.

Providing that the right IT infrastructure is in place, social landlords can buy apps 'off-the-shelf', develop them 'in house' or outsource app development to a specialist digital design agency.

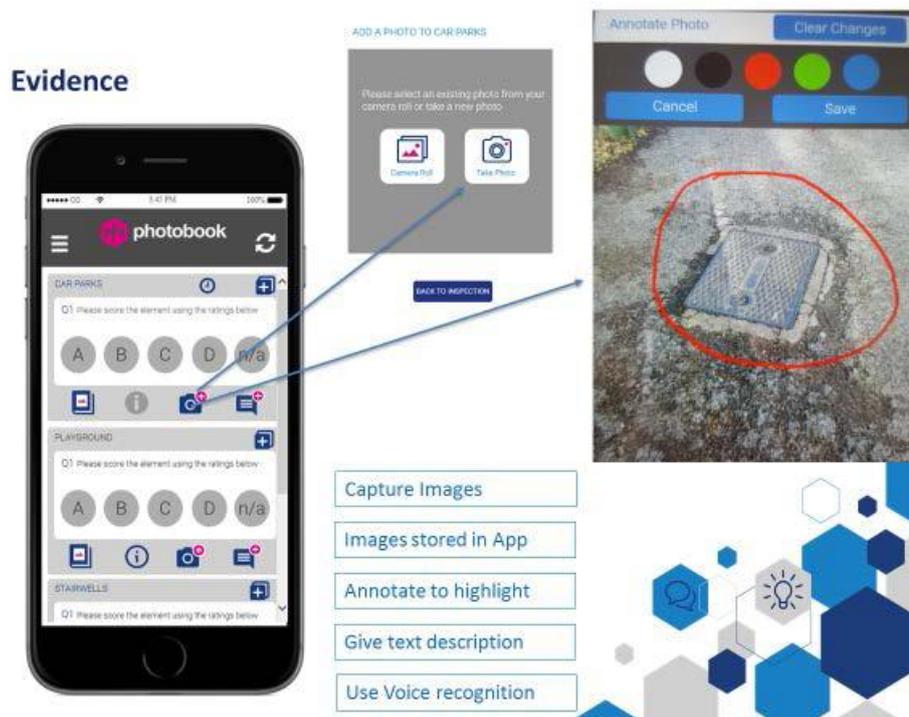
A good example of a reporting app is the HouseMark Photobook.

This is an affordable and easy-to-use app and web portal designed to streamline processes for inspection of neighbourhoods, repairs and voids, health and safety, mutual exchanges, parking (including abandoned vehicles) and so on.

The app user can upload photos of new problems and both landlords and tenants can use the photobook to track the speed and quality of issue rectification.

Although the app was designed for use by staff, some of the social landlords using the app are enabling involved tenants and 'neighbourhood champions' to use the system to report on the condition of their neighbourhood.

The app allows landlords and tenants to save time, work smarter and to use the photo record to ensure that all parties fully understand the issues to be resolved.



There are many other reporting apps available on the market covering ASB, repair requests and so on.

## Cloud First IT strategy

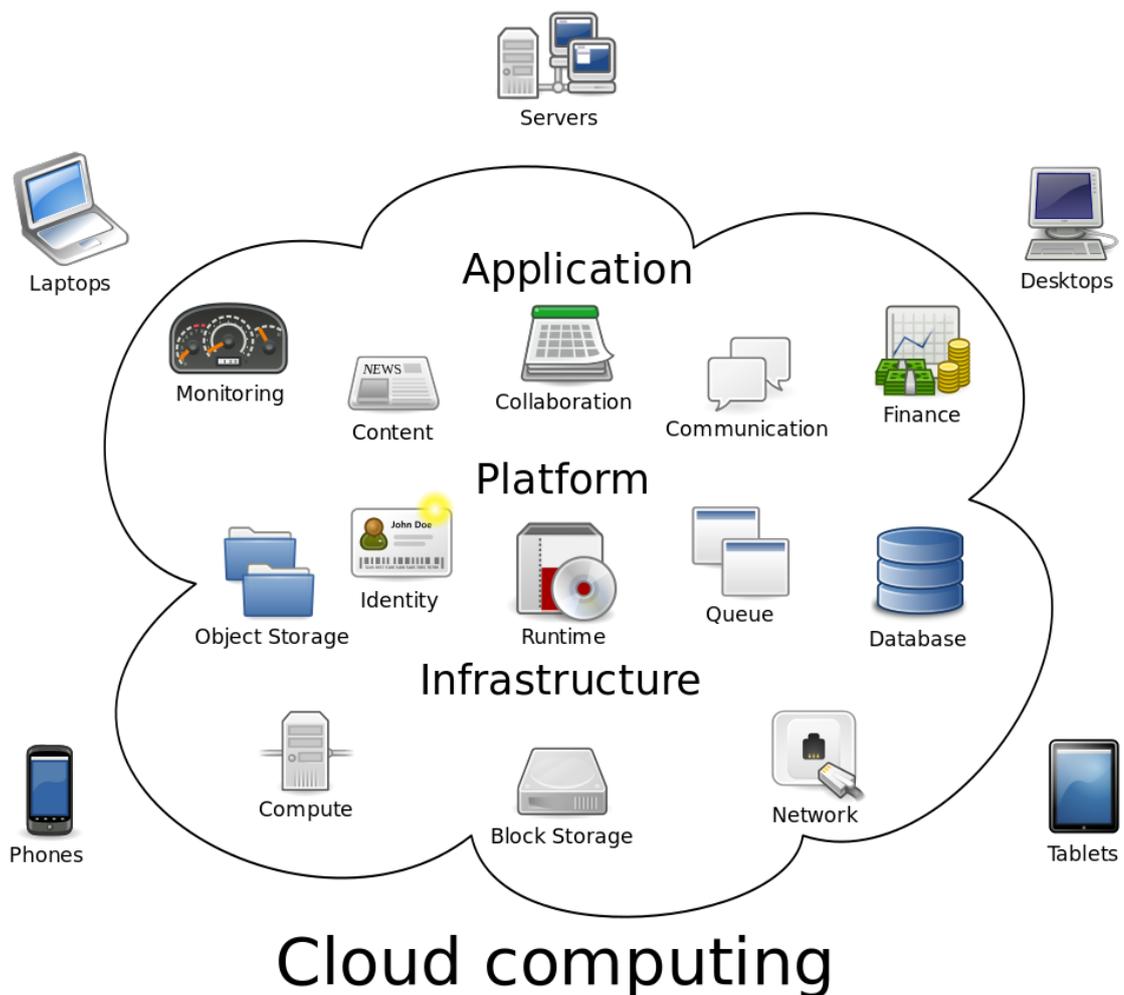
Cloud computing is a metaphor which describes how the group of networked IT elements required to providing digital services need not be individually managed by users. Instead, the entire provider-managed suite of hardware and software can be thought of as an amorphous cloud managed by an external provider via a service contract.

Agility is one of the big advantages of this approach. The speed with which new servers can be provisioned and the ability to 'pay-as-you-go' for data storage and other services are extremely important for delivery of digital services.

Advocates of Cloud computing cite the specific benefits to organisations as:

- avoiding or minimising 'up-front' IT infrastructure costs
- enabling organisations to get their apps up and running faster
- making it easier to undertake data analysis
- spending far less staff time on managing and maintaining IT systems
- freeing up staff time for IT strategy, resident involvement in that strategy and the actual delivery of digital transformation

Both central government and the NHS have adopted a Cloud First IT strategy.



## Chatbots/virtual assistants

A chatbot is a computer programme which uses artificial intelligence (AI) to conduct a conversation via auditory or textual methods.

Otherwise known as digital assistants, chatbots are often designed to convincingly simulate how a human would behave as a conversational partner. Chatbots are typically used in dialog systems for various practical purposes including customer service or information acquisition. Google's Alexa is probably the best known chatbot.

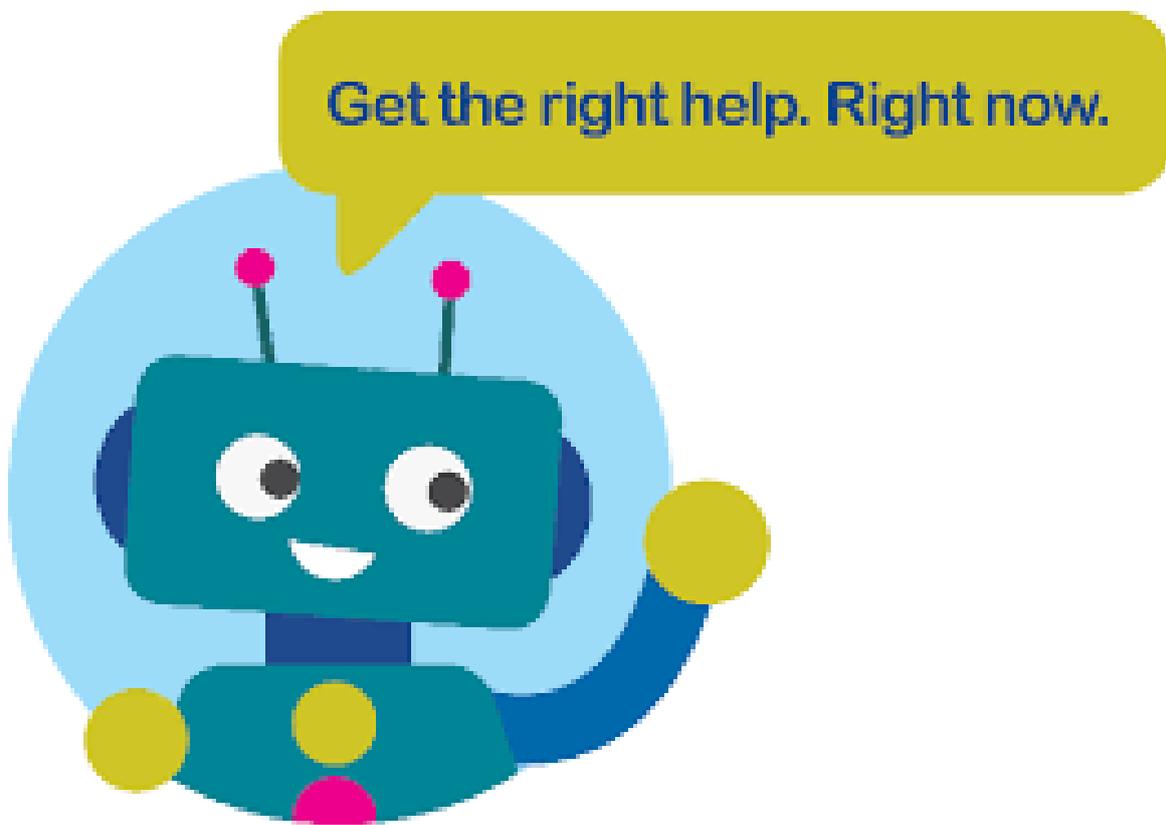
Some chatbots use sophisticated natural language processing systems, but many simpler bots scan for keywords within the input, then pull a reply with the most matching keywords, or the most similar wording pattern, from a database.

