



WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

A Meeting of the **COUNCIL** will be held in the Council Chamber - Civic Offices, Shute End, Wokingham RG40 1BN on **THURSDAY 20 JANUARY 2022 AT 7.30 PM**

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

Susan Parsonage
Chief Executive
Published on 12 January 2022

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/V8azWexi0mM>

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.
62.		APOLOGIES To receive any apologies for absence	
63.		MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING To confirm the Minutes of the Council Meeting held on 18 November 2021.	13 - 54
64.		DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST To receive any declarations of interest	
65.		MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS To receive any announcements by the Mayor	
66.		PUBLIC QUESTION TIME To answer any public questions A period of 30 minutes will be allowed for members of the public to ask questions submitted under notice. The Council welcomes questions from members of the public about the work of the 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 www.wokingham.gov.uk/publicquestions	
66.1	None Specific	Philip Meadowcroft has asked the Chairman of the Constitution Review Working Group the following question: Question At the November 2021 Full Council Meeting, the Mayor, responding to a Members' query about the previous meeting's draft minutes, was advised by Democratic Services that the minuting of a written answer to a Supplementary Question (about Members' use of private email addresses raised at the September meeting) was not required because clause 4.2.9.9 "Written Answers" in the Constitution did not extend to written answers to Supplementary Questions.	

The first two words of 4.2.9.9, which specifically deals with Written Answers, are “Any questions...” and I consider that the advice given to the Mayor, (which he duly endorsed and thereby dismissed the Member’s query) was patently flawed.

To prevent this occurring again, in the interests of transparency and openness (otherwise written answers to Supplementary Questions will be hidden from both public and Members’ view), will this Full Council Meeting tonight urge the Constitution Review Working Group to revise the wording of 4.2.9.9 to ensure that Democratic Services in future advises the Mayor and Leader of the Council (both of whom I trust, on reflection, will agree with me) that written answers to Supplementary Questions will be included in the minutes of the related meeting?

66.2 None Specific Danny Errawalla has asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

Question

Please can you give us an update on how the Anti-Poverty Strategy is going?

66.3 None Specific Juliet Sherratt has asked the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and Communities the following question:

Question

In the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021-24 document, it is claimed that prevention is at the heart of the Strategy. However, there is only one sentence referring to prevention in the rest of the document. Please can Councillor Soane outline how the Strategy aims to prevent domestic abuse and put prevention at the heart of the strategy to reassure residents that this is not a hollow document?

67.

PETITIONS

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

68. None Specific

COUNCIL'S ANTI-ABUSE CHARTER

To consider the adoption of a Wokingham Borough Council Anti-Abuse Charter, which is part of the implementation of the Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021-2024.

RECOMMENDATION: That Council approve the adoption of a local Anti-Abuse Charter.

55 - 58

69.	None Specific	<p>COUNCIL TAX BASE 22/23</p> <p>To set the Council Tax Base for 2022/23 in respect of the whole Borough and all constituent parts so that each precepting parish can subsequently set their Council Tax budgets for the year.</p> <p>RECOMMENDATION: That Council agree the proposed Council Tax Base, for the whole area and by Parish, as set out in the report.</p>	59 - 62
70.	None Specific	<p>COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME 22/23</p> <p>To adopt a Localised Council Tax Reduction Scheme which will ensure that all working age Borough residents who may experience financial difficulties in paying their council tax liabilities have access to a scheme of assistance, designed locally, offering financial help to them.</p> <p>RECOMMENDATION: That the Council agree the proposed Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2022/23:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) a local CTR scheme for 2022/23 is adopted on the same basis as the 2021/22; 2) that the full disregard currently allowed for War Widows and War Disability Pensions is continued from 1st April 2022 in respect of the Prescribed and Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme and Housing Benefit schemes; 3) that funds be made available to the hardship fund, known as Section 13a (S13a) scheme, for those who cannot pay their council tax liabilities; 4) Members to note the linkages to the broader Anti-Poverty strategy of both the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and the S13a scheme. 	63 - 68
71.	None Specific	<p>TREASURY MANAGEMENT MID - YEAR REPORT 2021-22</p> <p>To consider the mid-year Treasury Management report for 2021-22.</p> <p>RECOMMENDATION Council is recommended to note:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) that the Treasury Management Mid-Year report was considered and agreed by the Audit Committee at their meeting on Tuesday 30 November 2021; 	69 - 74

- 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 £36.62 per band D for 2021/22. This income is used by the Council to continue to provide priority services for the borough residents.
- 4) that as at the end of September 2021, the total external general fund debt was £416m, which reduces to £120m after taking into account cash balances (net indebtedness); External debt is forecast to reduce to £266m by the end of the financial year.

72.	None Specific	<p>PROCUREMENT OF EXTERNAL AUDIT To consider proposals for appointing the external auditor to the Council for the accounts for the five-year period from 2023/24.</p> <p>RECOMMENDATION: That Council agree the preferred approach to appoint the external auditor for the accounts for the five-year period from 2023/24, as recommended by the Audit Committee on 30th November 2021 of using the Sector Led Body, the PSAA by indicating an option to "opt-in."</p>	75 - 80
73.	None Specific	<p>APPOINTMENT OF TOWN/PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVE ON THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE To consider the appointment of a Town/Parish Council representative to the current vacancy on the Standards Committee.</p> <p>RECOMMENDATION that: Councillor Sheena Matthews (Earley Town Council) be appointed as a Town/Parish Council representative on the Standards Committee.</p>	81 - 84
74.	None Specific	<p>APPOINTMENT TO ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY To consider an appointment to the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority following the resignation of Councillor Anne Chadwick.</p>	85 - 88

RECOMMENDATION: That Councillor Alison Swaddle be appointed as one of the Council's representatives on the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority.

75. None Specific **TIMETABLE OF MEETINGS** **89 - 90**

To consider the proposed Timetable of Meetings for the 2022/23 Municipal Year.

RECOMMENDATION: That Council approve the Timetable of Meetings for the 2022/23 Municipal Year, as set out in the agenda.

76. None Specific **WHITE RIBBON MOTION** **91 - 96**

To receive an update on Council Motion 469 which was considered at the November 2021 Council meeting and subsequently referred to the Equalities Working Group to examine the benefits of the actions set out in the motion.

RECOMMENDATION: That Council note the update and agree the recommendations of the Equalities Working Group as follows:

- 1) Council explore how it can improve communications to residents on what it is doing to support domestic violence victims;
- 2) Council Officers explore whether there is a more comprehensive accreditation to certify at which level the Council is performing when it comes to domestic violence provision;
- 3) The Leader of the Council to write to the Home Secretary in support of making public sexual harassment a specific offence and impress the need for wider cultural change and write to the four MPs that cover Wokingham Borough and PCC to encourage them to also support this;
- 4) The Executive Member for Children's Services to write to local schools on how they're upholding the Department for Education's September 2021 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' policy on public sexual harassment.

77. **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

77.1 Arborfield

Gary Cowan has asked the Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions the following question:

Question

The Council's plan to tackle climate change contains the following

- Reduce carbon dioxide emissions from transport
- Create a local plan that specifies net zero construction and infrastructure
- Increase the levels of carbon sequestration the Borough through greening the environment
- Engage with young people and support sustainable schools
- Encouraging behaviour change.

Part of the Arborfield Green (Garrison) planning permission was to provide two primary schools for the new occupants and had the developer not agreed planning permission would have been quite rightly refused by the Planning Department.

When the primary school was nearing completion Wokingham Borough Council's Children's Services agreed to shut Farley Hill School and moved it in its entirety to the new school location at Arborfield Green, even calling it Farley Hill Primary School, so denying children living directly outside the gates of the new school access.

As a result of this decision all the primary school aged children in Arborfield Green have to be driven to surrounding primary schools while many who attended Farley Hill now have a much longer drive to the new school

How does this fit in with the five bullet points in the Council's plan to tackle climate emergency?

77.2 Charvil

Sam Akhtar has asked the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and Communities the following question:

Question

In Charvil village, I have had some issues with graffiti and have attempted to get this removed. However, I have been informed by the Council that their policy is to only remove graffiti which is offensive. Can you confirm why this policy is in place and if the Council

will consider changing the policy to include non-offensive graffiti in order to keep our Borough graffiti free?

77.3 Winnersh

Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey has asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question

When is the safety audit on Woodward Close entrance expected to be finished and the safety problems of the entrance finally fixed for the residents?

77.4 Bulmershe and Whitegates

Shirley Boyt has asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question:

Question

Lilly May Court is an affordable development in my ward under a shared ownership arrangement. It has emerged that these properties weren't constructed in accordance with planning conditions and mitigation intended to reduce the impact of noise from haulage yards was not installed. Furthermore, a covenant regarding the yards and the mitigation wasn't disclosed at the point of sale.

When residents complained to their provider about intolerable noise and pollution from the haulage yards, they were treated with contempt and told that they were 'not allowed' to complain about the hauliers and should 'keep their windows closed'.

It has finally been accepted that a breach of planning has taken place and the provider is now pressurising the residents to accept the mitigation. However, the majority of residents would never have bought into these properties had they been given the full facts at the point of sale and have requested the properties are bought back by the provider, who has refused.

The provider, Housing Solutions, is a 'Preferred Registered Provider' of WBC, so my question is - what pressure can WBC exert to encourage this provider to buy back these flats to enable these families to move on with their lives?

77.5 None Specific

Jackie Rance has asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Question:

Could you give me an update on the situation with 6th Form provision in the South of the Borough?

77.6 None Specific

Shahid Younis has asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Question

Now most of our schools in WBC are academies and as such beyond WBC control what are you doing in Children's Services to ensure our children are properly educated?

78.

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

79.

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

80.

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.

81.

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

Motion 472 submitted by Rachel Burgess

Wokingham Borough Council must continually review the support offered to families facing financial crisis to ensure a robust safety net is in place for those in need.

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic there were already too many families in Wokingham struggling to make ends meet, and now many more families have been thrown into crisis, without the ability to pay their rent, heat their homes or feed their children.

The Local Welfare Provision Scheme exists to provide immediate financial support to households facing an emergency situation. However, the number of people helped by this scheme in Wokingham borough has fallen by 76% since 2016-17, with just 21 people helped in 2020-21. In 2019-20, just £3,000 was spent providing support through this scheme. Over the last three years only 23% of the allocated budget was actually spent, on average.

Now more than ever, with the Covid-19 pandemic causing an unprecedented downturn in incomes, Wokingham Borough Council must continually review the support offered to families in crisis. Wokingham Borough Council will:

- Review the effectiveness of Wokingham's Local Welfare Provision Scheme
- Consult with residents and the voluntary sector to ascertain how those who need crisis assistance can be better supported
- Ensure residents in need of support can easily access the scheme and work to remove barriers to application
- Ensure effective signposting of the scheme in conjunction with the voluntary sector
- Ensure frontline staff are trained so that they are fully aware of the scheme and are able to advise residents on how to apply
- Prioritise the delivery of cash-first support, which is more empowering and respectful to those on lower incomes
- Ensure cash can be provided within 24-48 hours of a successful application
- Consider relaxing the qualifying criteria and disclosure requirements for the scheme, ensuring that residents' dignity is respected throughout.

81.2 None Specific

Motion 473 submitted by Guy Grandison

This Council welcomes the pause and review of the draft Planning Bill by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. This Council strongly believes in the principle of local decision-making in planning, and urges the Secretary of State to place this at the heart of reforms to the planning system. Further, this Council requests that the Leader of the Council writes to the Secretary of State, asking him to consider the following:

- A. A revision of the Housing Need formula to ensure that it does not penalise areas like Wokingham Borough for being prosperous places to live;
- B. Enhanced local community decision-making on development, including the potential for individual streets or villages to vote on whether to accept more housing; and
- C. Greater powers for local planning authorities to get developers building applications they have already been granted and the end the practice of 'land-banking'.

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**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE COUNCIL
HELD ON THURSDAY, 18 NOVEMBER 2021 FROM 7.30 PM TO 10.35 PM**

Members Present

Councillors: Keith Baker (Mayor), Abdul Loyes (Deputy Mayor), Sam Akhtar, Parry Batth, Rachel Bishop-Firth, Laura Blumenthal, Chris Bowring, Shirley Boyt, Jenny Cheng, Rachel Burgess, Stephen Conway, Phil Cunnington, Peter Dennis, Lindsay Ferris, Michael Firmager, Paul Fishwick, John Halsall, Jim Frewin, David Hare, Pauline Helliar-Symons, Graham Howe, Clive Jones, Norman Jorgensen, John Kaiser, Sarah Kerr, Tahir Maher, Morag Malvern, Charles Margetts, Rebecca Margetts, Adrian Mather, Andrew Mickleburgh, Stuart Munro, Gregor Murray, Barrie Patman, Jackie Rance, Angus Ross, Daniel Sargeant, Ian Shenton, Imogen Shepherd-DuBey, Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey, Caroline Smith, Chris Smith, Wayne Smith, Bill Soane and Alison Swaddle

Members In Attendance Virtually

Councillors: Anne Chadwick, Carl Doran, Maria Gee, Guy Grandison, Pauline Jorgensen, Simon Weeks and Shahid Younis

54. Apologies

Apologies for absence were submitted from Prue Bray and Gary Cowan.

55. Minute's Silence

The Council observed a Minute's Silence in memory of Sir David Amess.

56. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 23 September 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

Clive Jones commented that the Minutes did not include the response from the Leader of the Council to Mr Meadowcroft's supplementary question, and referred to 4.2.9.9 of the Council's Constitution. It was clarified that this rule applied to questions submitted in advance of the meeting and not to supplementary questions asked during the meeting.

Jim Frewin referred to the supplementary answer provided to his question. The Executive Member had agreed to return with an action plan regarding the SEND school. Jim Frewin asked that this be reflected. *Note: following the meeting it was clarified that an action plan had been requested but the Executive Member had not specifically indicated that it would be provided.*

57. 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 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 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.

58. Statements by Group Leaders regarding Carol Cammiss, Director Children's Services

John Halsall, Leader of the Council:

I think it is Derby's gain for our loss. Carol Cammiss came to Wokingham Borough Council just over three years ago, initially on an interim contract. Her talents were quickly recognised, and she was promoted to being a Director of Children's Services. Carol has been a force of nature. She has transformed a position where the Borough has been an Ofsted level of 'Requires Improvement' to being 'Good' in provision of SEND services. She reorganised staff to greatly reduce the number of interim staff. In the meantime, she has created an environment where people want to come and work in our Children's Services at Wokingham. Carol has stewarded Children's Services during the pandemic which has had an enormous impact on our educational system, as we all know from our residents. Carol has overseen continuity of education to our 22,000 school children, against many different challenges. She has worked tirelessly to put our schools together, and work together to get children vaccinated, which has meant considerable work for our health partners, organising delivery of jabs. Carol has started new initiatives such as a division addressing mental health needs. She has chaired and represented Wokingham on boards, with our partners on health and wellbeing and our partnered staff. All this she has done with great energy, great intellect, and force of application, to ensure that there has been consistent delivery. Carol has an understanding of what it takes to be a true Director, providing leadership, architecting structure and motivation to all those around her, as well as attention to budgetary control. My Executive Member for Children's Services has appreciated Carol's ability to be frank, objective, and have the mindset to get things done. All of those who have come into contact with Carol, have seen her demonstrate openness, integrity, a willingness to be challenged in order to get the best for the children. Carol leaves a very positive legacy upon which her successor and team can build. Carol is deservedly moving to a bigger job in Derby, and we are sure that her talents will carry her through to bigger roles beyond that. Carol, we wish you all the best for the future and wherever that takes you and thank you for what you have done for us.

Clive Jones, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group:

Sadly, we are losing Carol, our Director of Children's Services, in just a few days' time. She will be leaving for pastures new and an authority that is somewhat bigger

than Wokingham. All of the Liberal Democrat councillors wish her well in her new role. She has done an absolutely fantastic job, turning around the department which had been struggling for a number of years, and could prior to her arrival, have been taken over at any time by Ofsted. Under her calm, clear, confident, and determined leadership, things have been changed for the better, and she leaves us in a much better place than she found us. We are grateful for what she has done for Wokingham Borough Council and our residents, and we wish her well in her new role.

Rachel Burgess, Leader of the Labour Group:

I would like to echo my fellow councillors' comments and thank Carol. She has made a fantastic contribution in her three years with us. She has really made a difference to Children's Services, so thanks to Carol and we wish her all the best with her future endeavours in Derby.

Jim Frewin, Leader of the Independent Group:

In my short time as a Councillor, I have had very little contact with Carol, but my esteemed Independent colleague, Gary Cowan, and my predecessor as Leader of the Independent Group, Richard Dolinski, both hold her in great respect. I can think of no higher accolade so thank you very much.

Carol Cammiss thanked Members for their kind words.