WBC could deploy a chatbot to:

- provide 24/7 advice on housing matters
- record tenant queries out-of-hours
- direct tenants to emergency assistance or the relevant housing officer
- provide updates on tenant involvement and information on future meetings
- perform simple tasks such as taking payments for rent or Council Tax.

Optivo housing association is set to be the first social landlord in the UK to introduce a chatbot next year. The digital assistant will be both staff and customer facing and will incorporate Optivo's planned use of internet of things (IoT) sensors in its homes.

(See section on *Responding to an ageing tenant population* for discussion of the role of IOT sensors)



#### 4. Modernising tenant engagement techniques to increase active involvement

Traditionally, tenant engagement has been largely based around physical meetings. This has contributed to the over-representation of older tenants compared to younger residents.

We recognise this issue and would like WBC to work with us to increase active tenant involvement. We would like to see WBC take the following practical steps:

- increase the number of involved tenants through recruitment days and more face-to-face involvement opportunities and by varying the length and tone of communications to tenants
- introduce a new website for communicating with tenants
- supplement this by broadening the range of communication channels to include Face time, WhatsApp, Microsoft Messenger, Skype plus on-line housing surgeries with housing or benefits staff and 'virtual chat room' debates between councillors, staff and involved tenants
- appoint a specific officer responsible for updating and running all digital customer contact with tenants (with the support of an involved tenant/involved tenants)
- invest in tenant-led podcasts to ensure there is a regular stream of content

We believe that WBC should supplement its current statistical approach to measuring tenant satisfaction which captures **what** tenants think (the STAR system) with sentiment analysis, which better explains **why** tenants feel the way they feel.



The main use of sentiment analysis is to collect and analyse views expressed on **social media**. For example, retailers use sentiment analysis to judge consumer receptiveness to their products or to understand the impact their competitors are having on the market. Political parties use sentiment analysis to test out policies before they are formally launched.

Sentiment analysis can equally be applied to **surveys** of customers, staff and the general public.

For social landlords, the approach can be used to:

- analyse (structured) survey data
- (unstructured) data held in housing management and repairs IT systems
- follow and capture what is being said about the landlord on social media

Key word analysis techniques can also help social landlords understand the nature of the tenant debate - 'social collective intelligence' - or predict future repair costs.

Crowdscope has developed a system which generates 'social collective intelligence' for social landlords by:

- enabling interaction between tenants involved in a discussion forum or specific single-issue survey and
- then analysing the sentiments that tenants express on each other's opinions to produce rapid insight.

Lewisham Homes is currently hosting a pilot programme run by Field Dynamics and HouseMark which uses sentiment analysis as a component of predictive repairs cost modelling.

Field Dynamics apply an algorithm focused primarily on 'free text' comments or notes fields held over several years in customer relations management systems (CRMs) or other codified data sources – focusing on words such as 'renew handles', 'asbestos' or 'survey' or 'Discretionary Housing Payments'.

This 'soft' knowledge is then combined with 'hard' landlord data on previous asset management costs per property to:

- predict future maintenance costs on a home-by-home basis
- help the landlord decide future budgets
- help the landlord decide whether the replacement of a home is more logical than its continued repair.

## 5. Creating an easy 'friction-free' customer experience for tenants

Many of the most significant recent changes in human behaviour and customer expectations are being driven by the retail and technology sectors.

Mobile phones are now ubiquitous, online shopping and banking commonplace and retailers are competing over how to make customer transactions as quick and easy as possible. They recognise that transaction time is now as important as price to many consumers. Equally, the most successful retailers are reviewing their recruitment strategy for customer-facing staff and increasing the number of transactions can be undertaken directly by the consumer on a 'self-service' basis.

Unless WBC modernises the customer experience, it faces increased frustration and reduced satisfaction from tenants about why they can do things in other aspects of their life that they cannot replicate in their relationship with their landlord.

We would like to see WBC take practical steps to make the tenant customer experience easier and, if possible, 'friction free':

- recruiting as council housing staff helpful, knowledgeable, positive and sympathetic listeners with a commitment to customer service. It is better to employ people with the right personality traits and then train them, than to base recruitment primarily on the possession of formal qualifications
- deploying the new Customer Delivery Officers as a single point of contact for initial enquiries matched by easy access to specialists when required
- reviewing response time targets and steps to ensure that they are met in practice and that targets are agreed with involved tenants
- providing greater choice for tenants in terms of, for example, kitchen finishes and white goods supplied
- introducing *self-service housing* (see below)

## Self-service in social housing

Most social landlords have either introduced a greater element of self-service for their tenants or are actively considering doing so.

Self-service is now an integral part of our daily lives. Self-service check outs at supermarkets are second nature and in banking, self-service apps are ubiquitous.

It is now commonplace to book medical appointments online and to receive texts reminding you to attend.

The aim of 'self-service' is to encourage most tenants to manage their accounts online.

This significantly reduces the transactional demand on the landlord, particularly around call-centre costs where staffing and 'on-costs' such as office space are significant.

Freed-up staff resources can be redeployed to dealing with tenants with multiple complex needs or for managing the introduction of Universal Credit.

Tenants benefit from – at a single touch – being able on a 24/7 basis to undertake transactions online, such as:

- Check rent balance and view statements
- Report repairs and make appointments
- Check repairs history
- Make a secure payment
- Report anti-social behaviour
- Update family/household details
- Log complaints and compliments
- Permissions for pets, satellite dishes and online surveys etc.
- Access information about the home – such as how to use the central heating systems or where to locate stop-cocks
- Access virtual on-line 3D property tours, based on computer aided design, for transfers / lettings, consultation on refurbishment schemes or new build projects or purchasing of furniture or white goods – supplemented by emailable 2D presentations.

For self-service to be successful, tenants need to **actively use the facility**. This requires an easy-to-use platform, training videos and drop-in sessions, a marketing campaign and the back-up option of speaking to staff for the c10% of the population that do not have access to the internet or whose disability prevents them from using online services.

*Tenants are more likely to take-up self service housing if involved tenants have been part of the team that designs the self-service offer.*

A typical self-service dashboard looks like this:



## **6. Giving tenants greater choice on who does repairs and when**

Perhaps the most important single issue for tenants is day-to-day responsive repairs. Some repairs will be 'qualifying work' which is the landlord's responsibility and others will fall to tenants to organise themselves.

We would like to see WBC modernise its repairs operations by:

- introducing an accredited handyman service for 'non-qualifying work' – providing tenants with a list of trusted tradespeople who could do jobs which are not the landlord's responsibility – building upon existing WBC handyman arrangements for social care
- enabling tenants to order and cancel repairs directly with contractors for 'qualifying work' - using a list of council-approved contractors
- enabling tenants to be offered a range of hourly time-banded appointment options when they negotiate repair times with contractors

The combined effect of these changes would be to place council tenants in an equal position to private owner-occupiers when commissioning repairs – in itself, a modest contribution to tackling stigma.

Tenants would also like WBC to investigate the benefits of having a mixture of maintenance contractors – prime commercial, a directly employed labour force and (to support local economic development and help tackle climate change) local small contractors and handymen.

Tenants are already involved in the selection of prime commercial contractors but would like a say in the sub-contractors appointed by the prime contractor to undertake the actual work.

## Providing a choice of contractor for responsive repairs

Several social landlords – such as Notting Hill Genesis and Metropolitan Thames Valley – are adopting an approach to responsive repairs developed by Plentific, a software development company working in the property management field. The Plentific model was originally developed for home owners, providing them with approved lists of pre-accredited handymen, but is equally applicable in social housing.

The system has been compared to Uber. Tenants raise a repair request and, if its one that the landlord is responsible for, the job is offered to a pool of pre-accredited contractors or local tradespeople. The selected contractor then contacts the tenant directly – via a proxy phone number - and together they fix the repair appointment. The system allows the tenant to use photos of the problem when requesting repairs.

But the system is more robust than Uber. The landlord gets several suppliers to choose from, whereas Uber offers only one. The pre-accreditation process for verified tradespeople (covering public liability insurance, Company House registration, ID, proof of address, VAT number and all appropriate qualifications) is far more extensive than Uber applies to its drivers. The cost of pre-accreditation is recovered by a levy on contractor invoices.

The technology has quickly become popular with housing staff as it cuts down the amount of time spent organising repairs, invoicing and sending payments. This will enable Notting Hill Genesis to achieve efficiency gains and redeploy staff to work more closely with tenants who have multiple complex needs. Housing officers are also able to access real time updates on active jobs, as well as a complete digital record of any messages, documents or invoices connected to the work. This digital property record can form part of 'real time' data on the condition of the landlord's stock and the performance of its supply chain.

The system generates new opportunities for local contractors and (if they perform well) a steady flow of work. They are paid immediately upon completion, though never in cash. Contractors tend to undertake the work more quickly – because they can often negotiate out-of-hours appointments with tenants and because they receive instant payment. Abortive visits are much reduced as there is now no excuse for the tenant to miss an appointment. The model can also be developed to add a landlord's direct labour organisation (DLO) and Tier 1/prime contractors to the supplier pool.

### How it works.



A year-long pilot at Notting Hill Genesis found that the approach led to reduced repair times, a 20% reduction in job costs, improved asset and supply chain data and enhanced staff satisfaction. Notting Hill Genesis are now rolling out the approach on a phased basis to all its 60,000 homes.

When this is complete, Notting Hill Genesis plan to **allow tenants to select the contractor themselves** – although this will require rigorous controls about ‘qualifying work’ and job cost schedules before it can be introduced.

## 7. Responding to an ageing tenant population

Demographic experts are united in their prediction of an increasingly ageing UK population. This pattern is likely to be replicated in the composition of the WBC tenant population. The Council clearly needs to reflect this in its plans for future housing provision.

We would like to see WBC modernise its 'offer' to older residents in the following ways:

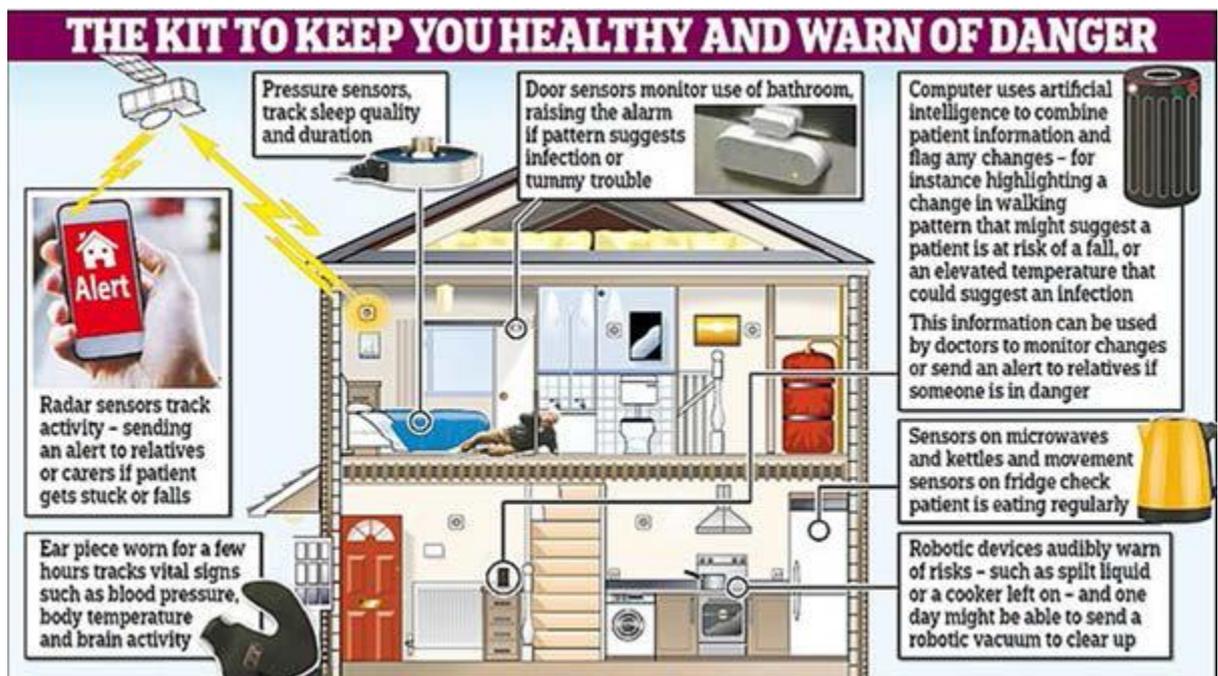
- future budgets should match actual projected need for aids and adaptations
- occupational therapist appointments and subsequent approved improvements should be undertaken in a timely manner
- more bungalows should be built - designed with wider doors etc
- adoption of a new core development standard – homes for a lifetime – for new homes and refurbishment funded via the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) by updating the borough Design Guide
- improved liaison between income collection staff and other agencies and greater support for local charities which act as a source of support and advocacy for tenants with financial issues
- more home visits - particularly for vulnerable tenants
- introduction of wearable technology – alerts for when a fall occurs and sensors to monitor non-standard behaviour patterns that might indicate imminent health risk
- developing a strategy to tackle loneliness amongst all tenants – including elderly tenants
- offering assistive technology to enable ageing tenants or those with a disability to live independently as long as possible.

## Assistive technology

Assistive technology is a term used to refer to practical tools that can support functional needs of people who experience difficulties linked to disability or ageing. Examples of assistive technology in the home currently being adopted by social landlords include:

- Automated entrance/internal door/s
- Automated control of devices in the home such as TV, heating, curtains
- Intercoms between rooms
- Flashing devices e.g. a doorbell, which alert the deaf or hard of hearing person that there is someone at the door through a flashing light – coupled with a video intercom at front door
- TV listening devices, which allow the person with hearing loss to adjust the TV volume independently and to eliminate background noise
- Amplified telephones, which provide amplified and higher quality sound to assist people with hearing loss to use the telephone
- GPS tracking for dementia sufferers
- Stand-alone devices such as memory aids and alarms
- Fall, flooding or fire detection devices which can communicate an early alarm to a remote support team
- Linked sensors which can control devices to increase the safety of elderly or disabled people – such as appliances that automatically switch off when not in use - and monitor their wellbeing

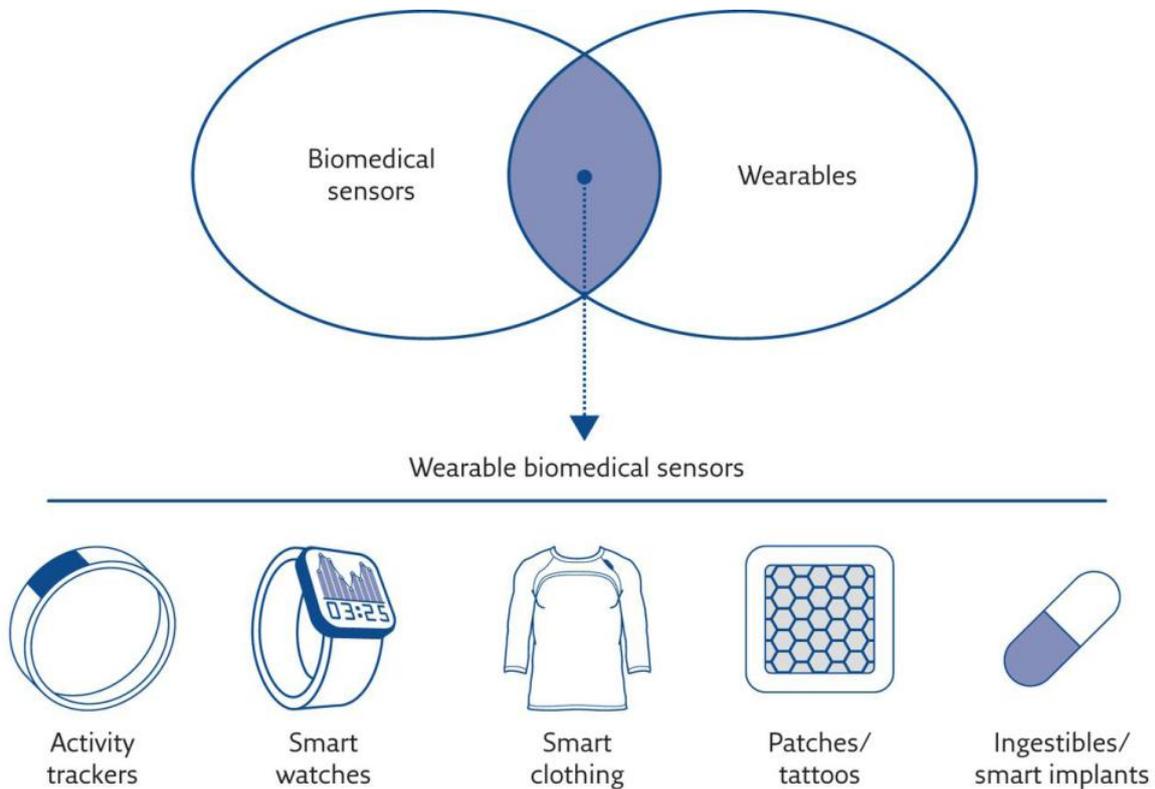
The following diagram from the *Mail Online* provides a useful visual description of how IOT (internet of things) sensors can help monitor tenant wellbeing.



## Wearable technology

Wearable technology are smart electronic devices (electronic device with micro-controllers) that can be incorporated into clothing or worn on the body as implants or accessories.

Wearable devices such as activity trackers are an example of the Internet of Things. 'Things' such as electronics, software, sensors, and connectivity are effectors that enable objects to exchange data through the internet with a manufacturer, operator, and/or other connected devices, without requiring human intervention.



*The sensors used in the Mail Online diagram above are often housed in the wearables like these.*

Wearable technology has a variety of applications which grows as the field itself expands. It appears prominently in consumer electronics with the popularization of the smartwatch and activity tracker. Apart from commercial uses, wearable technology is being incorporated into navigation systems, advanced textiles, and healthcare.

## **8. Helping tenants manage their personal finances**

With the impact of government austerity still being felt by tenants and the transition to Universal Credit enabling tenants on benefits to receive payment directly, it will become harder for WBC to maintain existing levels of rent collection and arrears.

We believe that by helping tenants manage their finances more effectively the Council can help itself.