59. Mayor's Announcements

There were no Mayor's Announcements.

60. Public Question Time

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

60.1 Nicholas Marshall asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question. Due to technical problems Mr Marshall was unable to be connected to the meeting and therefore the following written answer was provided:

Question:

As a cyclist I am acutely aware of the parlous state of our roads, constantly obliged to stare at the road ahead - scanning for cracks and holes in order to avoid injury to myself and damage to my wheels. Anyone observing a garden can see the effects of excessive dry spells, leading to shrinkage of the ground, whilst periods of saturating rainfall causes swelling and warping. Applied to the highway, it's clear that the increasing intensity of climactic conditions is putting stress on the road layer.

Variations in the water table cause heave and shrinkage. Water ingress and freezing obviously compound the problem. It's becoming increasingly clear that climate change is a factor because even recently constructed pathways and cycle tracks are degrading rapidly, which cannot be ascribed to the burden of heavy traffic.

My question is what policies has the Council formulated to relieve stress on the existing highways, to ensure new construction meets climate change proofed standards and for seeking alternatives to an over reliance on road-based distribution?

Answer:

The Council has in recent years substantially increased investment in planned structural maintenance of its road network. Prior to 2019 the Council spent approximately £2.1 million on planned maintenance each year whereas we are now averaging just under £6 million per year and have plans to continue this level of investment in future years. As a result of this approach, we have seen an improvement in our road condition, and we are currently in top third of local authorities in terms of road condition.

Alongside this investment the Council is currently developing an updated Local Transport Plan which we will be consulting on in 2022 and will ask residents where they think our focus should be in future. Further to this, we are in the process of producing a number of new documents and plans that will also shape the future of Transport in the Borough; including a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) a Low Carbon Transport Strategy and an EV Charging strategy.

The Council also runs an Innovation Forum in partnership with our term contractors Volker Highways and WSP that looks at new ways of working including the latest materials, you may be aware that we trialled plastic kerb stones last year. We are aware through this group of a number of new surfacing materials such as plastic roads and will consider running trials where and when it is appropriate to do so.

60.2 Andy Croy asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

Question:

In December 2019, before the pandemic, 2,641 households in Wokingham Borough were in receipt of Universal Credit.

The latest provisional figures, for May 2021, show 6,547 households in receipt of Universal Credit. It should be remembered that prior to the pandemic, over 40% of households in receipt of Universal Credit contained one or more people in work.

Since May, the opening up of the economy will have reduced the number of households receiving Universal Credit. Assuming 5,000 of the Borough's least well-off households are still in receipt of Universal Credit, the recent £20 a week cut to Universal Credit will have taken £100,000 per week out of the budgets of our poorest families - at a single stroke increasing the levels of poverty experienced by thousands and thousands of families in our Borough.

What formal representations has Wokingham Borough Council made to the Borough's four Members of Parliament to stress the need to maintain or restore the £20 a week Universal Credit uplift?

Answer:

The Council, along with our voluntary and community sector partners are developing an Anti-Poverty Strategy to help address the hardships faced by residents in the Borough on the back of the Covid 19 pandemic. This strategy works alongside the Recovery Strategy and the Equalities Plan in addressing the challenges faced by residents: tackling inequality.

The development of this strategy is underpinned by a Cross Party Working Group, and is being co-designed, co-produced and co-delivered with our VCS partners and their continued engagement and contribution is critical to delivery of the strategy over the five years.

According to the latest information provided by the DWP to the Council, there are 3,630 Wokingham residents in receipt of Universal Credit, of which 1,427 are on Council Tax Support. This information, along with insights identified by working with VCS groups, has been and continues to be crucial for ensuring that we understand how best to support our residents. The support has included the allocation of numerous forms of financial assistance to those who have suffered financial hardship throughout the course of the pandemic.

Addressing hardship across the Borough is a key priority for me and I see this strategy as a tangible step on the journey, to not only understand the needs of our residents, but to also make clear commitments about how we as a local authority, in conjunction with our VCS partners can work together to make a real difference to local people's lives.

As you know I have been actively lobbying Government, particularly since the onset of the pandemic, to get the best deal for Wokingham residents and I will continue to do so.

Supplementary Question:

That sounds like no, and I have to say I am quite stunned that the Borough has not made any formal representation about the scoring of Universal Credit. The Borough's Anti Poverty Strategy, such as it is, is going to be totally inadequate in terms of making up for the loss of £20 a week uplift, is it not?

Supplementary Answer:

The Council is working in partnership with the VCS to develop an Anti-Poverty strategy that will help address the hardships faced by residents in the Borough on the back of the Covid 19 pandemic.

The Council is working in conjunction with the Voluntary and Community sector to ensure the strategy meets the current and future needs of our residents.

As part of this work, the Council is working closely with VCS groups to ensure the Household Support Grant can support those most in need over the coming weeks and months. For example, the provision of food vouchers for families in receipt of Free School Meals in school holidays, this includes the recent October half term and the upcoming Christmas, February and Easter breaks.

The Council and VCS are also working in partnership to ensure the Household

Support Grant is used to reduce the impact of rising fuel prices through a targeted support model, which includes working with residents to provide advice and help as residents need it during the winter months.

61. Petitions

The following Member presented a petition in relation to the matter indicated.

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

Rachel Burgess	<p>Rachel Burgess presented a petition asking for a Safer Crossing at the Rectory Road and Wiltshire Road junction containing 66 signatures.</p> <p><i>To be forwarded to the Executive Member for Highways and Transport</i></p>
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62. Adoption of the Statement of Gambling Principles

The Council considered a report regarding the Adoption of the Statement of Gambling Principles.

It was proposed by Barrie Patman and seconded by Norman Jorgensen that the recommendations set out within the report be agreed.

Rachel Bishop Firth commented that it was unfortunate that the Council could not go further in the way in which it regulated gambling in the Borough due to restrictions by central Government. She commented that some councils were going further to limit the negative impact of gambling, training council officers on what they could do to ensure that gambling operators followed the law, strengthening the prevention of underage gambling and promoting gambling self-exclusion schemes. In addition, some Health and Wellbeing Boards had developed strategic approaches to problem gambling.

Chris Smith sought further explanation of gaming machine categories A, B, C and D. It was indicated that this information would need to be provided by the Licensing Team, and then circulated to Members.

Upon being put to the vote, the recommendations in the report were approved. The voting was as follows:

For	Against	Abstain
Sam Akhtar		Keith Baker
Parry Batth		
Rachel Bishop-Firth		
Laura Blumenthal		
Chris Bowring		
Shirley Boyt		
Rachel Burgess		
Jenny Cheng		

Stephen Conway		
Phil Cunnington		
Peter Dennis		
Lindsay Ferris		
Michael Firmager		
Paul Fishwick		
Jim Frewin		
John Halsall		
David Hare		
Pauline Helliard-Symons		
Graham Howe		
Clive Jones		
Norman Jorgensen		
John Kaiser		
Sarah Kerr		
Abdul Loyes		
Tahir Maher		
Morag Malvern		
Charles Margetts		
Rebecca Margetts		
Adrian Mather		
Andrew Mickleburgh		
Stuart Munro		
Gregor Murray		
Barrie Patman		
Jackie Rance		
Angus Ross		
Daniel Sargeant		
Ian Shenton		
Imogen Shepherd-Dubey		
Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey		
Caroline Smith		
Chris Smith		
Wayne Smith		
Bill Soane		
Alison Swaddle		

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the Statement of Gambling Principles and the consultation responses received, be considered;
- 2) the Statement be approved for adoption and publication by the 31st January 2022.

63. Member Question Time

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

questions to the appropriate Members.

63.1 Rachel Bishop-Firth asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:

Question:

I have a question about our garden waste disposal.

We have an increasing number of homes being built with small gardens but have just one standard garden bin size which is 240 litres. For those with small gardens this is difficult to store and would take a long time to fill, which is why in some other Council areas, this is the largest garden bin size available.

We also have the brown bags for garden waste, but for those with the smallest gardens these disintegrate before they are full. I have had a resident raise with me that those with arthritis find these bags very hard to use.

Other councils have services which better suit residents with small gardens. For example, Braintree District Council issues bins in 140 litre and 180 litre sizes as well as a 240 litre garden bin for those with the largest gardens.

What steps has Wokingham Borough Council taken to look at how we can best handle garden waste disposal for residents who have smaller gardens?

Answer

I totally agree with you and acknowledge that there are smaller gardens in the Borough, especially in newer developments. I will therefore undertake a feasibility assessment of smaller bins for the collection of garden waste over the winter period and all being well these will be rolled out in 2022/23.

Supplementary Question:

I am really pleased to hear that steps are now being taken on behalf of those who live in more modest homes. We know that residents who have arthritis have reported struggling with the green bags, which were introduced without consultation with residents. What steps will be taken in the process this time to consider residents who have medical conditions or a disability?

Supplementary Answer:

Assisted help is available for those that need it, and all you have to do is ask.

63.2 Sarah Kerr asked the Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions the following question:

Question:

Decentralising renewable energy generation is key to us decarbonising energy in order to reduce demand on the grid. We are pleased that this Council has agreed with the Lib Dems and enacted the requests made in the Lib Dem motion supporting the Local Electricity Bill, which is a start.

More needs to be done, and we need to help residents install solar PV on their own

properties. Many households do not have large amounts of disposable income and it is quite daunting with many cowboy installers out there.

Local authorities up and down the country have been working with an organisation called Solar Together. Solar Together is a group-buying scheme for solar PV and battery storage. It helps make this technology more accessible and more affordable. Local authorities work with Solar Together to promote the scheme in the area. Homeowners register their interest; the company organises a reverse auction and installers are pre-vetted. Residents then get their personal recommendation and are asked if they wish to accept the recommendation or not.

This is a simple thing to do to enable more of our residents to generate their own renewable energy. Will this Council commit to enabling a scheme like this for our residents?

Answer

Thank you for your question, Sarah and in short, subject to due diligence, the answer is yes.

The Council has been exploring the Solar Together scheme since June 2021 as an opportunity to encourage residents to install solar panels and solar batteries in their homes. Residents living in one of the participating council areas and who own their own house can register for the Solar Together group-buying scheme. This increases the bargaining power to ensure the most competitive offer from the pre-vetted suppliers available. The scheme also guarantees the quality of the suppliers as they have to go through a detailed assessment process. The scheme thus provides a more affordable price for good quality installations, reduces energy bills and carbon emissions of residents taking part, while increasing the number of PV's across the Borough.

However, for the scheme to be viable, it must be delivered by partnering with other local authorities to achieve the demand needed to attract a suitable and competitive offer from providers. Essentially the scheme operates on a direct marketing approach to homeowners and requires in the region of 100,000 homeowners to be targeted to generate the take-up required. This means that to take advantage of the scheme the Council will need to work with other local authorities to achieve the critical mass to make the scheme viable. Officers are currently engaging with the Energy Hub and with Berkshire neighbours to identify opportunities to collaborate and set up the scheme. There is significant interest in taking this forward, but it will take some time to align timescales and approval processes in each participating local authority.

Over the last year, the Council has been exploring other schemes that will help us address the challenges of future energy capacity, retrofitting, and generating more renewable energy locally, to mention some:

- We have spoken with Lendology, a not-for-profit lender that works with homeowners to fund home repairs and improvements;
- We have also spoken with Retrofitworks;
- I have had initial conversations with an organisation called Raleigh and another call In Range, and we have also worked to set up a Community Energy Fund.

Supplementary Question:

Thank you for saying that this will be taken forward. It would be good to be kept updated on the progress. Have you got any plans specifically for low-income home owners that would like to look at reducing their energy costs through having their own renewable energy?

Supplementary Answer:

We have a trial in place at the moment in one of the social houses across in Stuart Munro's ward, Riseley. That trial is ongoing at the moment. There are residents living in the house. We have installed solar PVs. We have installed an air source heat pump and batteries. We are using it as a test bed and other authorities are interested in the trial results. We need the trial to run a little bit longer at the moment, as we need to see how it impacts energy use over the winter, and what the net impact of solar generated over the summer has to offset energy use over the winter.

We are also looking at what we can do with the housing stock that we have. We have 2,500 owned houses across the Borough, and we are looking at opportunities that we can do with them. Some of the organisations that I have spoken to, Raleigh in particular, have a scheme that is live at the moment, particularly focused on housing stock for low-income families.

63.3 Stephen Conway asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question:**Question:**

Will the Executive Member for Finance provide the Council with details of the current shortfall in funding for Twyford's new library? At the Executive meeting on 30 September, the item relating to the lease for the new library was pulled at the last minute on the grounds that rising costs necessitated a 'pause' to review the budget. I would like to know how much the project costs are likely to exceed the already agreed budget so I can better understand what needs to be done to address the problem?

Answer:

The budget agreed in the MTFP was £720k and the estimated costs of the works calculated following the post tender return update was just over £1million. This represents an increase of almost 40%, which as you know, is why the 'pause' was introduced. As a responsible Council that takes our financial management very seriously, as you and others would no doubt expect. I did say that I would do all in my power to ensure that the Council looked at the problem to enable early delivery of the library, and as a result we are seeking to contain costs and bridge the gap through value re-engineering and exploring income generation opportunity from the overall site, which you will be glad to know does not involve the disposal of any of the Council's assets, quite the contrary. It will provide enhanced facilities for the residents of Twyford and deliver additional income to help provide a sustainable and valuable asset, which the new library would no doubt become. It is my intention that the outcome of this work will be presented to Executive in January 2022 for consideration, which will also include the delivery of a suitable lease.

Supplementary Question:

Will you agree to meet with me, either face to face or via Teams, to discuss some ideas that I have for bridging the funding gap?

Supplementary Answer:

Yes, I am quite happy to do that. The work is ongoing. I can assure you that we are almost there.

63.4 Andrew Mickleburgh asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:**Question:**

I wish to acknowledge the professionalism of our Borough's Civil Parking Enforcement team. They are a key part in the strategy to help manage parking and crucially, in many locations, such as outside schools, to help make our streets safer. Some initiatives have helped to address parking related safety issues. But all around the Borough serious problems continue. Regrettably, the often-heard phrase 'an accident waiting to happen' remains all too true in many locations. Could the Executive Member for Highways please outline the Borough's strategies and tactics for tackling this issue – including timings for actions?

Answer

It is a bit difficult to be specific as I am not entirely clear of the locations being referred to here, but certainly I and the Traffic Management Team and the Road Safety Team would be interested in hearing of any specific locations and problems. A lot of the problems are specific to individual schools and individual roads, so if you can give us some actual examples, we will be delighted to dig into them, and see what we can do to reduce the risk.

We are aware of some issues with parking and as you say we have been proactively trying to manage these and keep our children safe. I can also remind you that we can target our Parking Enforcement guys to particular areas. I recently targeted them at Hawkedon School and Loddon School for example, where we were having problems with parking that was causing a danger to children. If you can report these to us or the Parking Enforcement guys, we will be happy to adjust the schedule so that they can visit particular schools and particular risk areas.

As you can appreciate, we have to depend on the expertise and experience of our officers, and as you have said they are very good. That needs to be used to prioritise schemes and we need to address those locations where there is a collision history first before looking at those where others feel there may be one in future. There is plenty of things we can do. We can put in parking restrictions. We have already done that around Loddon School recently and we have put in some speed limiting chicanes around Hillside School. We have also put barriers in to stop children running in the road, but this is a very specific answer to a very specific problem.

Supplementary Question:

I will certainly get back to you with specific locations in Earley, and I appreciate why your answer does refer to the specificity of a lot of the questions. I am very

interested in whether any of the following potential measures have been evaluated and decided upon, for instance converting many of the single and double yellow lines outside schools to 'No loading' zones, taking effective action to considerably reduce the length of time it still takes to get Traffic Regulation Orders. This took about two years outside Loddon School. Any plans for the use of fixed or mobile CCTV cameras, such as those used in Reading, to identify offenders, whether the pre Covid trial to try to change behaviour in parking is going to be followed up. Have any of these been evaluated and decided upon?

Supplementary Answer:

Quite a few of those have been addressed. We were about to try fixed and mobile CCTV enforcement when Covid hit, and we will certainly be picking it up as the pandemic passes. We had to stop it as we had to prioritise work in other areas. The TRO timescales have had a lot of work on them, and we have set a TRO timetable where the TRO's will be done on a regular cadence and restrictions will be put in the next TRO that is ready to go, rather than what was happening before, where we were continually putting new things into a TRO and driving the timescale back. It is a much better process now. I have not looked in detail at 'No Loading' and I will look at that and take that away.

63.5 Jim Frewin asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question:

As Members are aware in the past few years Shinfield has been subjected to significant development on what was a semi-rural community. Some of the key routes are still on semi-rural roads and others widely recognised as needing uplift due to significant safety concerns arising from the increased traffic levels.