We would like to see WBC modernise by tackling these issues via:

- a 'financial MOT' to support work with tenants – based on questions such as “have you got a water meter”, “have you got a warm home”, “how much are you spending on utilities”? etc.
- personal budgeting training courses for tenants - run by WBC Tenancy Sustainment Officers and with a specific focus on Universal Credit
- making money management apps available to tenants 'on demand' – to help them to understand their spending on recurring payments, assist with budget analysis and planning, help with saving or accessing credit etc

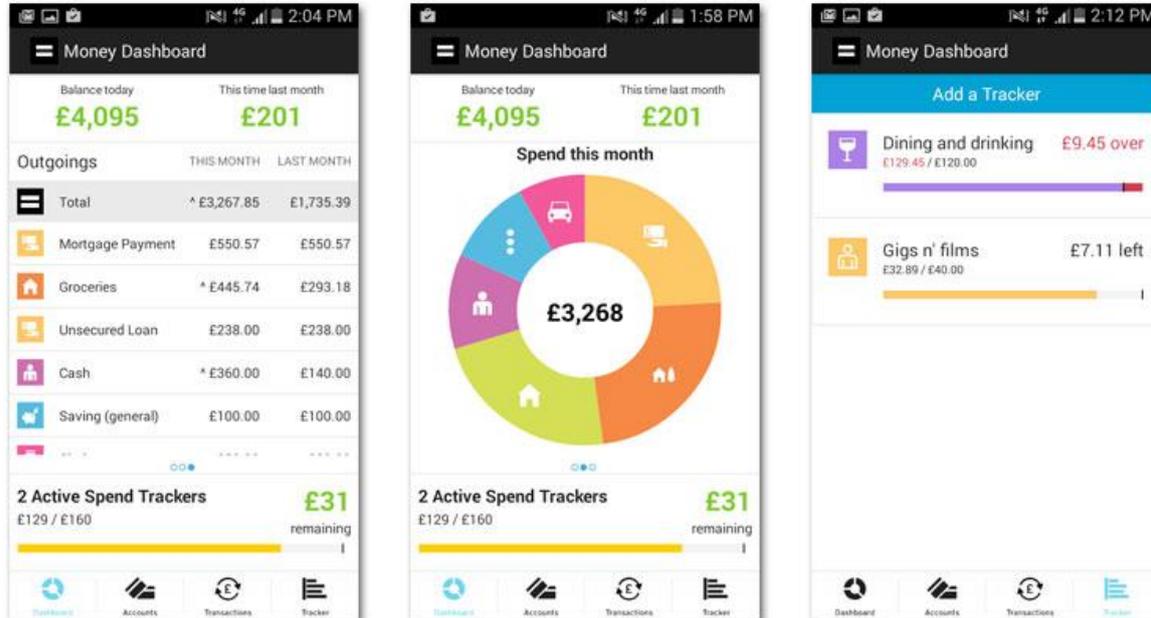
## Money management apps

The introduction of 'open banking' in 2018 has led to a flood of new digital financial services including money management apps such as Youtility, Wonder Bill, Money Dashboard, Yolt, Squirrel and Moneyhub. Some of these apps are free whilst others require a modest annual charge (usually less than £10 per year).

Essentially, money management apps are 'part budget planner and part utility price comparison'. The apps use information from a user's bank statements and credit cards to automatically analyse bank transactions and assemble them into an easy-to-view-and-use display which:

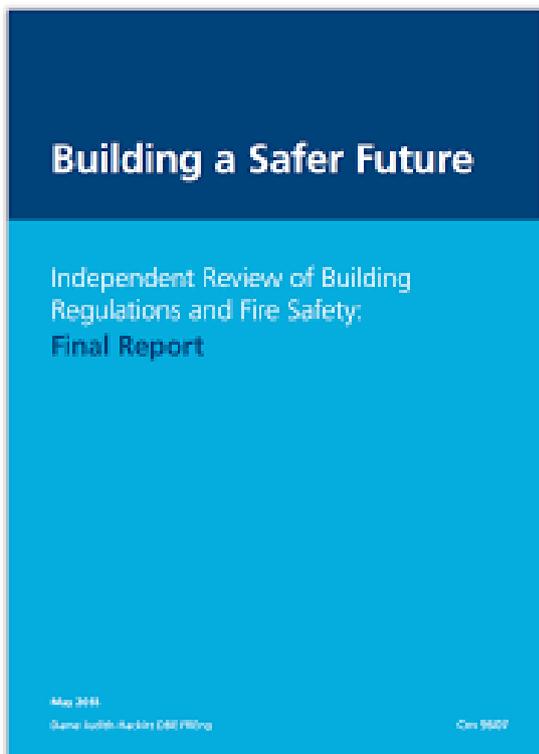
- compiles a list of all the app user's bills – focusing particularly on energy bills, insurance, streaming services, broadband, mortgage and rent payments and council tax bills
- helps the user to set monthly and annual budgets across different categories, track spending and set savings targets
- Enables the user to understand how they are spending their money and what their major expenses are
- allows the user to compare utility prices and switch to the best deal
- Alerts users when they have received a higher bill than normal, when a payment is due or when a utility contract is coming to an end.

*A typical money management app looks like this:*



## 9. Greater transparency regarding health and safety inspection results

The Grenfell Tower disaster has led to a renewed focus on the health and safety of council and housing association tenants. The government's Hackitt review of the building regulations (see below) has already led to several concrete proposals for change and improvement. We can expect the future enhanced consumer regulation promised in the government's housing Green Paper to increase the regulatory expectations placed upon social landlords in respect of health and safety.



We welcome WBC's current health and safety practice in the following areas:

- installation of safety aids – fire, smoke and carbon monoxide (CO) alarms - as standard in all new/existing council homes
- annual testing of gas appliances and alarms in all council homes
- annual testing of electric appliances and water (Legionnaires disease) in sheltered schemes and communal areas and community facilities

However, would like to see WBC be more transparent about the outcomes of these tests by:

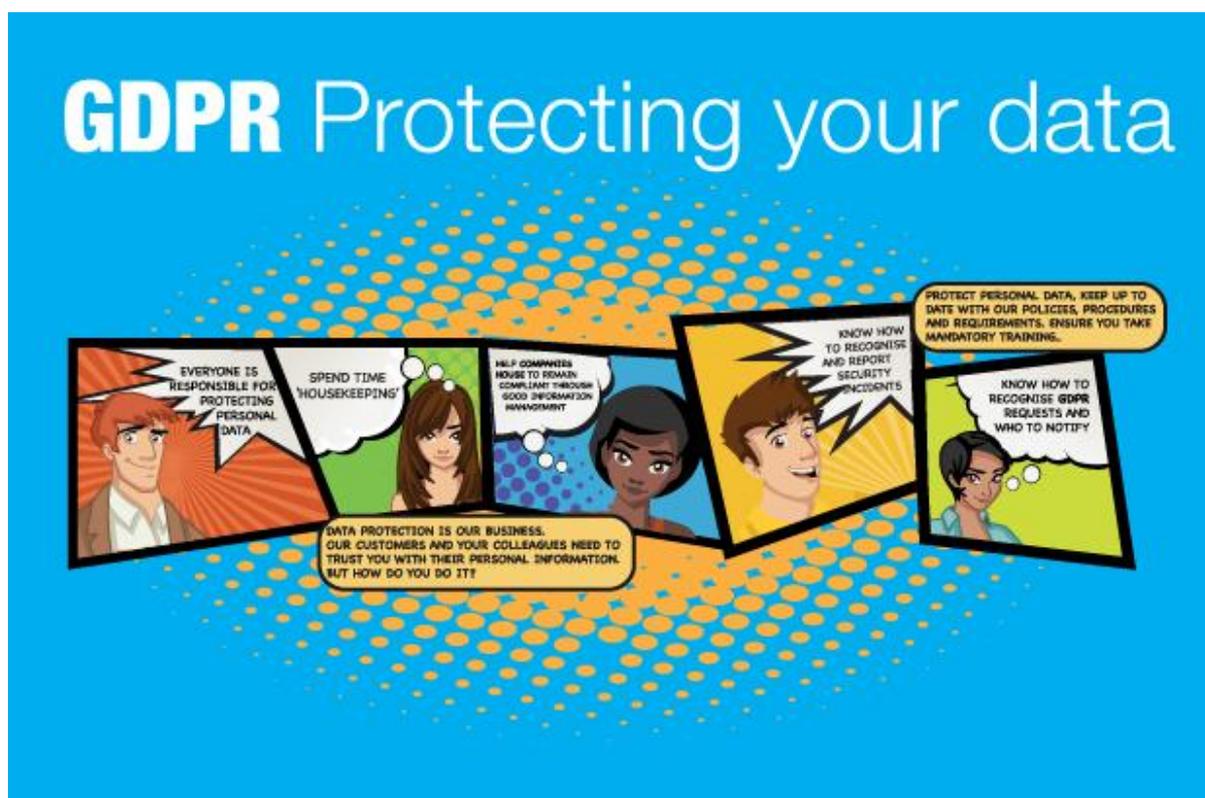
- publishing smoke, gas, electric and CO monitoring inspection results as part of the digital personalised customer record
- publishing fire safety inspection results - as recommended by the Hackitt review – as part of the accessible online personalised customer record

## 10. Developing a protocol for the analysis and protection of tenant data

The objective of WBC involved tenants is to help WBC build the level of trust required to gain tenant consent to the use of their personal data for housing data analysis.

The development of machine learning, artificial intelligence, sentiment analysis and the science of data analytics now enables councils to find out more about their tenants' circumstances, needs and aspirations and to use that data to improve housing services.

However, this increased use of personal data creates increased risks of data security and accidental non-compliance with EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and UK rules which, together, place the onus on the council to hold an individual's data securely and with their consent.



We would like to see WBC modernise by:

- using data analytics to predict future housing service need and demand
- enabling tenants to be involved in process of data collection, analysis and findings
- ensuring that all use of tenant data is GDPR compliant
- involving tenants in the development of the Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIAs) required under GGPR which identify and analyse how data privacy might be affected by specific actions related to the capture and analysis of personal data
- developing a housing-led protocol for the use and protection of data held on tenants based on Information Commissioner (ICO) guidance and the practical execution of ICO guidance as set out in *Transparency and Trust* – the 2017 industry standard HouseMark guide to data protection in social housing

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<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Proposed Solar Farm - Barkham</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	Council on Thursday, 23 September 2021
<b>WARD</b>	Barkham
<b>LEAD OFFICER</b>	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers
<b>LEAD MEMBER</b>	Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions - Gregor Murray

## **PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)**

The purpose of the report is to obtain authority to proceed with the development of a solar farm at Barkham.