As one example, in 2008 it was recognised that the junction between Church Lane and Basingstoke Road required 'uplift'. This was approved some 6 years later in 2014, as part of various local area development conditions. We are still waiting, nearly 14 years. In my short time as a Councillor, residents, and Councillors have been promised at least four dates for work to commence, others tell me it is many more than this.

All have been missed, the latest being Summer 2021. We are now being led to believe early 2022 but understandably we have little trust in this. There are multiple other areas of highway safety concern, especially in the areas adjacent to our schools. Hyde End Lane being one prime example.

My question is when will this Council give priority to the safety of Shinfield school children and other Shinfield residents by actually delivering what they promise, when they promise?

Answer:

The Council takes the safety of all residents very seriously, particularly the vulnerable; however, there are no infrastructure improvements planned for Hyde End Lane. In the case of the Church Lane/Basingstoke Road junction improvement, the Council is not the deliverer as the work, as you know, it is for Taylor Wimpey and we

have been pressing the developers to complete the works. We cannot complete them. They have to be done by the person who is responsible, and unfortunately you cannot force developers to finish work at a particular time. We are pressing them hard, understand the problem, but it is not something we can really do ourselves.

Whilst there have, as you say, been delays in progress, following the compliance initiatives the developer is due to award a contract for the work towards the end of this month for the scheme's delivery. The Council is working with the developer to ensure planning obligations are completed and we are expecting commencement as soon as possible and we will be happy to apply pressure to secure compliance.

Supplementary Question:

Given the direction of the Local Plan update, trust in councils delivering what we promised is important to residents, especially Shinfield, where we are patiently waiting for developers to provide us with promised sports pitches and a supermarket, a supermarket that is so long overdue, it is now being rebranded and promised again under a different planning application. My supplementary question is, how will this Council reassure all residents, and especially Shinfield residents, that what we promise during planning will be delivered?

Supplementary Answer:

I cannot really answer a question on planning. It is obviously a question for someone else, but I can assure you that I am very happy, as you know, to come and talk to residents. I have been talking to quite a few residents over the last few months in Shinfield, and I believe that we have actually found some sensible solutions to some of the problems that they have outlined. So, I am very happy to again come with you and meet residents to talk about any highways problems that they have got and what we can do to fix them.

63.6 Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question:

Question:

Why were 60 houses in Woodward Close not included in the traffic modelling for the Winnersh relief road when it was done for the SEND school and the 83 homes proposed by the Council behind the school?

Answer:

I am uncertain which 60 houses are referred to in this question, and I understand Officers have been trying to get clarification from you via email. In the absence of a response, I have the following comments regarding traffic modelling and the relationship with the consented and emerging proposals.

As every case must be considered on its merits at the time an application is determined; any necessary mitigation will be identified and addressed for that proposal at that time. Any future Local Plan proposals which are not adopted as policy at the time an application is determined could not be factored in without showing predetermination, nor indeed would the details be fully known for an assessment to be made in any event. In a nutshell the current time must consume

its own smoke and the future remains speculation which cannot be addressed unless there is an adopted policy.

The Winnersh Relief Road and associated road projects have all been assessed in line with the adopted Core Strategy and any committed development at the time of assessment for planning. This is a benefit of having a Local Plan as it allows assessments to consider allocations proposed, and for the opportunity to assess traffic impacts on a strategic scale rather than on a piecemeal basis. Following the Executive decision on Friday associated with the emerging Local Plan, we can begin to consider the potential for proposed draft policy allocations in line with the emerging strategy. It has not been possible until that information is available, for us to consider, subject to confirmation through the plan making process.

Supplementary Question:

You do realise that I am asking about the traffic modelling and not necessarily the Plan, and therefore it should have gone to Highways and not to you? It is 1-58 Woodward Close, as I told you, and the two named houses and the lower numbers of Woodward Close, and they were not included in that. Where are you planning on putting these houses since it is overwhelming the Winnersh Relief Road roundabout and how were you planning on getting the people in and out of Woodward Close in the process?

Supplementary Answer:

If you have any concerns, please raise them when we start the consultation next week. I presume you are referring to Winnersh Farms, and they will be addressed by the Officers.

63.7 Michael Firmager asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question:

At the junction of Sonning Lane and the A4 there have recently been a couple of accidents. Thankfully there have been no fatalities. This is a particularly dangerous road.

Please can you advise the number of accidents there since the year 2000 and what safety measures can be taken?

Answer:

A total of 17 personal injury collisions were reported by Thames Valley Police in the past 21 years, 4 of which involved serious injury with the remaining 13 reported as slight injury. As the elected member for Sonning states, thankfully none have resulted in a fatal injury.

Road safety benefits are the result of consistent and formal appraisal, coupled with targeted investment at those locations where interventions can make a difference. The formal appraisal of Local Safety Schemes sites is based upon a period on the five most recent years of data, and this shows that in this case only one 1 serious injury collision was reported in 2016 and there have been none since. Consequently, this junction would not be a location that would be prioritised as

needing any specific intervention, with too few collisions to determine if an engineering intervention should be implemented.

It is worth noting that the A4 Bath Road should not be regarded as a dangerous road. The section of A4 in Wokingham, between the Reading and Maidenhead boundaries, carries over 20,000 thousand vehicles each day including freight, commuter and leisure traffic and yet saw the number of serious collisions more than halved in a recent three-year study period (2015-18). The traffic safety on the section of this route within Wokingham is one of the most improved routes in the country, according to a 2020 report from the European Road Assessment Programme (EuroRAP) which undertakes annual Crash Risk Mapping across the country's strategic (SRN) and major (MRN) roads.

The reason for this improvement stem from a combination of minor improvement schemes and signing/lining measures, as well as our highway maintenance activities such as resurfacing, and winter maintenance implemented in the study period.

We will of course continue to monitor the safety record of this junction and prioritise it for a formal appraisal should the number of incidents increase significantly.

Supplementary Question:

One of the accidents, a young lad, suffered a double broken leg, and I would consider that a pretty dangerous incident, a life changing event for that poor boy, so I do not really recognise that particularly. I want to drag it out a bit more about the road. Are you able to give more details on the number of accidents and measures taken for the rest of the A4, not just that particular junction as well? They are all kind of linked. Warren Road is another, there is so many of them, South Drive, so many along that road which are potential death traps really.

Supplementary Answer:

I do not have that data to hand. I do not have statistics for that whole road, but I will be happy to get them for you. I think what you have got to remember is that the volume of traffic on that road is very significant, and sometimes where roads feel unsafe because of the volume of traffic, they are actually, in proportion to the amount of traffic, safer than you might think, but I will certainly find the statistics. I will ask Officers to respond to you. We can have a chat about any particular concerns you have following that.

63.8 Sam Akhtar asked the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and Communities the following question:

Question:

Residents in my ward have complained of fireworks being let off at unsociable hours last week. Myself and a number of residents were woken up on a weekday at 3am by the loud bangs from these fireworks. What is the local authority doing to clamp down on this sort of behaviour?

Answer:

In England and Wales, enforcement of firework law is split with the enforcement for; retail and wholesale storage, safety, and prohibition of sales to minors, falling under

local authorities. Unreasonably late or child use of fireworks fall under the Police.

Firework usage should cease by 11pm and except for :

- Midnight – Guy Fawkes Night
- 1am – the night of Chinese New Year, Diwali, and New Year's Eve

Long standing arrangements for dealing with anti-social behaviour by the Council is currently restricted to weekly office hours, with little or no service available in the evenings or at weekends, when anti-social behaviour more frequently occurs.

From April 2022, the Council will launch a 7 day a week ASB service, which will provide evening, weekend, and Bank Holiday capacity for dealing with anti-social behaviour. The new service will enable a much more coordinated prioritised and mutually supportive arrangement for issues of public concern, such as this, outside of officer hours. I very much intend that the new service will be able to quickly respond to a greater number of issues that are of concern to local people, and in many cases bring about a speedier resolution.

64. Minutes of Committee Meetings and Ward Matters

64.1 Maria Gee asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question:

During the Full Council meeting on 19 November 2020, I brought forward a Motion for a comprehensive policy on A Boards and other pavement obstructions, because in Wokingham Town Centre, which is predominantly Wescott ward, there was a problem for pedestrians, especially the users of wheelchairs and those with sight impairments. At that time Councillor Jorgensen felt that the existing policy was adequate, but the Council would expand that policy to include bollard covers. She stated that officers would put the amended policy out to public consultation to ensure that the views of groups representing disabled people, impacted residents and shopkeepers, were captured, and any substantive issues with the current policy were addressed. It is now one year on, and despite several emails from one of my residents and me, we are still none the wiser about what is being proposed. Please could Councillor Pauline Jorgensen advise when the new policy will be drafted, when it will be put out for consultation, and the proposed implementation date?

Answer:

I have seen the flurry of emails about this subject, and I need to ask the Officers for a specific date for you, so I cannot give it to you now, but I will certainly give it to you after the meeting.

64.2 Daniel Sargeant asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question:

Question:

At the HOSC, there was a report from David Birch and Matt Pope on Adult Services.

Can you explain the huge savings achieved, and will they need to downgrade the service to achieve these?

Answer:

Yes, you are correct. Basically, we have managed to make significant savings from Optalis over the last few years, totalling a sum of over £2.5million, which has been returned to WBC. The answer to how has this been done is, I have sat in this Chamber and explained the change of focus of Optalis, which has taken place. Two years ago, it was on rapid growth and expansion. We have asked and pushed for a refocus instead, on becoming a better provider, providing better care and better quality just to local residents. The result of that has been a renegotiation of the management contract with RBWM. The refocus of service has also led to less expenditure on things like marketing and management. We have also slimmed down the management structure of the service. For example, we have gone down from three boards controlling it, down to one, which I think will actually improve the service by making it more nimble, more agile, quicker to respond and quicker to move things forward. The answer to your question is that I would have absolute confidence that we can continue to make this level of savings going forward and that we can continue to improve the quality of what Optalis does.

64.3 Rachel Burgess asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:

Question:

There has been a lot of disappointment amongst many of my residents and others actually, with the heavily promoted so-called ice rink at Cantley Park, in my ward. Many were expecting real ice and I think in general there was just a lot of disappointment about the quality of what was provided. So, can you ensure that residents who are unhappy with the quality of the rink, and that it was not what was advertised, when they brought tickets, are entitled to a refund?

Answer:

Yes.

64.4 Imogen Shepherd-DuBey asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:

Question:

I am going to ask a question about Cantley as well. They have just installed some new EV chargers in the car parking area at Cantley, and I am told they are only working at the time the café is open. Can I ask what is the point of an EV charger that is only open when the café is open, and is this going to get fixed?

Answer:

Thank you very much for bringing that to my attention. I will certainly enquire and get back to you on that one.

64.5 Rebecca Margetts asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Question:

At the Executive meeting on 28 October, it was stated that the Oak Tree School was being delayed. Are you able to give me an update?

Answer:

In early August of this year the Department for Education (DoE) had indicated that the project for Oak Tree was on track to open in September 2022. Members may or may not be aware that the Oak Tree SEND school is a joint project with Reading to house 25 children from each Borough, giving 50 in total, and has been some years in the planning.

At the end of August, the DoE indicated that there could be a delay on opening, and on further investigation we found out it could possibly be delayed until September 2023. It appears that there could be technical difficulties with planning, contractors, and procurement. The implications are that the children that are eligible for entry in September 2022, need to be accommodated elsewhere, and this is a statutory driven obligation. Also, once those children have been accommodated elsewhere, that is it for their school career. They cannot just change back if Oak Tree becomes available again.

Under the guidance of Carol Cammiss, who of course I have to mention, we have kicked into action with Officers, the Leader and the Deputy Leader in his role of Finance, together with our opposite numbers at Reading, met with the DoE, and the mobilisation also involved efforts from our MPs, going right up to the Minister of Education, Nadhim Zahawi, I hope that I have got that right. The bottom line is that Oak Tree will not be in open in September 2022. We have explored every possible avenue to get that done. It is now targeted to be open in Easter 2023, so that we would be ready in September 2023. We are in close discussions with the Department for Education to ensure delivery at that time, and we are also in discussion with them, very closely, for any consequential cost implications, and we are expecting full confirmation from the DoE before the end of November.

64.6 David Hare asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:**Question:**

Hawkedon residents are concerned about the eventual site of the proposed MUGA, and would appreciate being able to have an input in a public consultation so that they know that their concerns and expectations are understood in the planning application?

Answer:

I will certainly enquire, and I will get back to you on that one.

64.7 Shirley Boyt asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:**Question:**

The question relates to the minutes of the Executive on 28 October, more specifically the Local Bus Service Improvement Plan. Under the heading of bus stop

infrastructure, it states that WBC has a bus stop policy and that bus stops are given a Bronze, Silver or Gold rating, and will be upgraded in line with these standards when funding is available. I cannot locate a copy of the Policy on the website, so I have no idea of the criteria for each level, but I would like to ask whether the bus stops that are managed by local Parish and Town Councils have also been rated, and more importantly when the aforementioned funding is available, will the many substandard bus stops in Woodley and Earley be upgraded along with those in other parts of the Borough? I have a second part to the question, which is also to do with bus stops if I may, which is that the new plan does not give any real priority to installing kassel kerbs which enable those with mobility issues to easily access buses. In the Transport Plan of 2011-2016, the Public Transport Plan, it was recognised that, infrastructure and services do not always cater for residents with special needs or restricted mobility. Under the key objective two, in that plan, there was a commitment to improve points of access to the public transport network e.g., kassel kerbs and bus shelters. Can you please reassure our disabled and elderly residents that this is still a key objective of the Council?

Answer:

Funnily enough I asked that same question when I read the same bit of the BSIP, as there are a selection of bus shelters owned by the parish councils and I am not quite sure which ones in the future are going to be maintained by the parish councils and which ones are going to be upgraded by who, so that is still a live question that is out there at the moment.

Regarding kassel kerbs, we have at the moment been upgrading a lot of bus stops so that there are kassel kerbs. That is one thing that we did to one of the bus stops in Hillside a couple of years ago, so I would hope that all new bus stops will have kassel kerbs, if that is possible, but I will make sure that that is made clear in the documentation, and I will let you know one way or another.

64.8 Caroline Smith asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question:

Hillside School has had temporary chicanes in place which have successfully reduced cars speeding past the school on Rushey Way. When are these temporary chicanes going to be replaced by more permanent ones?

Answer:

I am glad that you appreciate the chicanes that I worked with the school to get put in during the Covid issues because of the speeding and the problems that the children were having in terms of crossing roads and that sort of thing. We are still looking at various other improvements that we can do at Hillside in order to improve the crossings and that will be one of the permanent features, chicanes, when they are put in. I have not got a date yet, but I will get a date and I will respond to you.

64.9 Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question:

When are they going to fix the entrance into Woodward Close off the Reading Road? It is very hazardous, to the point that I just drove it again today and you get a big bump at the end. Will you please fix it so that we can actually not have an accident there?

Answer:

Yes, I have been in communication with Officers yesterday and today about this particular hump. They are having a bit of difficulty designing it so that it ramps properly with the road, but it is actively under consideration at the moment. They have got an engineer looking at redesigning that particular area and I certainly responded to a resident earlier, I think it was either later yesterday or early this morning, to say that was what was going on. I cannot give you a date until they have finished the design.

64.10 Sam Akhtar asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services, the following question:

Question:

At the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, there was a discussion about GP practices performance. What if anything are we doing, and can we do about poor performance?

Answer:

Council may remember because I spoke about this at the last meeting because it is something that we are very much aware is of real interest and of real concern to our residents to some of them. GPs are under a lot of pressure at the moment. NHS figures will quote a 40% increase in demand since the pandemic has ended, but if you look at the recent NHS Patient Survey of the country, it combines with anecdotal evidence to what all Members are telling me about GP performance across the Borough. We have some GPs that are very good, and that is all credit to them, but we have four that are in the bottom 10% of the GPs across the country, one of which has been at the bottom for a long, long while. The performance for me of the Wokingham Medical Centre in particular, is completely unacceptable. Loddon Vale, Twyford and Woosehill also give cause for concern.

In answer to your question as to what we have actually been trying to do about it, myself and two of the senior officers from the department had a long meeting with the Wokingham Medical Centre earlier in the year, where there was lots of talk basically, but not much evidence of delivery. Following that we wrote to the CCG to raise our concerns, got no response, wrote to Dr James Kent, who is head of the ICS BOB, and got a long letter back eventually offering lots of long promises but no actual delivery date. So, we raised it with our MPs to try to get them to intervene on our behalf and went back to Dr James Kent, who has now written back promising a meeting with me and the Officers to actually raise this with him directly. I have also spoken to the other lead Members from Reading and West Berkshire who share the same CCG, and obviously share the same problem to a degree. There is a joint letter which has been circulated which we have all agreed, which will be going to Dr Kent next week, the Head of the ICS, to push this matter further. We are not going to give up on this and we are not going to give in. We are going to keep pushing this issue because we know it is of real concern to our residents. One thing that I should

make absolutely clear in conclusion, is that GP performance is solely the responsibility of the CCG. It is something that we can lobby on but not anything that we have direct control over. All we will continue to do is raise concerns until we get some satisfactory answers.