The strategic outcomes include:

- Development of a solar farm sufficient to offset the councils carbon emissions
- Generation of a return on investment in excess of 5% from development of green infrastructure

The decision is required due to the value of the capital investment required. Key benefits are a significant step towards the Councils stated Climate Emergency ambitions by making our own Corporate Property 'Net Zero' carbon emitters.

The Solar Farm would be a significant statement of intent in the Councils move towards 'net zero'.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

That, subject to securing the necessary planning consents, Executive asks Council to:

- 1) recommend the capital expenditure of the £20,283,000 funded from borrowing as previously set out in the Medium Term Financial Plan;
- 2) approve delegation of decisions around the final extent and configuration of the Solar Farm to the Deputy Chief Executive (S151 Finance Officer) in conjunction with the Lead Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions where scheme amendments will not result in the average annual net income after capital financing costs falling below £200k;
- 3) note the estimated net income (after running costs and capital financing costs) of £12.0m over 25 years (equal to £480k per year on average) will be introduced into the Councils annual budget using an equalisation reserve;
- 4) approve commencement of the Solar Farm at Barkham.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report proposes the installation of a (up to) 36 Mega Watt Peak Solar Farm on Council owned Farmland in Barkham. This opportunity has the potential to offset the total Carbon Emissions from the Council's operational property portfolio.

The Executive only has authority to agree individual capital schemes up to a maximum of £15m therefore this will require Full Council approval.

## **BACKGROUND**

Wokingham Borough Council announced in 2019, as part of the Climate Emergency commitment, that it would look to become a Net Zero Carbon emitter, across the Borough, by 2030.

WBC published a Climate Emergency Action Plan in January 2020 to achieve this target, which includes the following significant appropriate actions:

- *Construct solar farms for the generation of clean energy for our community*

The Council's corporate asset profile currently stands at 116 Properties, including schools, youth and community centres, flagship corporate properties and smaller premises. All of these properties are in a central buying regime for Energy procurement. Energy usage is continually monitored and based on the last three consecutive years, The council has consumed ; 37,254,743 kWh's energy usage per annum split across Electricity and Gas.

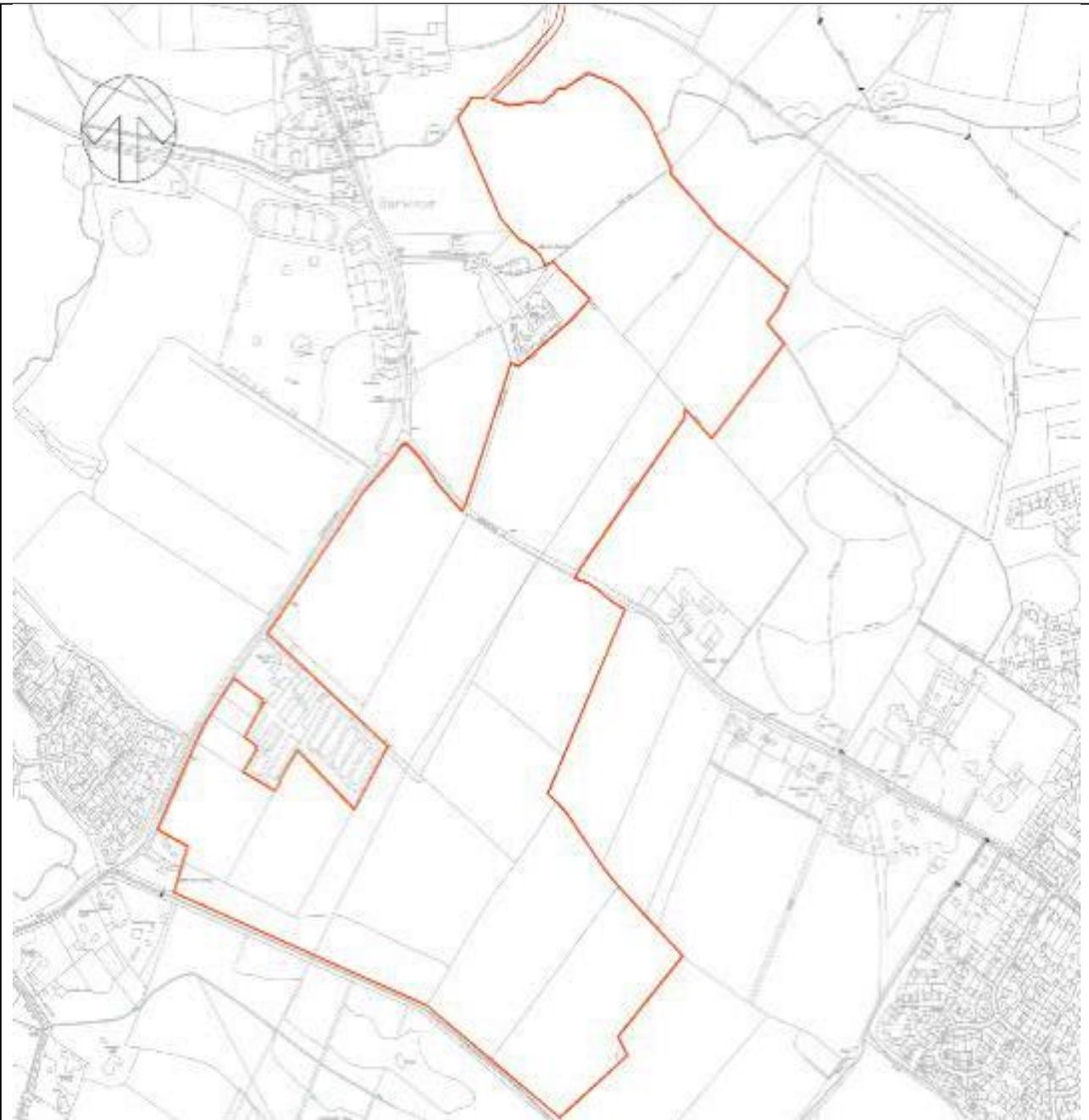
In the first instance, the Council is looking to achieve a quick resolution to provable carbon reduction and 'get its own house in order'. To this end, the potential installation of solar PV (photovoltaic) on farmland in the Council's freehold ownership throughout the Borough is being reviewed.

The first farm site assessed has returned consultancy documentation which would indicate a solar farm of up to 36MWp could be accommodated. This site could generate up to 34,500,000 kWh's per annum.

Importantly the commercial property team are using the construction of the solar farm (alongside other projects we are currently undertaking) to effectively make WBC's emitters. In effect, saving some 11,156 Tonnes of CO2 per annum, upon completion.

Site context and planning

The proposed location of the solar farm at Barkham is indicated here :



A full planning application (reference 211081) has been submitted and is expected to be determined by September 2021. The application includes a full environmental assessment of the impact of the solar farm on the site and surrounding area. It also includes details on tree planting and the installation of greenways across the Council's land as part of a wider scheme of environmental improvements.

Discussions with adjacent property owners/occupiers are ongoing with a view to mitigating the impact of the development wherever practicable to do so. In order to take these discussions into account and accommodate any changes to the site area which may be required following comments from the Local Planning Authority, it is recommended that decisions around the final extent and configuration of the Solar Farm be delegated to the Deputy Chief Executive in conjunction with the Lead Member for Business, Economic Development and Regeneration.

### *Delivery programme*

Subject to planning consent (expected September 2021), delivery of the solar farm will begin shortly afterwards.

The site will become vacant and available for construction to start from the end of September 2021.

The first stage in delivery will be the procurement process of build contractor. Delivery of the project will be managed by WBC's Commercial Property team.

### **Financial Information**

The financial appraisal has been developed using expert advice on costs (and performance) of a solar farm in this location by external consultants with significant experience in this field.

The table below summarises the financial position over a 25 year period which is the estimated life of the asset.

Total income is estimated to be c£59m based on the revenue from exporting the energy. It also takes into account the opportunity cost of lost rent at the site, currently c£34k per year.

Total running costs are estimated to be c£14m and include items such as insurance, maintenance, and management of the site. In addition, the Council will set a side an annual amount known as a 'contribution to sinking fund' which will be used to fund key lifecycle replacements identified in approximately 12 to 13 years' time.

Capital financing costs consist of interest costs from borrowing for 25 years and an annual minimum revenue provision (MRP) to repay the principal borrowing of £20.3m set out in recommendation 1.

The net income after capital financing costs is estimated to be c£12m which equates on average to a annual net surplus of £480k. This will contribute to the budget targets identified in the Medium Term Financial Plan.

<b>Estimated Costs / Income over 25 Years</b>	<b>£m</b>
Total Income (Inc. impact of lost rent)	(£59.37)
Total Running Costs (Inc. contribution to sinking fund)	£14.42
<b>Net Income before capital financing costs</b>	<b>(£44.95)</b>
Interest Costs	£12.68
Principal Repayment (MRP)	£20.28
<b>Net Income after capital financing costs</b>	<b>(£11.99)</b>

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

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

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£16m Capital (£240k) Revenue	Yes	Both
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£4.3m Capital (£480k) Revenue	Yes	Both
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£0 Capital (£480k) Revenue	Yes	Both

### **Other Financial Information**

The financial business case for the solar farm was considered and approved by the Climate Emergency Funding Board on 26<sup>th</sup> March 21.

### **Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation**

Planning consultation completed.

### **Public Sector Equality Duty**

A Stage 1 EIA has been completed.

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

Our corporate estate would become 'net zero' immediately following completion.

### **List of Background Papers**

Solar Farm Financial Business Case

<b>Contact</b> Ian Gough	<b>Service</b> Commercial Property
<b>Telephone</b>	<b>Email</b> ian.gough@wokingham.gov.uk

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**Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) form: Initial impact assessment**

If an officer is undertaking a project, policy change or service change, then an initial impact assessment must be completed and attached alongside the Project initiation document.

**EqIA Titular information:**

Date:	20 <sup>th</sup> June 2021
Service:	Commercial Property
Project, policy or service EQIA relates to:	Creation of a Solar Farm
Completed by:	Craig Hoggeth
Has the EQIA been discussed at services team meeting:	Not yet.
Signed off by:	
Sign off date:	

97

**1. Policy, Project or service information:**

This section should be used to identify the main purpose of the project, policy or service change, the method of delivery, including who key stakeholders are, main beneficiaries and any associated aims.

<b>What is the purpose of the project, policy change or service change , its expected outcomes and how does it relate to your services corporate plan:</b>
Purpose: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To develop a solar farm on Council owned farm land in Barkham.</li><li>• Expected outcomes:</li><li>• Increased revenue stream.</li></ul>

- Offsetting of Council's Carbon Emissions from its operational estate.

Services corporate plan:

- This aligns with the Council's Climate Emergency and Commerciality agendas.

**Outline how you are delivering your project, policy change or service change. What governance arrangements are in place, which internal stakeholders (Service managers, Assistant Directors, Members ect) have/will be consulted and informed about the project or changes:**

How is the project delivered:

- Creation of solar farm on council owned farm land in Barkham.

Governance:

- Commercial Property will be responsible for the development and management of the solar farm.

88

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

- WBC residents.

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

- N/A

## 2. Protected characteristics:

There are 9 protected characteristics as defined by the legislation:

- Race
- Gender
- Disability
- Gender re-assignment
- Age
- Religious belief
- Sexual orientation
- Pregnancy/Maternity
- Marriage and civil partnership:

*To find out more about the protected groups, please consult the EQIA guidance.*

## 3. Initial Impact review:

In the table below, please indicate whether your project, Policy change or service change will have a positive or negative impact on one of the protected characteristics. To assess the level of impact, please assign each group a Positive, No, Low or High impact score:

*For information on how to define No, low or high impact, please consult the EQIA guidance document.*

If your project is to have a positive impact on one of the protected groups, please outline this in the table below.

*For details on what constitutes a positive impact, please consult the EQIA guidance.*

Protected characteristics	Impact score	Please detail what impact will be felt by the protected group:
Race:	No Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is not considered any protected group will be impacted by this proposal.</li> </ul>
Gender:	No Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is not considered any protected group will be impacted by this proposal.</li> </ul>

Disabilities:	No Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It is not considered any protected group will be impacted by this proposal.</li> </ul>
Age:	No impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It is not considered any protected group will be impacted by this proposal.</li> </ul>
Sexual orientation:	No Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It is not considered any protected group will be impacted by this proposal.</li> </ul>
Religion/belief:	No Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It is not considered any protected group will be impacted by this proposal.</li> </ul>
Gender re-assignment:	No Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It is not considered any protected group will be impacted by this proposal.</li> </ul>
Pregnancy and Maternity:	No impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It is not considered any protected group will be impacted by this proposal.</li> </ul>
Marriage and civil partnership:	No impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It is not considered any protected group will be impacted by this proposal.</li> </ul>

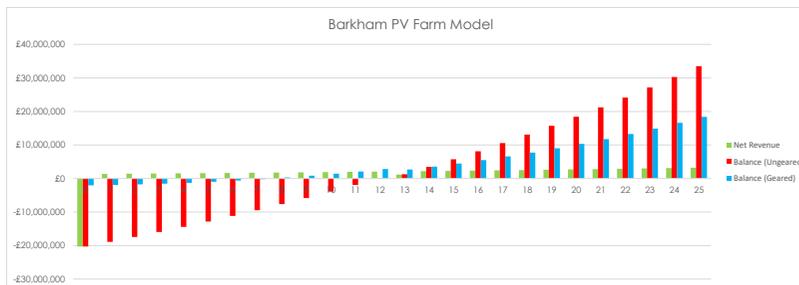
Based on your findings from your initial impact assessment, you must complete a full impact assessment for any groups you have identified as having a low of high negative impact. If No impact, or a positive impact has been identified, you do not need to complete a full assessment. However, you must report on this initial assessment and it must receive formal approval from the Assistant Director responsible for the project, policy or service change.

Initial impact assessment approved by....

Date:....

Barkham 36.6MWp PV Farm

Assumptions	
Size of system	36,610.00 kWp
Imported Energy overnight	154,827 kWh
Generation (kWh/kWp)	943
Exported Energy	34,523,230 kWh
Module degradation	0.40% Per annum
Import electricity price	£ 0.120 pence per kWh
Power Purchase Agreement Export Price	£ 0.045 pence per kWh
EPC Contractor Cost / kWp	£ 400
O&M Costs / kWp per annum	£ 5
Retail Price Inflation (RPI)	2.49%
Annual Fuel Price inflation	3.5%
Year 1 ROI	6.9%
Ungeared IRR	6.3%
Cost of Capital	1.0%
Amount of Loan %	90.0%
Length of loan	25.00 years
Gearred IRR	18%



101

Year	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	
<b>Output kWh (including module degradation &amp; module mismatch)</b>		34,523,230	34,350,614	34,178,861	34,007,966	33,837,927	33,668,757	33,500,393	33,332,891	33,166,227	33,000,396	32,835,394	32,671,217	32,507,861	32,345,321	32,183,595	32,022,677	31,862,563	31,703,251	31,544,734	31,387,011	31,230,076	31,073,925	30,918,556	30,763,963	30,610,143	
<b>Annual Revenue</b>																											
Revenue from Export		£1,553,545	£1,607,919	£1,664,197	£1,722,443	£1,782,729	£1,845,125	£1,909,704	£1,976,544	£2,045,723	£2,117,323	£2,191,429	£2,268,129	£2,347,514	£2,429,677	£2,514,715	£2,602,730	£2,693,826	£2,788,110	£2,885,694	£2,986,693	£3,091,227	£3,199,420	£3,311,400	£3,427,299	£3,547,254	
Imported Electricity (Overnight transformers)		-£18,579	-£19,230	-£19,903	-£20,599	-£21,320	-£22,066	-£22,839	-£23,638	-£24,465	-£25,322	-£26,208	-£27,125	-£28,075	-£29,057	-£30,074	-£31,127	-£32,216	-£33,344	-£34,511	-£35,719	-£36,969	-£38,263	-£39,602	-£40,988	-£42,423	
Inverter Replacement Year 13 (3p/w)														-£954,783													
DNO Application		£ 3,000																									
Tender Costs																											
Planning		-£ 100,000																									
Professional Fees (SPV, Planning & Technical)		-£ 100,000																									
<b>EPC Cost of PV Farm including fencing, Client substations</b>		-£14,644,000																									
Grid Connection Cost at 33kV		-£4,470,000																									
<b>Contingency</b>		-£965,850																									
Business Rates (Assumed Zero Sum)																											
Insurance		-£144,000	-£147,874	-£151,851	-£155,936	-£160,131	-£164,438	-£168,862	-£173,404	-£178,069	-£182,859	-£187,778	-£192,829	-£198,014	-£203,343	-£208,813	-£214,430	-£220,198	-£226,121	-£232,204	-£238,450	-£244,864	-£251,451	-£258,215	-£265,161	-£272,294	
3rd Party Asset manager		-£36,610	-£37,395	-£38,206	-£39,045	-£40,711	-£41,806	-£42,931	-£44,086	-£45,272	-£46,489	-£47,740	-£49,024	-£50,343	-£51,697	-£53,088	-£54,514	-£55,983	-£57,488	-£59,033	-£60,623	-£62,253	-£63,928	-£65,648	-£67,414	-£69,227	
Operational costs (rates, ins, O&M contract) ***		-£163,050	-£167,974	-£173,031	-£178,223	-£183,555	-£189,031	-£194,654	-£200,428	-£206,358	-£212,447	-£218,699	-£225,120	-£231,714	-£238,485	-£245,938	-£253,579	-£261,911	-£270,441	-£279,111	-£287,441	-£295,173	-£303,113	-£311,267	-£319,640	-£328,238	-£337,068
Costs																											
<b>Total Revenue</b>		-£20,282,850	£1,390,966	£1,440,816	£1,492,443	£1,545,908	£1,601,278	£1,658,620	£1,718,003	£1,779,501	£1,843,188	£1,909,142	£1,977,444	£2,048,175	£1,166,641	£2,197,277	£2,275,829	£2,357,174	£2,441,412	£2,528,645	£2,618,979	£2,712,524	£2,809,394	£2,909,706	£3,013,583	£3,121,150	£3,232,538
<b>UNGEARED MODEL</b>																											
Cash flow (£)		-£20,282,850	£1,390,966	£1,440,816	£1,492,443	£1,545,908	£1,601,278	£1,658,620	£1,718,003	£1,779,501	£1,843,188	£1,909,142	£1,977,444	£2,048,175	£1,166,641	£2,197,277	£2,275,829	£2,357,174	£2,441,412	£2,528,645	£2,618,979	£2,712,524	£2,809,394	£2,909,706	£3,013,583	£3,121,150	£3,232,538
Balance - Ungeared		-£20,282,850	£18,891,884	£17,451,066	£15,958,625	£14,412,717	£12,811,439	£11,152,819	£9,434,816	£7,565,314	£5,542,126	£3,362,983	£1,025,540	£122,635	£1,289,276	£3,486,555	£5,762,381	£8,119,555	£10,560,967	£13,089,612	£15,708,591	£18,421,114	£21,230,510	£24,140,216	£27,153,799	£30,274,948	£33,507,486
<b>GEARED MODEL</b>																											
Borrowings																											
Equity (Capital Outlay)		£18,254,565																									
<b>Annual Costs</b>																											
Loan Repayment		£730,182.4	£730,183	£730,183	£730,183	£730,183	£730,183	£730,183	£730,183	£730,183	£730,183	£730,183	£730,183	£730,183	£730,183	£730,183	£730,183	£730,183	£730,183	£730,183	£730,183	£730,183	£730,183	£730,183	£730,183	£730,183	
Interest		£182,546	£175,244	£167,942	£160,640	£153,338	£146,037	£138,735	£131,433	£124,131	£116,829	£109,527	£102,226	£94,924	£87,622	£80,320	£73,018	£65,716	£58,415	£51,113	£43,811	£36,509	£29,207	£21,905	£14,604	£7,302	
Operational costs (rates, ins, O&M contract)		£363,660	£373,442	£383,488	£393,804	£404,397	£415,275	£426,446	£437,918	£449,698	£461,795	£474,217	£486,973	£500,073	£513,525	£527,329	£541,524	£556,091	£571,050	£586,411	£602,186	£618,385	£635,019	£652,101	£669,643	£687,656	
<b>Total Annual Costs</b>		-£2,028,285	-£1,278,388	-£1,278,869	-£1,281,613	-£1,284,627	-£1,287,918	-£1,291,495	-£1,295,364	-£1,299,533	-£1,304,011	-£1,308,806	-£1,313,927	-£1,319,382	-£1,325,179	-£1,331,329	-£1,337,841	-£1,344,725	-£1,351,990	-£1,359,647	-£1,367,707	-£1,376,179	-£1,385,074	-£1,394,409	-£1,404,189	-£1,414,429	
Revenues		£1,390,966	£1,440,816	£1,492,443	£1,545,908	£1,601,278	£1,658,620	£1,718,003	£1,779,501	£1,843,188	£1,909,142	£1,977,444	£2,048,175	£1,166,641	£2,197,277	£2,275,829	£2,357,174	£2,441,412	£2,528,645	£2,618,979	£2,712,524	£2,809,394	£2,909,706	£3,013,583	£3,121,150	£3,232,538	
Cash flow (£)		-£2,028,285	£114,578	£161,947	£210,830	£261,281	£313,360	£367,125	£422,640	£479,968	£539,177	£600,336	£666,517	£728,794	£1,168,539	£865,947	£937,987	£1,012,449	£1,089,422	£1,168,998	£1,251,273	£1,336,345	£1,424,318	£1,515,297	£1,609,394	£1,706,721	£1,807,397
Balance - Geared		-£1,913,707	£1,751,760	£1,485,930	£1,279,648	£964,288	£599,163	£176,524	£303,445	£486,222	£722,957	£1,026,474	£1,492,957	£2,106,474	£2,835,268	£3,782,529	£4,946,663	£6,339,112	£8,062,534	£10,227,000	£12,944,419	£16,331,149	£20,403,149	£25,274,419	£31,054,819	£37,854,219	
Outstanding loan		£18,254,565	£17,524,382	£16,794,200	£16,064,017	£15,333,835	£14,603,652	£13,873,469	£13,143,287	£12,413,104	£11,682,922	£10,952,739	£10,222,556	£9,492,374	£8,762,191	£8,032,009	£7,301,826	£6,571,643	£5,841,461	£5,111,278	£4,381,096	£3,650,913	£2,920,730	£2,190,548	£1,460,365	£730,183	