64.11 Abdul Loyes asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question:

Question:

At the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny meeting on 6 October, you stated that the Adult Social Care reform could place a £20million burden on the Council. Can you confirm this figure and are there any other headwinds which the Council is facing?

Answer:

At the risk of stepping on the feet of my colleague for Adult Care, basically, we have a situation where we have 1700 people that we have in care that we fully fund, but 87% of all people in adult care in the Borough, are self-funded. As such we will need to pick up any additional costs once the £85,000 limit has been breached. This was an increase in minimum wage to care workers, and let me just say that I fully support that, knowing what a job that is. But again, that has led to the costs. Finally, the levelling up suggestion by the Government to make it fairer to self-funders, depending on the amount of money from the new money that has been passed to the NHS, and how of that has been passported to us. It could cost us between £17million and £20million.

On the wider question to regards to headwinds, well we have got a few hurricanes. We basically have inflation running higher than it has ever run in my memory, especially with energy costs seeing an increase of about £6-7,000 next year. Add to that, the increase in wages and also materials, and NI payments, I mean there are lots of things that we need to deal with. It makes it even more important that we are very prudent about the way we spend our money, and we maximise every penny that we receive from our shareholders, who are basically our funders as well, who are the residents. That is the picture that we are faced with at the moment.

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

Question:

The revised Local Plan update includes replacing a community Borough building that currently holds the library and a number of housing units. Back in May 2017, when asked about this site, there were no plans for the loss of this public asset, so what has changed now to include this site as another housing development as opposed to a community resource?

Answer:

In short, we are moving the library to a brand new building at Carnival Pool so we have a facility there. The community is not losing anything. They are getting a brand new library.

65. Statement from the Chairman of the Constitution Review Working Group

This item was withdrawn.

66. Statements by the Leader of the Council, Executive Members and Deputy Executive Members

Stuart Munro, Executive Member for Business and Economic Development:

I would just like to briefly give people listening an update as to where we are with regeneration in Wokingham town centre. I think it has come to a point where we need to take stock and look at where we are at and get some facts on the table. So, I am going to go through lettings and where we are with our stock of houses that we have built, and then some comment at the end about how well this has been received by the outside world.

So as far as anything is concerned, we are continuing to see several new businesses continuing to fit and open in our town centre units. Our emphasis remains on a good mix of local independents, to sit alongside quality nationals. A few come to mind in the last few months; R Young Art Gallery in Elms Field, the Lazy Frog in Denmark Street and BXG Fit, the town's first boutique boxing and fitness studio due to open soon in Peach Place. We continue to see strong interest in the remaining few units. We will be announcing new names soon after the paperwork has been completed. We continue to use regeneration to help the local community as well. For example, temporary lets to the Royal British Legion, and to the Christmas presents Community Project led by the First Day's children's charity, in Elms Field. Also, Peach Place will be used for the Wokingham Winter Carnival stage and entertainment on Sunday 28 November.

Despite tough conditions nationally over the last few years, the town centre continues to outperform many in the UK. Increased numbers of people working from home rather than commuting to London, offers a great opportunity to capture more of the local market share. Growing footfall and eating out as people start to return to shopping and entertainment. Low numbers of closures, and primarily related to nationals rather than local and boutique shopping, minimal vacant units and those that are empty, have seen interest across the town, not just WBC, privately owned ones as well. Regeneration currently has 91% let, and on target to achieve 94% by Spring of next year, the target we set ourselves. This means we continue to cover the cost of the regeneration. As well as generating a good return we can fund services for residents. Income will continue to rise as costs paid back over the next ten years or so. It is also a milestone because the asset value of the stock is far in excess of the loan.

On residential sales, another good news story, with prices continuing to generally meet or exceed predicted sales values, and 84% of the properties released to date, exchanged, and completed. All of this has been very well received in the outside world. We are receiving lots and lots of recognition, both locally and nationally. I will just mention a couple; a win of the Rural Town Planning Award for Excellence in planning for a successful economy; Association of Public Sector Excellence Best Housing Regenerated or New Build Initiative; Urban Land Initiative Award for

Excellence Mixed Use; Business Magazine's Thames Valley Property Award for development in Peach Place and SPACES (Society for Public Architecture, Engineering, Surveying and Construction) Yearbook entry for Peach Place and Elm's Field, Elm's Field going on to win the spacious regeneration award, last week. Finally, we have been approached by the Local Government Association to write a case study about the regeneration to share as best practice with other councils. So, Mr Mayor, it is clearly a highly successful programme of which you should be proud, with more exciting developments to come such as the Carnival Hub, which Councillor Smith, mentioned earlier, which is looking very impressive and yet to be delivered on time by a very organised German organisation. Visiting the town centre and seeing all the restaurants and other retail businesses come to life means more than just money and vibrancy of the place. The play park with mums and dads and their children confirms to me that it was the right decision to regenerate Wokingham town.

John Kaiser, Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Finance and Housing:

When I spoke earlier in answer to Councillor Loyes' question, I just wanted to touch on the finances of the Council. With other local councils getting into financial difficulty, it is important to give our residents in Wokingham Borough confidence that we are in a strong position and not at risk. Recent news on some authorities, for example Labour led Slough, which has had to declare bankruptcy, and are finding it impossible to make ends meet, with little chance that the situation will change for the foreseeable future. Residents are naturally concerned. Could we go the same way? The short and simple answer is no. How is it that we are delivering more services and facilities, when other councils are closing swimming pools and libraries? We are opening new ones and providing better facilities and services such as Bulmershe, Cantley, California Country Park, Lower Earley and Arborfield Green. Too good to be true I guess everybody will say.

Let me explain how we do this. In fact, it is the Conservative administration's careful budget monitoring, prudent borrowing, and shrewd investments. Our finances are among the soundest in the land, even CIPFA say that we are in the top twenty in the UK. How are we going to safeguard our financial future, which is the cornerstone of being able to provide great services? We regularly report on expenditure throughout the year and keep a close eye on expenditure. The first thing I did when I took this role was to insist that the Budget in all its glory went to Overview and Scrutiny before it is published in its final format, and over a long period of six months, so that everyone can have their say. Last year the Budget came in slightly underspent, and even though it has been a very tough year, we are currently on track this year.

Let me talk about debt. All local authorities must borrow if they want to forward funds things such as leisure centres, regenerated towns, solar farms, and other improvements for the community. Even more important, is to fund that infrastructure, as and when we need it, such as roads and schools, rather than waiting for the money from the developer. My rules around borrowing are quite clear. We must have a clear route to pay back, make commercial sense and deliver services and facilities to residents. I clearly understand we are not some company or commercial entity. That does not mean we should abandon prudent, fiscal control, like I say some Councils seem to have done. The money we spend is the residents' money, as such they are shareholders, and more importantly they are our funders, and as

such we must deliver services and environment that we all want to exist in Wokingham Borough. This means the key is to ensure that anything you borrow can be funded and paid back, a return on investment is backed by the asset and produced. In our case the cost of the borrowing does not just offset the returns we are making, the Council is generating revenue which can be reinvested in services. Without the money we could not balance our budget and would have to cut these services. Our net debt when you offset our internal borrowing investment is around £140million today and the interest paid is 2% of the Council's total income, all of which not only paid by the return of our investment but it is forecast this year, by March 2022, that we will be generating over £30 for each tax payer in this Borough through our investment, nearly three times more than we did last year, all of which can be spent on vital services.

In addition, we are looking to reduce our external debt by £100million at the same time, and we have reduced the cost of borrowing by nearly 1%. That is nearly a 40% decrease in our borrowing.

The biggest threat to the Council and the economy as a whole is inflation, as we see prices rise in all areas of life. We must keep pace, and there will be some tough decisions on pricing and services that we provide across the Borough. We have relatively low costs compared with other councils. Car parks is a classic case, where less than 1% of our income comes from it, and we have councils that surround us who collect over 10% of their income through it. We do not intend to go down that route and the last time we raised our car parking charges was 2017. Some councils, believe it or not, even raised their charges last year during Covid, can you believe that? That said any increase in fees and charges will be measured and only designed to allow the Council to keep pace with the cost. No doubt charges will be needed to respond to the massive increases we are seeing in energy prices, building costs, both labour and materials, as well as an increase in care and schooling. Even though we are considered to be the most prosperous area we still have poverty, and it is our job to ensure that the increases fall on those who can best afford to pay, as the only option will be less services, which will fall on the old and the most vulnerable in the Borough. We have strong reserves.

Gregor Murray, Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions:

Firstly, I am delighted to say that our new carbon neutral Dinton Pastures Activity Centre featured at COP26 last week, as an example of best practice and sustainable construction for community use.

I am sure that every Member will have seen recently that the cost of energy has increased significantly. With this in mind I wanted to update you on some of the vital and incredibly forward thinking work of the Council's Energy Team concerning our climate emergency. As I have said before, our Eco Flex to heat scheme has been a huge success for the Council. I am very pleased to say that this year 968 homes have had either cavity wall insulation, loft insulation, or both, installed free of charge to the resident, as a result of this fantastic scheme. These sites have all been made significantly more energy efficient as a result of this programme, reducing energy bills for the residents, providing real time savings for families most likely to be impacted in the sharp rises in energy prices. Mr Mayor, I am sure that you will

agree, that the foresight of our Energy Team should be applauded by this Council, and by the residents who have benefited so greatly from this free scheme.

In the last two weeks I have visited schools in Woodley, to see completed installations of new solar panels. At the end of this year the Energy Team will have completed thirteen additional solar PV installations across our Borough's schools. Combined they will generate well over 250,000Kwh of energy and will save a combined £52,000 a year in energy costs for those schools. That cost saving is money that goes directly back into the schools' budget to be spent elsewhere, supporting the education of our Borough's children. I should remind you also Mr Mayor, that these solar installations cost the schools nothing up front, so the school gets all the benefits of reduced energy costs and carbon savings without any of the upfront installation costs. Councillor Howe and I are both delighted with the success of this programme to date and have started discussions together on how we can accelerate it to other schools across the Borough, including our academies. At Bulmershe School, Wokingham Borough Council have upgraded an existing solar array, installing new panels that are capable of generating more than twice the electricity capacity from the same rooftop space. I am sure you would be interested to know that the previous panels have not just been scrapped, they have been relocated to Dinton Pastures where they will be used to provide power to the lake's aerator. Mr Mayor, I am also pleased to inform you that twenty one schools have had LED low energy lighting systems installed this year by our Energy Team and the Council completed installation upgrades at seven commercial sites.

Turning to trees Mr Mayor, I am very pleased to say that our 250,000 trees project officer has been appointed and started work. As part of her role, she will become the point of contact for town and parish councils as we look to identify additional sites for siting our trees, and I know that she will be contacting those councils directly in the coming weeks, if she has not done so already. She will also manage our garden forest programme, where we are looking to site up to 10,000 with residents to plant in their own properties.

As part of our tree planting initiative, you may have seen a consultation that has gone live using our new Engage Wokingham Borough platform. Already in use for our Waste Strategy consultation and now the Local Plan update consultation, this new platform has been launched to create a more constant two-way dialogue with our community on many issues, as already seen by several thousand residents signing up to engage.

Finally, Mr Mayor, you will have heard me say on numerous occasions that encouraging and adopting sustainable living behaviours in our residents is the most important thing that we can do as a council to combat climate change. With that in mind, on 21 and 22 October WBC held an open market engagement event where we invited businesses and individuals who are experts in behaviour change and sustainable living to come and pitch their ideas and tools to officers from across our council. I am pleased to say that over twenty five different pitches took place over two days from a variety of organisations, all proposing sustainable ideas relating to transport, energy reduction, waste reduction, active travel, food waste and consumption behaviours. Our officers are currently collating feedback and benchmarking scores from those pitches and will be arranging more detailed follow

up meetings to discuss more opportunities in more detail shortly. This is a vital step in building sustainable living behaviours across our Borough, and I am grateful for the Officers who made the time in their diaries to attend the two days.

Wayne Smith, Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement:

As most of you will know, last week the Executive approved the consultation for the revised growth Local Plan Update, which starts next Monday and will run to 24 January. I wanted just to say a few things. We have set up a number of events that will start next week. We have got an event on Monday evening at St Crispin's School, and then we have got an event in Arborfield the following week. We have also got four different virtual events, which already via our new Engage platform which Councillor Murray was referring to, we have got two hundred people registered for those events. Obviously, we are going to have to pay close attention to what happens with Covid, and to make sure that we have got precautions in place. We are also going to be having a section outside in the reception area where we will have all the maps and all the information available for residents to come along, and also if they go along to the Engage website, they can see when officers will be available to ask any questions or any points that they want to pick up. Also, there are various routes to engage with our Team. They can obviously engage through online, or they can write to our Team, or they can send us a letter. We very much hope that you can spread the word and ensure that we get as many people as possible to come along to our events, if not virtual, in person, and to give us their views on our Plan. As I said, we start next week, and it will run to 24 January, and we do hope that you come along and get involved.

Parry Batth, Executive Member for Environment and Leisure:

Mr Mayor I welcomed your presence at the opening of our two brand new leisure facilities, to benefit the health and wellbeing of our residents. The two facilities that you helped open are the boxing hub at Peach Place in Wokingham and the synthetic skating rink at Cantley. The synthetic rink mimics the characteristics of real ice. It creates a smooth and even surface for residents to skate on, with a low frictional resistance resulting in an enjoyable skating experience for all. Residents of all ages had fun skating the afternoon away when it opened over a week ago and showing off their skating skills. So far up to now over 2,750 tickets have been sold, and a couple of people that were expecting ice have been refunded. The state-of-the-art boxing hub will also be open to the public on 26 November. The hub includes a training ring, storage rig with three fitness stations, a functional cube ring with attachments for up to six stations and punch bags, including aqua bags, heavy bags, and upper cut bags. This offers a range of fantastic boxing facilities and is available to everybody whether you are looking for a 1-2-1 training membership, ad hoc classes or to hire the facility. The brand new facility packs a punch and will be very popular with our community, and will help them compliment an active lifestyle.

67. Statement from Council Owned Companies

Charles Margetts, Non Executive Director Optalis:

I spoke briefly earlier about Optalis. I thought it was time to give Members a much more full update. When I first took on this role two years ago, it was clear that Optalis needed reform to make it suitable for the needs of the future and to make it suitable for what the Council actually wanted from it. I am pleased to advise that

following long discussions with RBWM we have now reached agreement and signed a new contract to set Optalis up for future years.

There have been some significant changes to the purpose and the management structure of the company. I referred to some of these briefly earlier, but to cover the other ground; a reduction in management structure and bureaucracy to make decision making quicker and easier, and also to give a stronger direct relationship with each local authority partner. What this means is that three Boards have gone to one, as I said, and that one Board consists of the CEO, the Director of Adult Services from each authority, and the Lead Member. For the first time we have direct strategic control of the company.

The refocus of Optalis, which I referred to earlier basically on to quality rather than growth and the efficiency drive resulting in the saving of £2.5million a year. The other £2.5million over the last two years I should say. The other thing is that Optalis Wokingham will now operate independently from Optalis RBWM. This allows the company the freedom to design services that meet the needs of Wokingham residents and greater flexibility.

WBC has set the following priorities for Optalis to continue the transformation of services and to focus heavily on the retention and development of staff. With the current situation around the uncertainty around the Government's Adult Social Care proposals, which my colleague Councillor Kaiser referred to a few minutes ago, that is most helpful basically to do that. From a Wokingham point of view, using Optalis to provide care gives certainty of ongoing costs over time and enables us to hedge against the uncertainty in terms of cost in the care sector. It also ensures that any surplus money can be returned to WBC rather than being used to pay Directors' bonuses or shiny new offices. This enables us to plan financially, more effectively for the future with greater confidence. Whilst this change has been underway Optalis has maintained and improved the quality of care that it offers. David Birch and his team continue to move forwards. An example of this is, recently Wokingham coming first in the South East and second in the UK in the recent Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework. This measures the number of adults with learning disabilities who return to paid employment. The figure in Wokingham is over three times the national average, which is a real credit to the company and all the people who work there. I would like to thank the Supported Employment Service specifically for their work in this area.

Mr Mayor, in conclusion I would say that we believe that Optalis is well placed to continue its work, and to serve our residents. I know that there are some exciting new things that I will be able to talk about in the upcoming months, which are now being developed.

Norman Jorgensen, Non Executive Director Loddon Homes:

As a company wholly owned by Wokingham Borough Council, Loddon Homes has two main objectives. One is to provide much needed affordable housing in the Borough, and the second is to generate a financial return to the Council. I believe that Loddon Homes is an organisation that this Council should be proud of. This evening I will give you a bit of a snapshot. Firstly, we currently have one hundred and twenty three homes in our portfolio, with a further nineteen due by the end of the

financial year. The total asset value of these is in excess of £30million. We receive an annual rent and service charge income of about £570,000, and we have a further pipeline of around four hundred new homes over the next four years, supporting the delivery of the Council's housing programme. Underpinning this is Loddon's Homes robust five-year business plan, which is able to flex should Loddon's and the Council's housing objectives change, as well as withstanding the scrutiny of our Board and the Housing Regulator. The final version of the plan is expected in January.

We have just completed a couple of months of exceptional delivery and performance by the company. We took ownership of the final homes at Arnett Avenue, marking the completion of the first phase of the Gorse Ride regeneration. I recently met other members of the Board and members of Gorse Ride Community Steering Group to have a tour of the completed shared ownership apartments, and I can attest to the exceptional quality and workmanship of the final build. Whilst I was there, I met residents who had already moved into their new home, and they could not speak more highly of the property or of the service and support that they had received since moving in, from both Loddon Homes and the developers RJ Leighfield and Sons. I am pleased to report that 50% of all the shared ownership sales completed within a month of the properties being handed over. I am also pleased to report that we have received the initial feedback from our biannual residents' survey, and the response has been overwhelmingly positive, with 90% of residents being happy or very happy with the overall service that they receive from Loddon Homes. Over 95% say they would recommend us as a landlord, and 95% are happy with the quality of their home. We are only part way through the feedback and the full results will be published in December.

68. Motions

68.1 Motion 467 submitted by Ian Shenton

The Council considered the following Notice of Motion, submitted by Ian Shenton, and seconded by Sarah Kerr.

'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.'

Ian Shenton indicated that it was estimated that in normal times approximately one species per million was lost per annum, around eight in total per annum. However, it was estimated that the loss rate was currently a thousand times greater and equated to the loss of approximately one species an hour. He asked that the Council went beyond the ecological considerations currently incorporated in some of its activities, and declared an ecological emergency. The climate emergency and ecological emergency should equally be at the heart of future actions.

In accordance with 4.2.13.7 b iii) of the Constitution it was proposed by Gregor Murray and seconded by Parry Bath that the Motion be amended as follows:

'This Council **resolves to refer to the Tree Protection and Biodiversity Task and Finish Group to examine the benefits of** formally declaring an ecological emergency and **the actions below. This will be reported back to a future Full**

Council Meeting.

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.'

Sarah Kerr proposed a 10-minute adjournment to allow consideration of the proposed amendment. This was seconded by Stephen Conway. This was agreed.

Upon reconvening, the amendment was not accepted by the proposer of the original Motion.

Gregor Murray stated that he felt that the Motion was premature and that residents would be better served if the Motion was referred to the Biodiversity Task and Finish Group to consider in the context of their recommendations. In addition, he felt that further work needed to be carried out on existing projects, and referred to targets 18-20 of the Climate Emergency Action Plan.

Parry Batth felt that the timing of the Motion was premature and that referring it to the Biodiversity Task and Finish Group would avoid a duplication of effort and resources.

Sarah Kerr emphasised that it was an ecological emergency and the time to act was now. She highlighted that the UK had failed against seventeen of twenty Aichi Biodiversity targets and had gone backwards in six areas. The UK had lost more biodiversity than any other G7 country and was in the worst 10% globally for loss of biodiversity. Sarah Kerr felt that there was not time for the Motion to be considered by another Committee. Whilst there were some actions ongoing around protecting nature, they were not enough. She felt that biodiversity required its own action plan, and that climate and biodiversity emergencies were a dual threat.

Angus Ross commented that the actions needed careful consideration as to how they could be taken forwards in the best way.

Rachel Burgess stated that she supported the original Motion and that Wokingham needed to do its bit to protect biodiversity. She emphasised the need for concrete actions and a clear commitment.

Stephen Conway felt that the amendment was procrastination.

The amended Motion was put to the vote and voting was as follows:

For	Against	Abstain
Sam Akhtar	Rachel Bishop-Firth	Keith Baker
Parry Batth	Shirley Boyt	
Laura Blumenthal	Rachel Burgess	
Chris Bowring	Stephen Conway	
Jenny Cheng	Peter Dennis	
Phil Cunnington	Lindsay Ferris	
Michael Firmager	Paul Fishwick	
John Halsall	Jim Frewin	
Pauline Helliard-Symons	David Hare	
Graham Howe	Clive Jones	
Norman Jorgensen	Sarah Kerr	
John Kaiser	Tahir Maher	

Abdul Loyes	Morag Malvern	
Charles Margetts	Adrian Mather	
Rebecca Margetts	Andrew Mickleburgh	
Stuart Munro	Ian Shenton	
Gregor Murray	Imogen Shepherd-Dubey	
Barrie Patman	Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey	
Jackie Rance	Caroline Smith	
Angus Ross		
Daniel Sargeant		
Chris Smith		
Wayne Smith		
Bill Soane		
Alison Swaddle		

The amended Motion was declared by the Mayor to be carried.

The Mayor indicated that he had been advised that because there was no time available to debate the substantive Motion a further vote was not required. He indicated that Members could have a vote if requested.

Clive Jones indicated that had there been a further vote the Liberal Democrat Group would have abstained. Rachel Burgess indicated that the Labour Group would also have abstained. Jim Frewin indicated as an independent he would have voted 'for.' John Halsall indicated that the Conservatives would also have voted 'for.'

RESOLVED: That this Council resolves to refer to the Tree Protection and Biodiversity Task and Finish Group to examine the benefits of formally declaring an ecological emergency and the actions below. This will be reported back to a future Full Council Meeting.

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.

68.2 Motion 468 submitted by Gregor Murray

The Council considered the following Notice of Motion submitted by Gregor Murray and seconded by Angus Ross.

'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 Covid-19 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.'

Gregor Murray indicated that the Tree Cities of the World had been brought to his attention by members of the Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association. There were five conditions for achieving Tree Cities of the World status and he felt that Wokingham was already doing three of them and another was a work in progress. Firstly, the Council already had an Officer responsible for the care and planting of trees. Secondly, the Council's Tree Strategy was a work in progress and would require completion before status could be applied for. The third condition was to be aware of what trees the area had and work was being undertaken by the Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association to ascertain this information. In addition, there was a need to harness the community to better understand the Borough's tree population. The fourth condition was to allocate resources, which was being addressed through the planting of a large number of new trees. The final condition was to celebrate achievement which he felt was not being done presently. He referred to the commitment to plant a Covid memorial wood.

69. Continuation of the meeting

At this point in the meeting, 10.05pm, in accordance with Procedure Rule 4.2.12 (m), the Council considered a Motion to continue the meeting beyond 10.30pm for a maximum of 30 minutes to enable further business on the Agenda to be transacted. The Motion was proposed by Stephen Conway and seconded by David Hare.

Upon being put to the vote, the Motion was declared by the Mayor to be lost.

70. Continuation of Motion 468 submitted by Gregor Murray

The Motion was put to the vote and voting was as follows:

For	Against	Abstain
Sam Akhtar	Jenny Cheng	Keith Baker
Parry Batth		
Rachel Bishop-Firth		
Laura Blumenthal		
Chris Bowring		
Shirley Boyt		
Rachel Burgess		
Stephen Conway		
Phil Cunnington		
Peter Dennis		
Lindsay Ferris		
Michael Firmager		
Paul Fishwick		
Jim Frewin		
John Halsall		
David Hare		
Pauline Helliard-Symons		
Graham Howe		
Clive Jones		
Norman Jorgensen		
John Kaiser		
Sarah Kerr		
Abdul Loyes		
Tahir Maher		
Morag Malvern		
Charles Margetts		
Rebecca Margetts		
Adrian Mather		
Andrew Mickleburgh		
Stuart Munro		
Gregor Murray		
Barrie Patman		
Jackie Rance		
Angus Ross		
Daniel Sargeant		
Ian Shenton		
Imogen Shepherd-Dubey		
Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey		
Caroline Smith		
Chris Smith		
Wayne Smith		

Bill Soane		
Alison Swaddle		

The Motion was declared by the Mayor to be carried.

Chris Smith indicated that he had wished to speak in favour of the Motion due to the importance of the subject. It was clarified that in line with the Constitution, this was not possible.

RESOLVED: That 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 Covid-19 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.

70.1 Motion 469 submitted by David Hare

The Council considered the following Notice of Motion submitted by David Hare and seconded by Clive Jones.

'White Ribbon UK is a leading charity engaging with men and boys to end violence against women and girls. Their mission is for all men to fulfil the White Ribbon Promise to never commit, excuse or remain silent about male violence against women and girls.

It is not enough for men to not be violent towards women and girls. Men need to take responsibility for helping to make change happen. All men can help prevent physical, mental, or emotional violence against women and girls by speaking out whenever they encounter such behaviour. If men do not act to correct this, women and girls will continue not feeling safe to do many of the things men do without thinking, making us a morally corrupt and emotional poor society, as we trivialise the sickness that is any type of violence against women and girls.

Wokingham Borough Council resolves to:

- Seek White Ribbon Accreditation for the Organisation within the next 6 months and encourage all male councillors to take the White Ribbon pledge, never to take part in, condone or stay silent about violence against women. As part of this Wokingham Borough Council will appoint a male Councillor as an Ambassador for White Ribbon.
- Promote the Our Streets Now campaign to make street harassment of women a crime; ask the Chief Executive to write to the Home Secretary to ask them to make street harassment a specific crime; ask the Chief Executive to write to the four MPs who cover the Borough, as well as the Police and Crime Commissioner, to ask them to show their support for this campaign by signing the petition and by lobbying ministers to make street harassment a specific crime and encourage elected members and residents to sign the petition.
- Ask schools, academies and colleges in the Borough to each develop a clear policy on tackling physical, mental, emotional or spiritual harassment of female pupils or staff, separate to their bullying policy and ask them to include education to prevent public sexual harassment, as part of their PSHE education.'

David Hare stated that White Ribbon accreditation would give the Council the opportunity to lead the way as a positive role model for men and boys, demonstrating that the Council was meeting the Public Sector Equality Duty and the Equality Act 2010. He commented that some women were unable to get away from violence either in or outside the home. The Council needed to lead in ending physical, verbal, sexual, financial, emotional, and spiritual violence against women.

Clive Jones emphasised that a change in attitude against women, was necessary. He questioned why women should feel uncomfortable in everyday life. Street harassment was also an issue. Clive Jones emphasised that the Council could seek changes to the law and should speak up for women, helping to change attitudes.

In accordance with 4.2.13.7 b iii) of the Constitution it was proposed by Laura Blumenthal and seconded by Alison Swaddle that the Motion be amended as follows:

‘That White Ribbon UK is a leading charity engaging with men and boys to end violence against women and girls. Their mission is for all men to fulfil the White Ribbon Promise to never commit, excuse or remain silent about male violence against women and girls.

It is not enough for men to not be violent towards women and girls. Men need to take responsibility for helping to make change happen. All men can help prevent physical, mental, or emotional violence against women and girls by speaking out whenever they encounter such behaviour. If men do not act to correct this, women and girls will continue not feeling safe to do many of the things men do without thinking, making us a morally corrupt and emotional poor society, as we trivialise the sickness that is any type of violence against women and girls.

Wokingham Borough Council resolves to ***refer this matter to the cross-party Equalities Working Group at its meeting in January 2022, to examine the benefits of the actions below and to report back to a future Full Council meeting:***

- Seek White Ribbon Accreditation for the Organisation within the next 6 months and encourage all male councillors to take the White Ribbon pledge, never to take part in, condone or stay silent about violence against women. As part of this Wokingham Borough Council will appoint a male Councillor as an Ambassador for White Ribbon.
- Promote the Our Streets Now campaign to make street harassment of women a crime; ask the Chief Executive to write to the Home Secretary to ask them to make street harassment a specific crime; ask the Chief Executive to write to the four MPs who cover the Borough, as well as the Police and Crime Commissioner, to ask them to show their support for this campaign by signing the petition and by lobbying ministers to make street harassment a specific crime and encourage elected members and residents to sign the petition.
- Ask schools, academies and colleges in the Borough to each develop a clear policy on tackling physical, mental, emotional or spiritual harassment of female pupils or staff, separate to their bullying policy and ask them to include education to prevent public sexual harassment, as part of their PSHE education.’

The amendment was not accepted by the proposer of the original Motion.

Laura Blumenthal commented that she agreed with the spirit of the original Motion. The Council was committed to doing all it could to protect residents from violence and harassment, including educating staff and Councillors, and speaking out when witnessing abuse. The Equalities Team was designing training for staff and Councillors, which would extend to all the protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. She commented that the Equalities Task and Finish Group would

be considering training and awareness raising and could see whether the Council needed elements of what White Ribbon offered, to supplement the work already being undertaken by the Council. She was of the view that it was too early to decide to sign up to White Ribbon accreditation.

Rebecca Margetts commented that sexual harassment in schools had become common place. The Council would engage with schools on this issue and the need for implementing policy and procedure to meet the statutory guidance from the Department of Education. She felt that the Council should look at how it could support all individuals who were suffering any kind of harassment.

Rachel Burgess commented that she supported the original Motion and that violence against women was a serious problem.

Sarah Kerr stated that almost every woman at the meeting would have survived some form of harassment or assault. Women were disproportionately the victims of violence because they were women and girls. She was pleased that training was being developed but felt that this barely scratched the surface of what needed to be done.

The amended Motion was put to the vote and voting was as follows. Due to the fact that the time was 10.30pm, and therefore the meeting was due to conclude, the Mayor indicated that should the amendment be passed a second vote would not be held:

For	Against	Abstain
Sam Akhtar	Rachel Bishop-Firth	Keith Baker
Parry Batth	Shirley Boyt	Jim Frewin
Laura Blumenthal	Rachel Burgess	Abdul Loyes
Chris Bowring	Stephen Conway	
Jenny Cheng	Peter Dennis	
Phil Cunnington	Lindsay Ferris	
Michael Firmager	Paul Fishwick	
John Halsall	David Hare	
Pauline Helliard-Symons	Clive Jones	
Graham Howe	Sarah Kerr	
Norman Jorgensen	Tahir Maher	
John Kaiser	Morag Malvern	
Charles Margetts	Adrian Mather	
Rebecca Margetts	Andrew Mickleburgh	
Stuart Munro	Ian Shenton	
Gregor Murray	Imogen Shepherd-Dubey	
Barrie Patman	Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey	
Jackie Rance	Caroline Smith	
Angus Ross		

Daniel Sargeant		
Chris Smith		
Wayne Smith		
Bill Soane		
Alison Swaddle		

The amended Motion was declared by the Mayor to be carried.

The Mayor asked Council if they required a further vote. This option was not requested.

RESOLVED: That White Ribbon UK is a leading charity engaging with men and boys to end violence against women and girls. Their mission is for all men to fulfil the White Ribbon Promise to never commit, excuse or remain silent about male violence against women and girls.

It is not enough for men to not be violent towards women and girls. Men need to take responsibility for helping to make change happen. All men can help prevent physical, mental, or emotional violence against women and girls by speaking out whenever they encounter such behaviour. If men do not act to correct this, women and girls will continue not feeling safe to do many of the things men do without thinking, making us a morally corrupt and emotional poor society, as we trivialise the sickness that is any type of violence against women and girls.

Wokingham Borough Council resolves to refer this matter to the cross-party Equalities Working Group at its meeting in January 2022, to examine the benefits of the actions below and to report back to a future Full Council meeting:

- Seek White Ribbon Accreditation for the Organisation within the next 6 months and encourage all male councillors to take the White Ribbon pledge, never to take part in, condone or stay silent about violence against women. As part of this Wokingham Borough Council will appoint a male Councillor as an Ambassador for White Ribbon.
- Promote the Our Streets Now campaign to make street harassment of women a crime; ask the Chief Executive to write to the Home Secretary to ask them to make street harassment a specific crime; ask the Chief Executive to write to the four MPs who cover the Borough, as well as the Police and Crime Commissioner, to ask them to show their support for this campaign by signing the petition and by lobbying ministers to make street harassment a specific crime and encourage elected members and residents to sign the petition.
- Ask schools, academies and colleges in the Borough to each develop a clear policy on tackling physical, mental, emotional or spiritual harassment of female pupils or staff, separate to their bullying policy and ask them to include education to prevent public sexual harassment, as part of their PSHE education.

70.2 Motion 470 submitted by Clive Jones

Due to time constraints this Motion was not considered.