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<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Treasury Management Outturn 2020-21</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	Council on 23 September 2021
<b>WARD</b>	None specific
<b>LEAD OFFICER</b>	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers

## **OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY**

To demonstrate that the Council's treasury function has effectively managed the Council's debt and cash balances to support the funding of the delivery of the Council's key priorities.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Council is asked to note:

- 1) the Treasury Management Outturn Report 2020-21 which was agreed at Audit Committee on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2021;
- 2) that all approved indicators set out in the Treasury Management Strategy have been adhered to;
- 3) the contents of "Table A", as set out in the report, which shows the net benefit per council tax band D equivalent, from the income generated less the financing costs on all borrowing to date equates to £10.22 per band D for 2020/21. This credit provides income to the Council to invest in its priority services. This net benefit has increased from the £7.20 benefit estimated in the treasury mid-year report;
- 4) that the total external general fund debt is £458m, which reduces to £121m after taking into account cash balances (net indebtedness);
- 5) that although the Council is taking the opportunity of new borrowing at low interest rates in 2020/21, external debt is expected to reduce to c£350m by March 2022 as a result of repayment of legacy debt on maturity;
- 6) the Council's realisable asset value of approximately £400m, of which its commercial assets are estimated at approximately £240m.

## **SUMMARY OF REPORT**

This report provides a summary of the Treasury Management operations during the financial year of 2020/21. It is presented for the purpose of monitoring and review, in accordance with Council's treasury management practices. The Council adhered to all agreed prudential indicators except for a temporary breach in investment limits outlined below. This includes ensuring the necessary liquidity to deliver on the day-to-day operations of the Council. There are two aspects of treasury performance: debt management which relates to the Council's borrowing and cash investment which relates to the investment of cash balances.

Key highlights to note are:

- The annual benefit from the income generated less the financing costs on all borrowing to date equates to £10.22 per council tax band D property for 2020/21.
- Net indebtedness after cash balances is £121m at end of March 2021.
- Realisable asset value of £408m at end of March, meaning an asset to net indebtedness ratio cover of 3.37:1.

A detailed breakdown of the Council's performance in these areas is summarised below.

### Prudential indicators debt and investment

During 2020-2021, the Council adhered to all of its prudential indicators.

On one occasion the Council had to exceed a counterparty limit (not a prudential indicator) by investing with another local authority. Due to additional funds from central government during the pandemic, the Council found itself with surplus funds in its transactional bank account (NatWest). In accordance with MHCLG investment guidance, for security of monies reasons, the treasury team sought to invest the surplus funds with another local authority; as other authorities were also in surplus funds the only suitable counterparty at the time was Thurrock Council and although we were at our maximum limit specified in the investment strategy, it was considered more secure to invest with them than leave the money in our transactional account. The investment was short term and has already been repaid back to the Council.

Investments with local authorities are within the MHCLG Investment guidance where they are determined to be low risk and high credit quality investments. In addition, the local government act 2003 contains protections for lenders to local authorities with all money borrowed by a local authority.

### Council's Net Indebtedness

Net indebtedness represents the underlying debt position the Council holds. The table below shows how this is calculated.

	Mid Year £m	Outturn £m
General Fund – Capital Financing Requirement	£449m	£365m
<u>Less</u> Internal funded borrowing	(£125m)	£93m
External Debt Total	£324m	£458m
<u>Less</u> Cash investment balances	(£241m)	(£337m)
<b>Net Indebtedness Total</b>	<b>£83m</b>	<b>£121m</b>

**As at March 2021, total external debt for the general fund was £458m and treasury investments were £337m resulting in net indebtedness of £121m.** The HRA borrowing is excluded from this calculation as it is a ringfenced account with external debt funded from housing tenants rental income.

The increase in both external debt and cash investments represents the differing nature of external debt and cash investments, external debt is long term and based on supporting the approved capital programme spend as expected. Short term investments which are based on cash balances at a point in time. Cash balances have also improved during the year due to more government grants being paid upfront to help the impact from Covid-19. External debt is within the prudential limits set in the treasury management strategy. The Authorised Limit (maximum external debt allowed) was set at £533m, the actual year end external debt (including HRA) position was £529m, within the limit set. The Council continues to aim to manage its debt in the most financially effective way whilst adhering to statutory requirement including the CIPFA's Prudential Code.

General fund external debt has increased from the mid year forecast of £324m to £458m, an increase of £134m. The increase in borrowing is due to many reasons which include;

- Whilst interest rates have remained at historically low levels during the pandemic, the Council have been taking advantage of this for borrowing and with a forecast that rates are expected to rise in the near future, coupled with the forecast borrowing agreed in the treasury management strategy, the Council have taken some loans out early to take advantage of the best rates. The average interest rate has fallen from 2.46% to 1.48% over the past year which is a saving of 0.98%.
- Due to COVID and the uncertainty around cashflow for many local authorities, the traditional markets where we would access short-term borrowing e.g. Local Authorities, has become more difficult with less short-term options available on the days we need to borrow.
- Reporting the debt position at any point in time can be a little misleading because some borrowing is repaid in short periods of time. For example, external debt shown in the table above is forecast to reduce to c£350m by the end of the current financial year, March 2022.

The movements in the Council's external debt through 2020/21, are shown in table below.

	Opening @ 01/04/2020	New Borrowing	Repayments of Borrowing	Closing @ 31/03/2021
	£m	£m	£m	£m
General Fund	£204m	£373m	(£119m)	£458m
Housing Revenue Account	£75m	£0m	(£4m)	£71m
<b>Total</b>	<b>£279m</b>	<b>£373m</b>	<b>(£123m)</b>	<b>£529m</b>

## Cost of Financing Debt

The table below shows the gross financing costs of servicing the external debt. Gross financing costs reflect the annual interest costs payable and an amount for Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP). To understand the true cost of this, it is important to take into account the income from treasury investments, contributions from 'invest to save' schemes, income from investment / commercial properties which all contribute to reducing the annual cost of this financing. Furthermore for completeness and transparency the table has been extended to show additional income the Council receives from our assets which contributes towards the funding of key services the Council provide. This is the income over and above the amount used to contribute towards the financing costs of the borrowing.

**Taking these factors into account, for the general fund the net annual benefit from the income generated less the financing costs on all borrowing to date equates to £10.22 per council tax band D property for 2020/21 as set out below.**

**TABLE A**

	Mid Year Forecast	Outturn
	£,000	£,000
General Fund – Financing Cost (Interest and MRP debt repayment)	7,784	8,118
<u>Less</u> contributions towards financing costs from following areas:		
- Treasury investments	(815)	(1,406)
- Commercial investments	(2,820)	(2,659)
- Town centre regeneration	(2,536)	(2,622)
- Housing companies	(568)	(727)
- Invest to save schemes	(503)	(418)
	(7,242)	(7,832)
Net Annual Financing Cost	542	286
<u>Include</u> additional income over and above the contributions shown above:		
- Commercial investments	(1,061)	(1,022)
- Town centre regeneration*	0	0
<b>Net Annual <u>Benefit</u> to the taxpayer</b>	<b>(519)</b>	<b>(736)</b>

Net Annual Benefit £,000	(519)	(736)
Divide by Council Tax Base (no. of band D equivalent properties)	72,037	72,037
<b>Benefit per band D property - £</b>	<b>£7.20</b>	<b>£10.22</b>

\*Income from this investment goes to repay its costs. When the scheme is fully operational, the surplus income is expected to be c£2m per annum. Over the fulness of time when debt is fully repaid, the surplus will be in the region of £5m - £6m per year.