70.3 Motion 471 submitted by Rachel Burgess
Due to time constraints this Motion was not considered.

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TITLE	Council's Anti-Abuse Charter
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Council on 20 January 2022
WARD	None specific
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Place and Growth - Steve Moore

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

- Increased awareness, education and training in relation to violence and abuse including domestic abuse through the commitment of a local Anti-Abuse Charter.
- Increased access to levels of help and support for those experiencing violence and abuse.
- Implementation of a trauma-based approach across the Council.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council approve the adoption of a local Anti-Abuse Charter.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

Nationally there is clear recognition that deeper more conscious understanding and actions need to take place to successfully tackle violence in our society. As part of this wider strategic context is the important work of the Violence Against Women and Girls agenda. In response the government set out a new Domestic Abuse duty and The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 came into effect in April 2021.

Locally, in December 2021 the Council agreed a new Wokingham Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021 – 2024 which sets out the Borough's approach, this strategy incorporates both the new duty as well as our wider response to domestic abuse. In turn this strategy makes an important contribution to our localised approach to addressing the wider response to violence under the umbrella of work being undertaken by the Wokingham Community Safety Partnership.

The Council is proud of the large amounts of work already underway and in place to ensure those reaching out for help and assistance receive the right help at the right time.

However, the journey to deliver change for victims and survivors is challenging and arduous. It requires commitment to change from all sections of society and continued full commitment from all.

Therefore, to help ensure that the Wokingham Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021-24 is implemented and to champion the guiding principles within it. The Council has been working closely with local domestic violence charity Kaleidoscopic UK, to develop a Charter for all Officers and Councillors. The Charter makes the Council's intent clear and will help residents, including victims and survivors understand the Council's commitment towards fostering a deep-rooted culture and step change.

The Charter

Wokingham Borough Council stands committed to preventing any form of violence or abuse against anyone in the Borough. Officers and Councillors pledge to champion a culture of high standards by reporting abuse and supporting victims throughout their recovery journey. This includes being informed on recognising signs of trauma and preventing victim blaming.

Background

Nationally there is clear recognition that deeper more conscious understanding and actions need to take place to successfully tackle violence in our society. As part of this wider strategic context is the important work of the Violence Against Women and Girls agenda. In response the government set out a new Domestic Abuse duty and The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 came into effect in April 2021.

Locally, in December 2021 the Council agreed a new Wokingham Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021 – 2024 which sets out the Borough's approach, this strategy incorporates both the new duty as well as our wider response to domestic abuse. In turn this strategy makes an important contribution to our localised approach to addressing the wider response to violence under the umbrella of work being undertaken by the Wokingham Community Safety Partnership.

The Council is proud of the large amounts of work already underway and in place to ensure those reaching out for help and assistance receive the right help at the right time.

Wokingham has 43 different domestic abuse stakeholders including Cranston our local commissioned Domestic Abuse Service Provider and SupportU, a service offering support for LGBT+ victims.

These 43 stakeholders share key service information and work hand in hand to help victims and survivors of domestic abuse. Other local organisations such as Kaleidoscopic UK, a peer support charity for victims has been at the heart of championing local domestic abuse provision and been working closely with the Council on the proposed Charter. This further demonstrates the Council's commitment to the already comprehensive Domestic Abuse Strategy and work plan.

Already in train is a strong Local Domestic Abuse Partnership Board which has made considerable amounts of progress on delivering our Domestic Abuse Duty which came into force on 29th April 2021. This local board has attendance and expert input from the National Domestic Abuse Commissioners Office as well as The Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities.

Work has started on securing Domestic Abuse Housing Accreditation (DAHA) for our Council Housing Services. This will ensure that we are taking clear actions focused steps, in both our policies and practice to deliver the safest and most effective response for domestic abuse victims seeking help from the Council.

The Council has one of the most comprehensive Home Security Schemes, often referred to as a Sanctuary Scheme. Which offers practical home security adaptations to secure properties for victims. This offer of help is for all residents, in privately owned, rented, Council or housing association properties. The scheme provides an essential and practical offer of help for victims of domestic abuse and assists them to stay in their own homes. Something victims have told us they would prefer to do, were safe and possible.

Furthermore, in recent months we have undertaken a comprehensive audit and review of training for officers and frontline staff to ensure that they are equipped to help victims. We have put in place Workplace Domestic Abuse Guidance to ensure that managers can recognise and spot the signs to help support staff members that maybe victims and in need of help.

A communications strategy that underpins the Wokingham Domestic Abuse Strategy. together with regular press and social media posts has been rolled out. Together with information and ways to access help, which has been provided at Covid clinics and testing locations.

In addition to all this good work, we are active members of a number of national accredited programmes including; the Employers Initiative on Domestic Abuse (EIDA).

The Council is also exploring a number of other good practice and inclusive accreditation schemes including, UK Safe Spaces and Call for Action on Perpetrators. A workstream which shares research findings, best practice and drives national policy work on perpetrators. We are in talks with Ask for ANI which will allow the use of nationally recognised stickers on office buildings to signal staff are aware of domestic abuse and can provide a room where victims can call helplines for support.

And whilst we are proud to say that our efforts have been commended by the National Domestic Abuse Commissioners Office, who have recognised the level of commitment and good practice being undertaken locally. We still have more to achieve to ensure we make the borough a safe place for all victims.

The journey to deliver change for victims and survivors is challenging and arduous. It requires commitment to change from all sections of society. To help ensure that the Wokingham Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021-24 is implemented inclusively and to champion the guiding principles within it.

Analysis of Issues

Violence in Society is a serious problem which destroys families and communities. As part of this agenda, is the widespread issue of domestic abuse which affects parts of all communities.

A local Charter for all Officers and Councillors is proposed for adoption. It will make the intent of the Council clear and will help residents, including victims and survivors understand the Council's commitment towards fostering a deep-rooted culture and step change on violence and abuse.

The Charter will assist to champion the Council’s new Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021-2024 and help embedded its approach to raising education, awareness and training of wider forms of abuse.

The Charter

Wokingham Borough Council stands committed to preventing any form of violence or abuse against anyone in the Borough. Officers and Councillors pledge to champion a culture of high standards by reporting abuse and supporting victims throughout their recovery journey. This includes being informed on recognising signs of trauma and preventing victim blaming.

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)	None	None	None
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	None	None	None
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	None	None	None

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision
None

Cross-Council Implications
None

Public Sector Equality Duty
A full equalities impact assessment has been undertaken as part of the Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021-24. It has also been undertaken as part of the full Community Safety Strategy 2021-24. Therefore an EqlA is not required.

Climate Emergency – <i>This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030</i>
None

List of Background Papers
Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021-2024

Contact Narinder Brar	Service Place
Telephone No 07979255308	Email Narinder.Brar@wokingham.gov.uk

TITLE	Council Tax Base 22/23
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Council on 20 January 2022
WARD	Non-Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

Set the Council Tax Base for 2022/23 in respect of the whole Borough and all constituent parts so that each precepting body can subsequently set their Council Tax budgets for the year. The higher the tax base, the greater opportunity to generate much needed income to help fund council services.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council agree the proposed Council Tax Base, for the whole area and by Parish, as set out in the report.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

Council Tax Base

The council tax base is the total number of Band D equivalent dwellings liable for Council Tax after discounts, exemptions.

Local authorities must ensure their council tax base for the forthcoming financial year is approved by Council, or a delegated body, by 31st January each year. This year's tax base calculation continues to include the significant changes to the council tax base from 1 April 2013 arising from the changes to the council tax benefits system. Financial support to individuals for council tax, formerly known as council tax benefit, is now offered as a discount within the council tax system, known as council tax reduction.

This year's tax base calculations show that there is a total of 72,206 properties on the Council Tax register as of 1st October 2021, after making all relevant adjustments for discounts, exemptions, new builds, bad debts, etc. the proposed tax base of band D equivalent increases to 74,946.3 for 2022/23.

The proposed tax base for 2022/23 reflects an increase of 2.25% on the equivalent figure for the 2021/22 financial year.

A summary of the impact of the movements on the council tax base is as follows:

(i) The Borough had 74,580.3 properties on 1 October 2021 net of the loss due to any Council Tax Reduction.

(ii) The increase arising from the estimated new properties in 2022/23 and other changes is estimated at 1,123.1 band D equivalent properties.

iii) The total of (i) to (ii) above is 75,703.4 properties. The bad debt provision for

2022/23 is 1% of this amount, i.e., 757.1 properties.

The net total of (i) to (iii) above is 74,946.3 properties as set out in the analysis.

Background

The Local Authorities (Calculation of Tax Base) Regulations require the billing authority (Wokingham Borough Council) to notify its major precepting bodies (The Police and Fire Authorities) and its Parishes of the tax base for the following financial year. The precepting bodies may request this information between the 1st December 2021 and 31st January 2022.

Analysis of Issues

The prescribed calculation is made as follows.

(i) A return is made to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (form CTB1). This analyses the valuation list as at a prescribed date into the various property bands and then provides details of discounts and exemptions.

(ii) The Band D equivalent property numbers for tax purposes for the whole of the area are broken down into each constituent Parish area.

(iii) An adjustment is made to allow for the impact of council tax reduction grant (which reduces the Band D equivalent property numbers in each area and overall).

(iv) An estimate of unbanded and new properties expected to be banded during 2022/23 are added.

(v) An adjustment is then made to take account of bad debts. This has been maintained at 1.0% as in previous years.

The resultant outcome reflects the tax base for the coming financial year in accordance with the table below:

TAX BASE BY PARISH & WHOLE DISTRICT – 2022/23

	LOCAL TAX BASE 2022/23	LOCAL TAX BASE 2021/22 (last yr)	CHANGE FROM 2021/22 TO 2022/23	% CHANGE FROM 21/22
PARISHES				
ARBORFIELD & NEWLAND	1,298.90	1,324.20	(25.30)	-1.91%
BARKHAM	2,158.90	2,012.90	146.00	7.25%
CHARVIL	1,464.90	1,437.20	27.70	1.93%
EARLEY	11,974.90	11,961.20	13.70	0.11%
FINCHAMPSTEAD	6,295.60	6,032.00	263.60	4.37%
REMENHAM	327.30	329.00	(1.70)	-0.52%
RUSCOMBE	545.70	533.00	12.70	2.38%
ST. NICHOLAS HURST	1,104.00	1,086.30	17.70	1.63%
SHINFIELD	7,356.10	6,703.20	652.90	9.74%
SONNING	829.50	835.70	(6.20)	-0.74%
SWALLOWFIELD	1,077.80	1,075.10	2.70	0.25%
TWYFORD	3,026.40	3,037.20	(10.80)	-0.36%
WARGRAVE	2,150.90	2,128.10	22.80	1.07%
WINNERSH	4,465.30	4,298.50	166.80	3.88%
WOKINGHAM TOWN	16,712.90	16,396.30	316.60	1.93%
WOKINGHAM WITHOUT	3,299.40	3,300.40	(1.00)	-0.03%
WOODLEY	10,857.80	10,806.80	51.00	0.47%
WHOLE AREA	74,946.30	73,297.10	1,649.20	2.25%

The report has been prepared in consultation with both Finance and Legal and any comments made have been reflected within the report.

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)	N/A	Yes	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	N/A	Yes	Revenue
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	N/A	Yes	Revenue

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision
The revised tax base and total grant allocation will be factored in to the 2022/23 budget setting process.

Cross-Council Implications
Council tax income contributes to the funding of all General Fund services.

Public Sector Equality Duty
An equalities assessment is not required in this instance as it relates to setting of the Council Tax Base and does not directly affect individuals.

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

List of Background Papers
Local Government Finance act 1992 The Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012

Contact Andrew Kupusarevic	Service Income and Assessments
Telephone No 07920 785784	Email andrew.kupusarevic@wokingham.gov.uk

TITLE	Council Tax Reduction Scheme 22/23
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Council on 20 January 2022
WARD	None specific
LEAD OFFICER	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

The adoption of a Localised Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) will ensure that all working age borough residents who may experience financial difficulties in paying their council tax liabilities have access to a scheme of assistance, designed locally, offering financial help to them.

The local CTRS does not impact pensioners who still come under the Government's "Prescribed scheme"

RECOMMENDATION

That the Council agree the proposed Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2022/23:

- 1) a local CTR scheme for 2022/23 is adopted on the same basis as the 2021/22;
- 2) that the full disregard currently allowed for War Widows and War Disability Pensions is continued from 1st April 2022 in respect of the Prescribed and Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme and Housing Benefit schemes;
- 3) that funds be made available to the hardship fund, known as Section 13a (S13a) scheme, for those who cannot pay their council tax liabilities;
- 4) Members to note the linkages to the broader Anti-Poverty strategy of both the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and the S13a scheme.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

Each year Wokingham Borough Council has to decide a Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) that fulfils the purpose of supporting our most vulnerable residents and is contained within agreed budgets.

Wokingham Borough Council has reviewed its current CTRS, assessing its impact and effectiveness.

Background

COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION

In April 2013 Council Tax Benefit (CTB) was abolished and replaced by Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS). This was accompanied by a 10% reduction in Government funding, which was equivalent to around £600k to WBC, and schemes were written to reflect this. The funding for this was withdrawn from 2015 and was then incorporated within the Revenue Support Grant, which was reduced to zero in 2018 for WBC.

This scheme is not provision of grant to individuals but a reduction in the amount of council tax they are required to pay; this means that there is no budget as such but a reduction in the level of council tax receipts.

Therefore, when considering a new or revised scheme, various alternatives are modelled in the context of affordability which considers the overall impact on the recipients benefiting from the scheme and the Council's collection fund.

The main features of the scheme are:

- It is an income-banded scheme
- There is no provision for back-dating awards, prior to the claim date
- the minimum level of support available is set at £3.00 per week
- the maximum level of support is 78% of council tax liability
- claims restricted to Band D and below
- an investments and savings limit of £4,000
- Disability Living Allowance/Personal Independence Payments, Armed Forces Independence Payments and War Disablement Payments are disregarded.
- Child Benefit and Child Maintenance are disregarded.
- Carers Allowance disregarded.

In addition to the CTR scheme the Council is also doing what it can to assist those in hardship which includes:

- Test & Trace Support Payments for those on low income who have to self-isolate*
- Household Support Grant*
- Council lead voluntary support for the vulnerable
- Local Welfare Provision
- Discretionary Housing Payments
- Section 13a scheme.

**Please note that further guidance from Central Government may change what support is available as the pandemic continues.*

The evidence from the 20/21 and 21/22 CTR schemes have shown that the Covid Pandemic has not had a significant impact on the schemes values due to other government incentives and the amount identified below is sufficient to meet demand.

It should be noted that the local CTRS only impacts on those of working age. Pensioners are assessed and awarded under the Government's "prescribed scheme".

Annual review

Each year, all collecting local authorities are required to review their scheme and consider whether changes should be made. In considering a review for our CTRS, the following criteria have been considered:

- How the current scheme is working both directly for residents/recipients and administratively
- Financial impact to the council, all its residents and recipients of CTR
- Impact on council tax collection rates on an overall basis and broken down to recipients of CTR.

Other considerations:

- Any known future changes to government legislation/schemes and funding as well as other activity at a local level
- Effectiveness of the S13a scheme (hardship fund available to assist those residents who cannot pay their council tax for a variety of reasons)
- Financial status of the Council and its balances
- The impact of the COVID pandemic on the Council and its residents.

Findings

- Generally, administration of CTR has worked well and without any substantial problems or issues;
- We have had a low level of tribunal cases
- Previous years have shown that the scheme has been affordable for the Council
- Overall council tax collection has held up relatively well including payments by those in the CTR scheme and is mainly on target, despite the pandemic.
- The services (Income & Assessments) continue to analyse the impact of COVID on the CTRS, the effect on the vulnerable and how these impact on collection levels.
- There are a small number of claims made to the S13a scheme (hardship fund) each year. This scheme is discretionary and assists those residents who are unable to pay their council tax due to hardship. A policy is agreed each year and the scheme advertised on our website (<https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/council-tax/discountsand-appeals/council-tax-discounts-and-reductions/>).

Table on spend below:

Year	Spend on S13a awards	Number of awards
13/14	£2,383.93	5
14/15	£4,766.88	10
15/16	£5,804.00	14
16/17	£8,978.22	15
17/18	£16,227.13	15
18/19	£10,682.05	11
19/20	£13,544.70	16
20/21	£14,286.00	33
21/22	£16,063.85 - as of 31 st December 21	40

Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2022/23 - Recommendation

When devising a scheme, we must consider both the impact on the residents eligible to receive CTR and all residents who pay council tax, along with the financial impact it will have on the council and its delivery of services.

The impact of COVID still remains a key issue for the Council and it needs to be able to react appropriately to provide whatever support we can to those in genuine hardship in accordance with our commitments under the emerging Anti-Poverty Strategy. CTRS and S13a scheme are and will remain a source of help to fulfil this.

In conclusion it is recommended that the scheme remains the same for 2022/23.

Summary

As a result of reviewing the current scheme and the financial circumstances of the authority, it is proposed that a local CTR scheme for 2022/23 is approved by Council on 20 January 2022 on the same basis as the 2021/22 scheme.

Protection to pensioners would still apply.

The Council remains aware that a relief scheme such as CTRS may exclude some claimants who, in the short term at least, are unable to improve their financial circumstances. This may present them with difficulties in paying council tax liabilities. In this respect, the provision for further discretionary reductions is to be made under Section 13A(l)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 as substituted by the Local Government Finance Bill 2012.

The report has been prepared in consultation with both Finance and Legal and any comments made have been reflected within the report.

Analysis of Issues

As a result of reviewing the current scheme and the financial circumstances of the authority, it is proposed that a local scheme is approved by Full Council on 20th January 2022 on the same basis as the 2021/2022 scheme.

Protection to pensioners would still apply, unless the Government makes any changes to the prescribed scheme.

The Council remains aware that a relief scheme such as CTRS may exclude some claimants who, in the short term at least, are unable to improve their financial circumstances. This may present them with difficulties in paying council tax liabilities. In this respect, the provision for further discretionary reductions is to be made under Section 13A(l)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992

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)	£4 mill (21/22)	Yes	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£4.1 mill (22/23)	Yes	Revenue
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	Not decided		

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

Provision has been made for the current scheme within the MTFP.

Cross-Council Implications

None

Public Sector Equality Duty

The Scheme is in the main the same as the previous year when an equality assessment was carried out. This has been reviewed to ensure all things remain relevant and mitigation effective.

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

None

List of Background Papers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Requirements) (England) Regulations 2012 (SI 2012 No. 2885), as amended - Local Government Finance Act 1992 - The Welfare Reform Act 2012 - The Equality Act 2010 - The Housing Act 1996 - Initial EQIA

Contact Andrew Kupusarevic	Service Income and Assessments
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TITLE	Treasury Management Mid - Year Report 2021-22
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Council on Thursday 20 January 2022
WARD	None Specific
LEAD OFFICER	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Finance and Housing - John Kaiser

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

Effective borrowing and investments to optimise the resource position for the Council and provide strong financial standing.

RECOMMENDATION

Council is recommended to note:

- 1) that the Treasury Management Mid-Year report was considered and agreed by the Audit Committee at their meeting on Tuesday 30 November 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 £36.62 per band D for 2021/22. This income is used by the Council to continue to provide priority services for the borough residents.
- 4) that as at the end of September 2021, the total external general fund debt was £416m, which reduces to £120m after taking into account cash balances (net indebtedness); External debt is forecast to reduce to £266m by the end of the financial year.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

This report provides a summary of the treasury management operations during the first six months of 2021/22. 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. 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.

Appendix A is the Treasury Management Mid-Year report which was agreed at Audit Committee on 30th November 2021. Key highlights to note from this report are:

- **All approved indicators set out in the Treasury Management Strategy have been adhered to.**

- The annual benefit from the income generated less the financing costs on all borrowing to date equates to £36.62 per council tax band D property for 2021/22. This benefit is reinvested into supporting Council wide services.
- Net indebtedness after cash balances is £120m at end of September.
- The average interest rate of external borrowing is 1.54%.

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

Prudential Indicators Debt and Investment

As at 30th September 2021, the Council have adhered to all of its prudential indicators and is also on target to meet these for the full year position.

The table summarises the prudential indicators, comparing the limits set in the strategy and the forecast position at outturn (31 March 2022).

Key highlights to note are;

- Authorised and operational boundary limits are forecast to be lower than the treasury strategy. This is because the Capital financing requirement (CFR) is forecast to reduce due to re-profiling of capital expenditure to later financial years.
- General fund external borrowing is forecast to be lower than expected as a result of the reprofiling. Furthermore, the internal borrowing level is being increased to bring it in line with the industry ratio of approximately 2:1 as recommended by our treasury management advisors.
- Ratio of net financing costs is forecast to be minus 1% which means that all capital financing costs (debt repayment and interest) are fully covered by income generated from treasury investments and housing, local economy and regeneration assets. As a consequence, there is a surplus available to the council taxpayer after funding all capital financing costs.

Prudential indicators:	Treasury Strategy	Forecast Outturn March '22
	£m	£m
<u>Limits</u>		
Authorised limit	£729m	£641m
<i>Note – CFR * 120%</i>		
Operational Boundary	£677m	£588m
<i>Note – CFR *110%</i>		
<u>Performance Indicators</u>		
Gross external borrowing – General Fund (GF)	£358m	£266m
Gross external borrowing – HRA	£69m	£68m
% of internal borrowing to CFR	29%	38%
Ratio of net financing costs to net revenue stream –	1.00%	-1.03%

GF		
Ratio of net financing costs to net revenue stream – HRA	16.52%	14.96%

Council's Net Indebtedness

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

	Mid Year (30 th Sept) £m	Forecast Outturn £m
General Fund – Capital Financing Requirement	£401m	£456m
<u>Less</u> Internal funded borrowing	£15m	(£190m)
External Debt Total	£416m	£266m
<u>Less</u> Cash investment balances	(£296m)	(£89m)
Net Indebtedness Total	£120m	£177m

As at 30th September 2021, total external borrowing for the general fund was £416m and treasury investments were £296m resulting in net indebtedness of £120m. The HRA borrowing is excluded from this calculation as it is a ringfenced account with external borrowing funded from housing tenants.

As set out in the treasury management strategy, net indebtedness was estimated to be £265m for 2021/22. The mid-year net indebtedness position of £120m and the forecast outturn of £177m are comfortably within the estimates set out in the strategy. This is driven largely by reprofiling in the capital programme, moving expenditure back to later years. This will result in external borrowing forecast to be £266m at 31st March 2022, £92m less than estimated in the strategy. The average interest rate on the Council's external debt is 1.54%.

Cash investment balances at the end of the financial year are forecast to be £89m, which is in line with the estimate of £93m set out in the strategy. The cash investment balance remains strong at the mid-year position as expected, with a significant portion of external debt due to be repaid in the second half of the financial year. External debt for the general fund was £458m at 31st March 2021, this has been managed down by £42m throughout the first six months of the financial year and by a further £150m by the end of the financial year.

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 £36.62 per council tax band D property for 2021/22 as set out below.

TABLE A

	Previous Year Outturn	Forecast Outturn March '22
	£,000	£,000
General Fund – Financing Cost (Interest and MRP debt repayment)	8,118	8,593
<u>Less</u> contributions towards financing costs from following areas:		
- Treasury investments	(1,406)	(1,333)
- Invest to save schemes	(418)	(1,163)
- Housing, Local Economy and Regeneration	(6,008)	(7,462)
	(7,832)	(9,958)
Net Annual Financing Cost / (Benefit)	286	(1,365)
<u>Include</u> additional income over and above the contributions shown above:		
- Commercial investments	(1,022)	(1,319)
- Town centre regeneration*	0	0
Net Annual <u>Benefit</u> to the taxpayer	(736)	(2,684)
Net Annual Benefit £,000	(736)	(2,684)
Divide by Council Tax Base (no. of band D equivalent properties)	72,037	73,297
Benefit per band D property - £	£10.22	£36.62

*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 £36.62 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.

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).

As highlighted in the table above, treasury investment returns are forecast to be c£1.3m of which c£0.7m is investment income from cash investments such as short-term loans to local authorities and returns from money market funds. Cash investment balances are forecast to be c£89m at the end of the financial year. Cash balances vary throughout the year and have reduced as external debt has been repaid. The average return on these balances is estimated to be 0.29%. Although a low return, this is reflective of the current market of low interest rates however more importantly for the Council is the security and liquidity of these balances before yield is considered.

As part of the Council’s policies on property investment the Council has invested c£86m of its own balances, these generate c£4.2m in annual revenues which is a return of 4.93%. Monetary investments achieve a return of c.0.30% over a similar investment term equating to only c£0.3m and therefore the property investment generates an additional c£3.9m.

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)	Not applicable	Yes	Revenue
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	Not applicable	Yes	Revenue

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

- the net benefit per council tax payer for the financing of all borrowing to date equates to c£36.62 per band D equivalent.

- total external general fund debt is £416m and the Councils net indebtedness after cash balances is £120m. The Councils general fund external debt is forecast to reduce to £266m by the end of the financial year.
- The average interest rate of external borrowing is 1.54%.

Cross-Council Implications

None

Public Sector Equality Duty

This is a report on the performance of the Treasury service of the Council and is not requesting any funding or service changes that would impact on any members of the community and thus has no equalities impact.
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Climate Emergency – <i>This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030</i>

This is a report on the performance of the Treasury service of the Council, and has no impact on the Council's carbon neutral objective.
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List of Background Papers

None

Contact Mark Thompson	Service Finance
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TITLE	Procurement of External Audit
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Council on 20 January 2022
WARD	None Specific
LEAD OFFICER	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

This report sets out proposals for appointing the external auditor to the Council for the accounts for the five-year period from 2023/24.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council agree the preferred approach to appoint the external auditor for the accounts for the five-year period from 2023/24, as recommended by the Audit Committee on 30th November 2021 of using the Sector Led Body, the PSAA by indicating an option to “opt-in.”

SUMMARY OF REPORT

Under the Local Government Audit & Accountability Act 2014, the Council is required to have appointed an external auditor to audit the accounts. The Council has previously opted into the ‘appointing person’ national auditor appointment arrangements established by Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA) for the period covering the accounts for 2018/19 to 2022/23. PSAA is specified as the ‘appointing person’ for principal local government under the provisions of the Local Government Audit & Accountability Act 2014 and the Local Audit (Appointing Person) Regulations 2015. PSAA are now inviting Councils to opt in for the period 2023/24 to 2027/28.

The auditor appointed at the end of the procurement process will:

- (a) Undertake the statutory audit of accounts and Best Value assessment of the council in each financial year, in accordance with all relevant codes of practice and guidance. The appointed auditor is also responsible for investigating questions raised by electors and has powers and responsibilities in relation to Public Interest Reports and statutory recommendations.
- (b) Act independently of the council and the main purpose of the procurement legislation is to ensure that the appointed auditor is sufficiently qualified and independent.
- (c) Be registered to undertake local audits by the Financial Reporting Council (FRC) and employ authorised Key Audit Partners to oversee the work. As the report below sets out there is a currently a shortage of registered firms and Key Audit Partners.

Auditors are regulated by the Financial Reporting Council (FRC), which will be replaced by a new body with wider powers, the Audit, Reporting and Governance Authority (ARGA) during the course of the next audit contract.

The national offer supplied by PSAA provides the appointment of an independent auditor with limited administrative cost to the council. By joining the scheme, the Council would be acting with other councils to optimise the opportunity to influence the market that a national procurement provides. Due to the framework in which the audit of local government accounts is undertaken, the Council has very limited influence over the nature of the audit services being procured, the nature and quality of which are determined or overseen by third parties. Therefore, the recommended approach is to opt in to the national auditor appointment scheme.

To take advantage of the national auditor appointment arrangements, the Council is required under the local audit regulations to make the decision at full Council. The opt-in period starts on 22 September 2021 and closes on 11 March 2022. To opt into the national scheme from 2023/24, the Council needs to return completed opt-in documents to PSAA by 11 March 2022.

Background

- 1 Section 7 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 (the Act) requires a relevant authority to appoint a local auditor to audit its accounts for a financial year not later than 31 December in the preceding year. Section 8 governs the procedure for appointment including the requirement for the authority to consult and take account of the advice of its auditor panel on the selection and appointment of a local auditor. Section 8 provides that, where a relevant authority is a local authority operating executive arrangement, the function of appointing a local auditor to audit its accounts is not the responsibility of an executive of the authority.
- 2 Section 12 makes provision for the failure to appoint a local auditor: the authority must immediately inform the Secretary of State, who may direct the authority to appoint the auditor named in the direction or appoint a local auditor on behalf of the authority.
- 3 Section 17 gives the Secretary of State the power to make regulations in relation to an 'appointing person' specified by the Secretary of State. This power has been applied in the Local Audit (Appointing Person) Regulations 2015 (SI 192) and this gives the Secretary of State the ability to enable a Sector Led Body to become the appointing person.
- 4 The Secretary of State has enabled PSAA Ltd to be an appointing person for local auditors under a national scheme.
- 5 On the 21st July 2016, Council agreed with the Audit Committee's proposal that Wokingham Borough Council support the Local Government Association (LGA) in setting up a National Sector Led Body to appoint external auditors. This was done and a formal decision from Council to "opt-in" to the Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd (PSAA) national auditor appointment arrangements was then made.
- 6 The Council elected to remain in the appointment arrangements for a period of five years, commencing 1 April 2018. The Council's current external auditor under this arrangement is Ernst & Young (EY).

Analysis of Issues

7. Existing external fee levels are to increase when the current contracts end.
8. Opting-in to a national Sector Led Body (SLB) provides maximum opportunity to limit the extent of any increases by entering a large-scale collective procurement arrangement and remove the costs of establishing an auditor panel. There will not be a fee to join the sector led arrangements. The audit fees that opted-in bodies will be charged by the sector led body will cover the costs of appointing auditors. The LGA believes that audit fees achieved through block contracts will be lower than the costs that individual authorities would be able to negotiate. In addition, by using the SLB, councils will avoid having to undertake their own procurement and the legal requirement to set up a panel of independent members.

9. PSAA Ltd commit to ensure that fee levels are carefully managed by securing competitive prices from firms and by minimising their own costs. Any surplus funds will be returned to scheme members under the articles of association and memorandum of understanding with the Department for Communities and Local Government and the LGA.
10. PSAA Ltd expect annual operating costs to be lower than current costs because they expect to employ a smaller team to manage the scheme. They are intending to fund an element of the costs of establishing the scheme, including the costs of procuring audit contracts, from local government's share of their current deferred income. This is considered appropriate because the new scheme will be available to all relevant principal local government bodies.
11. Contracts are likely to be awarded at the end of June 2022 and, at this point, the overall cost and therefore the level of fees required will be clear. They will consult on the proposed scale of fees in autumn 2022 and publish the fees applicable for 2023/24 in March 2023.

Proposals

12. That the Council accepts Public Sector Audit Appointments' invitation to opt into the sector-led option for the appointment of external auditors to principal local government and police bodies for five financial years from 1 April 2023. The opt-in period starts on 22 September 2021 and closes on 11 March 2022. The Council is required to return completed opt-in documents to PSAA by 11 March 2022.

Other options considered

13. Two alternative options are available to the Council:
 - (a) To appoint its own auditor, which requires it to follow the procedure set out in the Act.
 - (b) To act jointly with other authorities to procure an auditor following the procedures in the Act.
14. **Option A:** The Council may elect to appoint its own external auditor under the Act, which would require the council to:
 - a) Establish an independent auditor panel to make a stand-alone appointment. The auditor panel would need to be set up by the Council itself, and the members of the panel must be wholly or a majority of independent members as defined by the Act. Independent members for this purpose are independent appointees, excluding current and former elected members (or officers) and their close families and friends. This means that elected members will not have a majority input to assessing bids and choosing to which audit firm to award a contract for the Council's external audit.
 - b) Manage the contract for its duration, overseen by the Auditor Panel.
15. **Option B:** The Local Government Audit & Accountability Act 2014 enables the Council to join with other authorities to establish a joint auditor panel. This will need to be constituted of wholly or a majority of independent appointees. Further legal advice would be required on the exact constitution of such a panel having

regard to the obligations of each Council under the Act and the Council would need to liaise with other local authorities to assess the appetite for such an arrangement.

16. Both option A and B would be resource-intensive processes to implement for the council, and without the bulk buying power of the sector-led procurement would be likely to result in a more costly service. It would also be more difficult to manage quality and independence requirements through a local appointment process. The Council is unable to influence the scope of the audit and the regulatory regime inhibits the Council’s ability to affect quality. The Council and its auditor panel would also need to maintain ongoing oversight of the contract. Local contract management cannot, however, influence the scope or delivery of an audit. Options A and B are therefore not the recommended approach.

Conclusion

17. The Council will need to take action to implement arrangements for the appointment of external auditors from April 2023. The Council is asked to endorse the recommendation of the Audit Committee on 30th November 2021.
18. The Council has been asked by the PSAA for an indication of the preferred approach in order that it can invest resources in providing appropriate support to councils. The SLB approach offers best value to councils by reducing set-up costs and having the potential to negotiate lowest fees whilst helping to sustain the external audit sector.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

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

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£0	Yes	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£0	Yes	Revenue
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	See below	To be confirmed	Revenue

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision
<p>There is a risk that current external audit fee levels could increase when the current contracts end. It is clear that the scope of audit has increased, requiring more audit work. There are also concerns about capacity and sustainability in the local audit market.</p> <p>Opting into a national scheme provides maximum opportunity to ensure fees are as realistic as possible, while ensuring the quality of audit is maintained, by entering into a large scale collective procurement arrangement.</p>

If the national scheme is not used some additional resource may be needed to establish an auditor panel and conduct a local procurement. Until a procurement exercise is completed it is not possible to state what, if any, additional resource may be required for audit fees from 2023/24.