The net benefit per council tax payer, from the income generated less the financing costs on all borrowing to date equates to £10.22 of the average band D council tax charge. This income is used by the Council to continue to provide priority services for the borough residents.

### Asset Value

Whilst it is important to understand the net borrowing for the Council, it is also essential to consider the asset value that this borrowing generates as part of the Council's capital programme. Using the value of assets from our draft annual accounts, the estimated asset value for the Council is £953m at 31st March 2021. Realisable asset value is based on annual accounts valuation and any individual disposal would seek to maximise the receipt to the Council at the time of sale.

	£m	£m
Asset Value as per balance sheet 31 March 2021		953
<u>Less:</u>		
Highways & Transport assets	250	
Schools' assets	277	
Other non-realisable assets	17	
		545
Value of realisable assets		408
Of which are;		
Operational Assets		167
Commercial Assets		241
- Wokingham Town Centre	117	
- Community Investment Group	78	
- Housing Companies	47	

## Asset Ratio

Taking the value of realisable assets and dividing by the external debt or net indebtedness gives a good indication of the debt cover our assets provide.

- Asset cover\* to External Debt – 1.63:1
- Realisable Non Current Assets cover to Net Indebtedness – 3.37:1

\*Asset cover = value of realisable assets plus cash investment balances.

## Investment of Cash Balances

Cash flow balances vary significantly throughout the year due to differences in timing of income (council tax, developer contributions, grants, etc.) and timing of expenditure (running costs - revenue, and investment in assets and services – capital). During times when the council holds cash balances, investments will be made based on security, liquidity, and yield (in this order). Due to the uncertainty around Covid-19, whilst the council have been fortunate with the cashflow support from central government (e.g. grants paid earlier than planned) over the past year, more investments were made on a short term and secure basis across. This has ensured the liquidity is available to meet Covid-19 pressures however has meant returns on investments are lower due to the duration of the investment and lower risk counterparties (e.g. lending to other local authorities).

The table below shows the Council's investments by type, including performance and year-end balance.

	Average Invested	Interest Received	Average rate of return	31 <sup>st</sup> March 2021 Balance
	£m	£m	%	£m
Investment Properties	£79.0m	£2.7m	2.63%	£85.9m
Loans to Subsidiaries	£31.5m	£1.1m	3.65%	£33.2m
Fund Managers	£0.65m	£0.01m	1.49%	£0.65m
Local Authorities	£168.5m	£1.4m	0.80%	£332.0m
Money Markets	£9.5m	£0.04m	0.43%	£5.0m
<b>Total</b>	<b>£289.0m</b>	<b>£5.3m</b>	<b>1.82%</b>	<b>£456.7m</b>

As part of the Council's policies on property investment the Council has invested £85.9m of its own balances, these generate £3.7m in annual revenues which is a return of 4.31%. Monetary investments achieve a return of c.1.5% over a similar investment term.

## Peak Debt and Capital Financing Requirement (CFR)

As highlighted previously, the Council continue to invest significant amounts into the capital programme generating assets such as roads, schools, housing, regeneration properties and many more. The graph below sets out the expected repayment of this debt as well as the asset value generated.

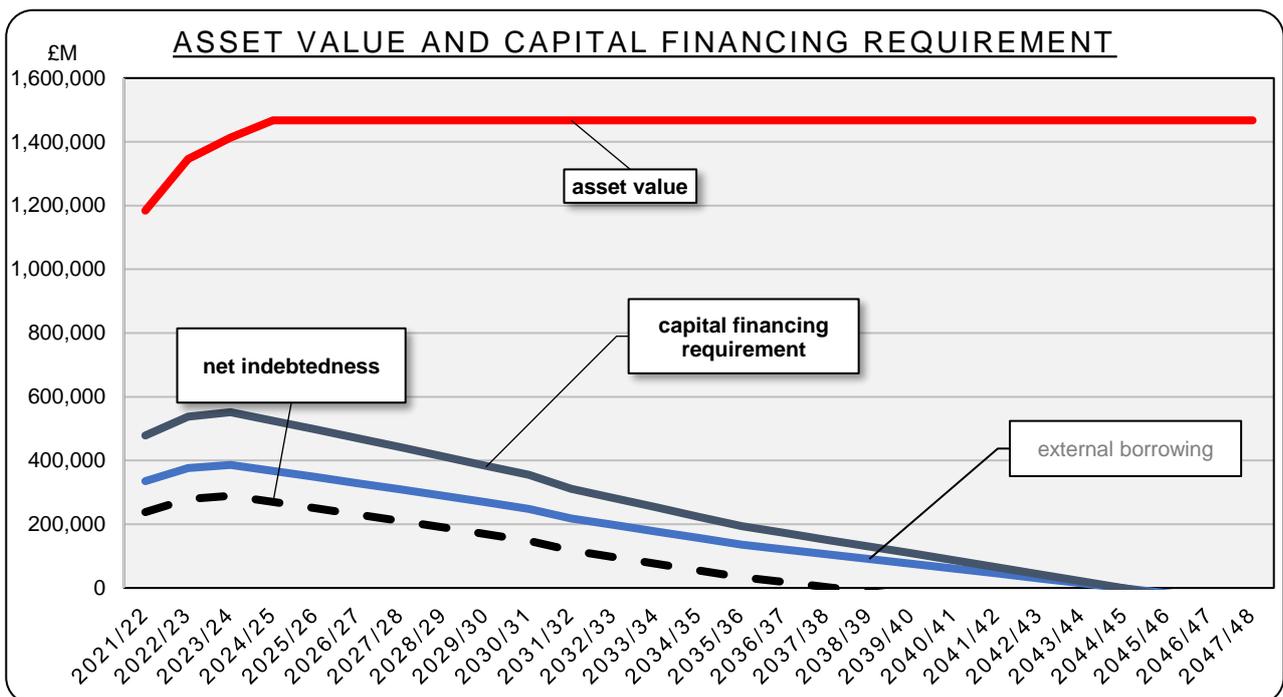
The graph includes three key lines in reference to debt;

- Capital financing requirement (CFR) - A technical calculation of historic capital expenditure less that already paid for, required to arrive at the annual level of debt repayment.
- External debt – this is the actual amount borrowed with third parties. The difference between CFR and external debt is referred to as internal borrowing.
- Net indebtedness – this is external debt less treasury (i.e. liquid) investment balances. It is important that these are considered together as treasury investments could be used to repay external debt.

The Council are expecting debt to rise over the next three years in line with the capital programme and then it is expected to reduce over time as income is generated from these projects and cost savings are realised.

CFR and external debt will reduce as borrowings are repaid through income and will reach a point in time when debt is fully repaid, and the ongoing income will be transferred to benefit the general fund.

The graph is based on general fund only and excludes HRA as this is ringfenced. The original CFR levels before commercialisation, forward funding and regeneration projects were approximately £100m.



After the first three years, the expectation is that the CFR, external debt and net indebtedness will start to reduce as repayments of borrowing start to increase, capital receipts and developer funding are received. The position for the peak CFR has also reduced from what was forecast in the treasury management strategy, falling from a peak CFR of £671 million to £552 million. This is due mainly to changes in capital expenditure profiling.

The asset value used in the graph above are calculated using the total asset value from the Council's balance sheet, and an estimate of capital expenditure over the next three

years. This is a prudent approach to asset value as it would be expected that asset value would also increase over time.

### Capital Financing Requirement

An important part of the treasury management strategy is to highlight the level of borrowing need. This is known as the capital financing requirement (CFR) and is an accounting concept which monitors how much capital expenditure has been incurred but not yet paid for.

A major source of funding for the Council’s capital programme is borrowing. This is described in two forms, supported borrowing and general fund borrowing. A significant part of the Council’s capital programme is either self-financing or makes a surplus where the income generated is greater than the cost of financing and therefore is available to fund other council services. These are referred to as “supported borrowing”. General fund borrowing is funded through existing base budget and supports general investment to maintain Council assets and continue to provide services to customers and residents.

A summary of the general fund CFR position at the end of March 2021 is shown below. This has been split into supported borrowing and general fund borrowing.

<b>2020/21</b>	<b>Supported Borrowing</b>	<b>General Fund Borrowing</b>
	£m	£m
Opening balance	231	97
Expenditure in year	44	19
Repayments in year	(22)	(3)
<b>Closing balance</b>	<b>253</b>	<b>113</b>

It is important to note that the CFR balance does not reflect the level of debt the Council holds. Where the Council hold surplus balances such as reserves, unspent grants and working capital, this avoids the need to borrow externally saving on interest costs. This is known as internal borrowing. Furthermore, it is important to take into account any treasury investment balances when looking at external debt to understand a more accurate debt figure.

The housing revenue account also has a CFR which is ringfenced and repaid through tenants rental income. The CFR for the HRA as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 was £83m.

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

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

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	See other financial information	Yes	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	To be confirmed	Yes	Revenue
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	To be confirmed	Yes	Revenue

### Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

- net benefit per council tax payer, from the income generated less the financing costs on all borrowing to date equates to £10.22. This income is used by the Council to continue to provide priority services for the borough residents.
- total external general fund debt is £458m and the Council's net indebtedness after cash balances is £121 million.
- the Council's realisable asset value of £408m, of which its commercial assets is estimated at £241m.

### Cross-Council Implications

None

### Public Sector Equality Duty

N/A – this report is reporting past financial information

### List of Background Papers

None

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