Cross-Council Implications

Impacts the whole organisation with regards to financial and broader governance.

Public Sector Equality Duty

This is a report on the appointment of the Council's external auditors and not requesting any funding or service changes that would impact on members of the community and thus has no equalities impact.

List of Background Papers

None

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Service Governance

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Agenda Item 73.

TITLE	Appointment of a Town/Parish Council Representative to the Standards Committee
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Council on 20 January 2022
WARD	None specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Monitoring Officer - Andrew Moulton

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To confirm the appointment of a Town/Parish Council representative on the Standards Committee. The Committee's role is to ensure that elected Members of Borough, Town and Parish Councils achieve the highest standards of behaviour in carrying out their roles.

RECOMMENDATION

That Councillor Sheena Matthews (Earley Town Council) be appointed as a Town/Parish Council representative on the Standards Committee.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Standards Committee includes seven Borough Council Members and three co-opted (non-voting) Town/Parish Members. Of the three Town/Parish Members at least one should be a Town Council representative.

Current Town/Parish representatives on the Standards Committee are Sally Gurney (Wokingham Town Council) and Roy Mantel (Twyford Parish Council).

The process for appointing the Town/Parish representatives is overseen by the Monitoring Officer and one of the Council's Independent Persons. Any recommended appointment is agreed by the full Council.

The report sets out the process followed in filling a vacancy for one of the Town/Parish representatives and asks the Council to approve the recommended appointment.

BACKGROUND

1. The Standards Committee includes seven Borough Council Members and three co-opted (non-voting) Town/Parish Members. Of the three Town/Parish Members at least one should be a Town Council representative.
2. Current Town/Parish representatives on the Standards Committee are Sally Gurney (Wokingham Town Council) and Roy Mantel (Twyford Parish Council).
3. The Council's Constitution states that a Town/Parish Member should be present when matters relating to Town/Parish Councils or their Members are being considered by the Standards Committee. A Town/Parish representative is also part of any Hearings Panel convened to consider an alleged breach of the Code of Conduct by a Town or Parish Member.
4. The process for appointing the Town/Parish representatives is overseen by the Monitoring Officer and one of the Council's Independent Persons. Any recommended appointment is agreed by the full Council.
5. The report sets out the process followed in filling a vacancy for one of the Town/Parish representatives. Each of the Borough's Town and Parish Councils were asked to nominate potential candidates to fill the vacancy.
6. The Monitoring Officer and Independent Person subsequently interviewed four candidates for the vacancy on the Standards Committee. Following this process it was agreed that Councillor Sheena Matthews (Earley Town Council) was the most suitable candidate. Councillor Matthews has accepted the appointment, subject to ratification by full Council.
7. Council is requested to confirm the appointment of Councillor Sheena Matthews as a Town/Parish Council representative on the Standards Committee.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

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

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

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision
None

Cross-Council Implications
The role of the Standards Committee is to ensure the highest standards of behaviour for elected Members in the Borough, Town and Parish Councils across the Borough.

Public Sector Equality Duty
Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act; • advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; • foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. <p>These principles have been considered in the drafting of this report.</p>

List of Background Papers
None

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Agenda Item 74.

TITLE	Appointment to The Royal Berkshire Fire Authority
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Council on 20 January 2022
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

To ensure that there is full representation on the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority in order to represent the views of residents.

RECOMMENDATION

That Councillor Alison Swaddle be appointed as one of the Council's representatives on the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

Councillor Anne Chadwick has resigned from her appointment on the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority and therefore there is a need for Council to appoint another representative.

Background

The Council is entitled to appoint four representatives, three Conservative Group Members and one Liberal Democrat Group Member, onto the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority.

At the Annual Council meeting held on 20 May 2021 Councillor Anne Chadwick was appointed as one of the Council's representatives on the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority. The other Members appointed were Councillors Pauline Helliard-Symons, Angus Ross and Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey. Councillor Chadwick has advised of her intention, for personal reasons, to resign her appointment with effect from 31 January 2022. There is therefore a need to appoint another Conservative Group Member onto the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority. As the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority is a regulatory body the appointment must be made by Council and cannot be decided under the Individual Executive Member decision making process.

The Royal Berkshire Fire Authority has advised that whoever is appointed by Council will then be formally appointed to the Fire Authority at their meeting scheduled to take place on 15 February 2022.

The Leader of the Conservative Group has put forward Councillor Alison Swaddle as his Group's nomination for the appointment and Council is therefore requested to approve this appointment.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

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

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

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

There are no financial implications associated with this decision.

Cross-Council Implications

There are no cross-Council implications associated with this decision.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty has been taken

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

The decision has no impact on the Council's carbon neutral objective.

List of Background Papers
The Council's Constitution Minutes of the Annual Council meeting held on 20 May 2021

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Wokingham Borough Council - Timetable 2022/23

2022/23	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY
Mon				1									1
Tues				2			1 EB						2 EB
Weds		1 AC		3			2 ChSC			1 AC	1 SC		3
Thur		2		4	1 LD		3 CoSC	1		2 CON/LD	2 LD		4 Elec
Fri		3	1	5	2		4	2		3	3		5
Sat		4	2	6	3	1	5	3		4	4	1	6
Sun	1	5	3	7	4	2	6	4	1	5	5	2	7
Mon	2	6 HOSC	4 CoSC	8	5 CoSC	3 CoSC	7 SACRE/ HOSC	5	2	6	6 CoSC	3	8 CON/ LD
Tues	3 EB	7 EB	5 EB	9	6 EB	4 EB	8	6	3 EB	7	7 EB	4	9 Mtrg
Weds	4	8 PC	6 HOSC	10 PC	7 ChSC	5 S	9 PC	7 SF	4 ChSC	8 PC	8 PC	5	10 PC
Thur	5 Elect	9 JWB/LD/ WWB	7 S	11 WWB	8 S	6 LD	10 WWWB/ CON	8 WWB/ CON/LD	5 LD	9 WWB/ CON	9 WWBB	6	11 WWWB/ CON
Fri	6	10	8	12	9	7	11	9	6	10	10	7	12
Sat	7	11	9	13	10	8	12	10	7	11	11	8	13
Sun	8	12	10	14	11	9	13	11	8	12	12	9	14
Mon	9 CON/ LD	13 S	11	15	12	10	14 LD	12	9 CoSC	13 LD	13	10	15 LD
Tues	10 Mtrg	14	12	16	13	11	15	13	10	14	14	11	16
Weds	11 PC	15 ChSC	13 SF/PC	17	14 PC	12 SF/PC	16 S	14 PC	11 SF/PC	15	15 SF/S	12 PC	17 MTrg
Thur	12 WWBB/ CON	16 CON	14 CON/LD/ WWBB	18	15 WWBB/ CON	13 WWB/ CON	17 C	15	12 WWBB/ CON	16 E/C	16 LD/CON	13 WWB/ CON	18 C
Fri	13	17	15	19	16	14	18	16	13	17	17	14	19
Sat	14	18	16	20	17	15	19	17	14	18	18	15	20
Sun	15	19	17	21	18	16	20	18	15	19	19	16	21
Mon	16 LD	20 SACRE	18 SC	22	19 LD	17	21	19 CoSC	16 LD	20 Mtrg	20 L&A	17	22 CoSC
Tues	17	21	19	23	20	18	22	20	17	21	21	18	23
Weds	18 Mtrg	22	20 CPB	24	21 Mtrg	19 L&A	23 CPB	21	18 S	22 S	22 ChSC	19	24 CPB
Thur	19 C	23 L&A	21 C	25	22 C	20 Mtrg	24 E	22	19 C	23 CPB	23 C	20	25 E
Fri	20	24	22	26	23	21	25	23	20	24	24	21	26
Sat	21	25	23	27	24	22	26	24	21	25	25	22	27
Sun	22	26	24	28	25	23	27	25	22	26	26	23	28
Mon	23 CPB	27 Mtrg	25 Mtrg	29	26 HOSC	24 SC	28 LD	26	23 SC	27 HOSC	27 HOSC	24	29
Tues	24	28	26	30	27	25	29	27	24 EB	28	28	25	30
Weds	25 CoSC	29	27 AC	31	28 AC	26	30 AC	28	25 HOSC		29 Mtrg	26	31
Thur	26 E	30 E	28 E		29 E	27 E		29	26 E		30 E	27	
Fri	27		29		30	28		30	27		31	28	
Sat	28		30			29		31	28			29	
Sun	29		31			30			29			30	
Mon	30					31 LD			30 L&A				
Tues	31								31				

C = Council
 E= Executive
 EB= Executive Briefing
 HOSC= Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee
 SC= Standards Committee

AC= Audit Committee
 CPB= Corporate Parenting Board
 L&A= Licensing and Appeals
 S= Overview & Scrutiny Management
 Mtrg Member Training Session

WWB= Wokingham Wellbeing Board
 WWBB Wokingham Wellbeing Board Briefing
 JWB= Joint Waste Disposal Board
 CoSC= Community & Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Committee

LD= Liberal Democrat Group
 CON= Conservative Group
 ChSC= Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee
 School Holidays

PC= Planning Committee
 SF= Schools Forum
 SACRE Schools Advisory Council for Religious Education
 Bank Holidays

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TITLE	White Ribbon Motion
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Council on 20 January 2022
WARD	None specific
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Place and Growth - Steve Moore

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

To have a clear, comprehensive and inclusive programme of work which aligns to the council's Equalities Strategy and the Wokingham Domestic Abuse Strategy.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council note the update and agree the recommendations of the Equalities Working Group as follows:

- 1) Council explore how it can improve communications to residents on what it is doing to support domestic violence victims;
- 2) Council Officers explore whether there is a more comprehensive accreditation to certify at which level the Council is performing when it comes to domestic violence provision;
- 3) The Leader of the Council to write to the Home Secretary in support of making public sexual harassment a specific offence and impress the need for wider cultural change and write to the four MPs that cover Wokingham Borough and PCC to encourage them to also support this;
- 4) The Executive Member for Children's Services to write to local schools on how they're upholding the Department for Education's September 2021 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' policy on public sexual harassment.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

At the November 2021 Council Meeting motion 469 submitted by Cllr Hare was considered and put to a vote The particulars of the Motion are set out below.

The motion was referred to the Council's Equalities Working Group, who have further considered the points when they met on the 6th January 2021.

The Equalities Cross Party Working Group have made several recommendations:

- The Council to explore how it can improve communications to residents on what it is doing to support domestic violence victims.
- Council officers to explore whether there is a more comprehensive accreditation to certify at which level the Council is performing when it comes to domestic violence provision.
- The Leader of the Council to write to the Home Secretary in support of making public sexual harassment a specific offence and impress the need for wider

cultural change. Write to the four MPs that cover Wokingham Borough and PCC to encourage them to also support this

- The Executive Member for Children's Services to write to local schools on how they're upholding the Department for Education's September 2021 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' policy on public sexual harassment.

Background

At November 2021 Council meeting Motion 469 submitted by Cllr Hare was considered and put to a vote. The particulars of the Motion are as follows;

- Seek White Ribbon Accreditation for the Organisation within the next 6 months and encourage all male councillors to take the White Ribbon pledge, never to take part in, condone or stay silent about violence against women. As part of this Wokingham Borough Council will appoint a male Councillor as an Ambassador for White Ribbon.
- Promote the Our Streets Now campaign to make street harassment of women a crime; ask the Chief Executive to write to the Home Secretary to ask them to make street harassment a specific crime; ask the Chief Executive to write to the four MPs who cover the Borough, as well as the Police and Crime Commissioner, to ask them to show their support for this campaign by signing the petition and by lobbying ministers to make street harassment a specific crime and encourage elected members and residents to sign the petition.
- Ask schools, academies and colleges in the Borough to each develop a clear policy on tackling physical, mental, emotional or spiritual harassment of female pupils or staff, separate to their bullying policy and ask them to include education to prevent public sexual harassment, as part of their PSHE education.

Amendment

In accordance with the Council's Constitution the Motion was amended by Laura Blumenthal as follows:

Wokingham Borough Council resolves to refer this matter to the cross-party Equalities Working Group at its meeting in January 2022, to examine the benefits of the actions below, and to report back to a future Full Council meeting.

- Seek White Ribbon Accreditation for the Organisation within the next 6 months and encourage all male councillors to take the White Ribbon pledge, never to take part in, condone or stay silent about violence against women. As part of this Wokingham Borough Council will appoint a male Councillor as an Ambassador for White Ribbon.
- Promote the Our Streets Now campaign to make street harassment of women a crime; ask the Chief Executive to write to the Home Secretary to ask them to make street harassment a specific crime; ask the Chief Executive to write to the four MPs who cover the Borough, as well as the Police and Crime Commissioner, to ask them to show their support for this campaign by signing the petition and by lobbying ministers to make street harassment a specific crime and encourage elected members and residents to sign the petition.
- Ask schools, academies and colleges in the Borough to each develop a clear policy on tackling physical, mental, emotional or spiritual harassment of female pupils or staff, separate to their bullying policy and ask them to include education to prevent public sexual harassment, as part of their PSHE education.

Analysis of Issues

Equalities Working Group Update

The motion was referred to the Council's cross party Equalities Working Group, who have further considered the points when they met on the 6th January 2022.

Following a detailed meeting and discussion with the White Ribbon organisation involving the Leader of the Council, the Chair of the Equalities Working Group and the Community Safety Lead and Mark Gwynne the Interim Head of Insight, Strategy and Digital Change. It has been highlighted that the foundation of the work undertaken by the White Ribbon organisation work focuses on helping organisations that are at a starting point with changing their culture around domestic abuse. They can also provide assistance to organisations that are having difficulty adopting and implementing cultural change in this workspace.

Through a programme of work delivered over the last 2 years, Wokingham Borough Council is well advanced in its cultural change journey in relation to domestic abuse and therefore has considered the scope of White Ribbon accreditation and its fee in detail. Against the context of the work set out and currently underway through the Wokingham Domestic Abuse Partnership Board and Networking Group, it is felt that progressing White Ribbon accreditation would be both limited and not add adequate value for residents. However, the Council will explore with White Ribbon the benefits of potentially engaging them as a training facilitator as part of the Council's monthly domestic abuse training programme for frontline staff.

Furthermore, it is felt exploring accreditation that is more comprehensive and wider reaching would be advantageous and reflect the inclusive principles of the Wokingham Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021-24.

The Council's programme of work and progress on delivery is of a high standard, however it would benefit further from increasing and improving communications in relation to the scale and range of work being undertaken by the council and local stakeholders. This was discussed by the Group and it was agreed that communications and marketing should be increased to give residents information and advice on local services and activities that are being carried out. This would allow for essential information on support and help to be disseminated as well as helping to build confidence with victims and survivors in relation to the council's commitment.

In addition to the already comprehensive work and training being rolled out. The council is also introducing trauma informed training for staff to spot signs of domestic abuse. The new training will help Council Officers to identify behaviours in domestic abuse victims that show trauma. This type of training was a key recommendation from the domestic violence charities who took part in shaping the Council's Domestic Abuse Strategy.

The Council is also currently designing Equalities training for staff and Councillors. This will cover bystander training and allyship which will educate staff and Councillors on how they can step in safely when coming across someone being harassed or discriminated against. This will complement the Council's established domestic abuse training to include public harassment, including public sexual harassment.

Focusing on education around the circumstances of victims from different backgrounds and developing practical skills, the training will complement existing monthly coaching for frontline staff and will help foster safer stronger communities.

The Equalities Working Group have made several recommendations:

- The Council to explore how it can improve communications to residents on what it is doing to support domestic violence victims.
- Council officers to explore whether there is a more comprehensive accreditation to certify at which level the Council is performing when it comes to domestic violence provision.
- The Leader of the Council to write to the Home Secretary in support of making public sexual harassment a specific offence and impress the need for wider cultural change. Write to the four MPs that cover Wokingham Borough and PCC to encourage them to also support this
- The Executive Member for Children's Services to write to local schools on how they're upholding the Department for Education's September 2021 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' policy on public sexual harassment

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)	None	None	None
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	None	None	None
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	None	None	None

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

None

Cross-Council Implications

N/A

Public Sector Equality Duty

A full equalities impact assessment has been undertaken as part of the Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021-24. It has also been undertaken as part of the full Community Safety Strategy 2021-24. Therefore an EqlA is not required.

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

There will be no impact on the Councils' carbon neutral objective as a result of this decision.

List of Background Papers
Motion 469 considered at the 18 November Council meeting

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