



WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

A Meeting of the **COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** will be held in the Council Chamber - Civic Offices, Shute End, Wokingham RG40 1BN **WEDNESDAY 1 SEPTEMBER 2021 AT 7.00 PM**

Susan Parsonage
Chief Executive
Published on 23 August 2021

The role of Overview and Scrutiny is to provide independent “critical friend” challenge and to work with the Council’s Executive and other public service providers for the benefit of the public. The Committee considers submissions from a range of sources and reaches conclusions based on the weight of evidence – not on party political grounds.

Note: Although non-Committee Members and members of the public are entitled to attend the meeting in person, space is very limited due to the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic. You can however participate in this meeting virtually, in line with the Council’s Constitution. If you wish to participate either in person or virtually via Microsoft Teams, please contact Democratic Services. The meeting can also be watched live using the following link:
<https://youtu.be/YaHybuJP0XA>



WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

Our Vision

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

Enriching Lives

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

Safe, Strong, Communities

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

A Clean and Green Borough

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

Right Homes, Right Places

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

Keeping the Borough Moving

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

Changing the Way We Work for You

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

MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillors

Guy Grandison (Chairman)
Anne Chadwick
Clive Jones

Sam Akhtar
Phil Cunnington
Alison Swaddle (Vice-Chairman)

Shirley Boyt
Paul Fishwick

Substitutes

Rachel Burgess
Rebecca Margetts
Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey

Pauline Helliar-Symons
Barrie Patman
Caroline Smith

Norman Jorgensen
Jackie Rance

ITEM NO.	WARD	SUBJECT	PAGE NO.
23.		<p>APOLOGIES To receive any apologies for absence.</p>	
24.		<p>MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS To confirm the Minutes of the meeting held on 21 June 2021 and the Minutes of the extraordinary meeting held on 21 July 2021</p>	5 - 22
25.		<p>DECLARATION OF INTEREST To receive any declarations of interest.</p>	
26.		<p>PUBLIC QUESTION TIME To answer any public questions</p> <p>A period of 30 minutes will be allowed for members of the public to ask questions submitted under notice.</p> <p>The Council welcomes questions from members of the public about the work of this committee.</p> <p>Subject to meeting certain timescales, questions can relate to general issues concerned with the work of the Committee 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</p>	
27.		<p>MEMBER QUESTION TIME To answer any member questions.</p>	
28.	None Specific	<p>UPDATE ON LOCAL ELECTIONS To consider an update on the Local Elections</p>	23 - 30

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|------------|---------------|--|----------------|
| 29. | None Specific | BROADBAND PROVISION
To consider an update on broadband provision within the Borough | 31 - 44 |
| 30. | None Specific | LIBRARY SERVICE UPDATE
To consider an update regarding the Library Service within the Borough | 45 - 62 |
| 31. | None Specific | UPCOMING MEETING SCHEDULE
To consider the provisional list of items scheduled for upcoming meetings of the Committee | 63 - 68 |

Any other items which the Chairman decides are urgent

A Supplementary Agenda will be issued by the Chief Executive if there are any other items to consider under this heading

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MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 21 JUNE 2021 FROM 7.00 PM TO 10.45 PM

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Guy Grandison (Chairman), Alison Swaddle (Vice-Chairman), Sam Akhtar, Shirley Boyt, Anne Chadwick, Phil Cunnington, Paul Fishwick and Clive Jones

Executive and Deputy-Executive Members in Attendance

Councillors: Stuart Munro, Gregor Murray, Wayne Smith, Bill Soane and Shahid Younis

Officers Present

Callum Wernham (Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist), Narinder Brar (Community Safety Manager), Felicity Parker (Superintendent, Bracknell and Wokingham Local Police Area), Neil Carr (Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist), Keeley Clements (Director - Communities, Insight, and Change), Rhian Hayes (Interim Assistant Director Housing and Place), Marcia Head (Service Manager - Place and Growth) and Simon Price (Assistant Director Neighbourhoods and Communities)

7. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

8. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 24 March 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the following minor amendments.

Agenda page 9: “2) **It be recommended that** the Low Carbon transport Strategy revert to be named the Low Emissions Transport Strategy”

Agenda page 10: “8) An update regarding the Borough Wide Parking Management Plan be considered by the Committee in March 2022.”

Agenda page 10: “9) An update regarding Flood Risk Management and an update from the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service be considered in March 2022.”

9. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

A pecuniary and prejudicial declaration of interest was submitted from Paul Fishwick relating to agenda item 15, on the grounds that he was the owner of a business which had received a grant from the Council in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Paul added that he would leave the room for this item, and take no part in any discussions or votes related to the item.

10. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

11. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

12. COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 11 to 36, which provided an annual update on the work of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP).

The report outlined an overall reduction in crime offences of 9.9% across the Wokingham Borough in the last 12 months. Incidents which had seen an overall reduction included burglary, vehicle crime, and drugs possession offences. As a result of the pandemic, there were a number of areas of concern including car meets in Council car parks and open spaces, and domestic abuse. The community safety team have lead a tri-Borough operational based response with local service providers and key stakeholders to adapt services for victims of domestic abuse. The CSP had 4 key priorities which came to an end on 1st June 2021, which included addressing violence against women and girls, tackling anti-social behaviour; harmful behaviour and organised crime, reduction and prevention of exploitation and and address the needs of vulnerable victims and offenders, and empowering and enabling the resilience of local communities.

Bill Soane (Executive Member for Neighbourhood and Communities), Narinder Brah (CSP Manager) and Felicity Parker (Superintendent, Bracknell and Wokingham Local Police Area) attended the meeting to answer Member questions.

During the ensuing discussions, Members raised the following points and queries:

- Were there any specific statistics relating to cybercrime within the Borough? Officer response – Cybercrime was a key area which had been highlighted within the strategic assessment. There had not been any local increase in this area, and Action Fraud was an agency which helped victims deal with cybercrime. The CSP was also supported through colleagues within the Public Protection Partnership, who had noticed personal protection equipment and vaccination fraud offences. In the future, additional details relating to cybercrime within the Borough would be added to the annual update report.
- The data on agenda page 14 related to anti-social behaviour was absent from the report, and it was believed that this was previously provided by the Thames Valley Police (TVP). What were the current figures and how did they impact on the overall crime figures? Police response – The data was available, but not to hand, and would be circulated to the Committee.
- There had been decrease in areas such as burglary incidents and domestic abuse. There was a concern that less instances of domestic abuse may have been reported because of victims being in lockdown with their abusers. What could be done to ensure the safety of those at risk? Police response – There had been a significant decrease in burglary incidents, which was something that the CSP was proud of and they were awaiting to see if this trend continued post Covid-19 (C-19). During the first lockdown, visits were made to medium and repeat risk victims of domestic abuse to ensure that they were being provided the best service possible.
- Agenda page 27 had indicated an overall reduction of CSP funding of around £1000. What effect would this have on service delivery? Officer response - This funding was based on a historical formula. This issue had been flagged internally and would be picked up, and conversations would occur with the newly elected Police and Crime Commissioner.
- What did the MARAC team consider? Officer response – The MARAC team only dealt with cases which had been professionally risk assessed as being high risk.

- Agenda page 23 indicated a reduction in attendance of Kicks sessions from 25 attendees last year to just 5.5 this year. Could this be clarified? Officer response – Clarification would be provided to the Committee.
- The precept for the PCC had increased for the current financial year, yet the funding for the CSP had reduced. What was the rationale behind this? Police response – The PCC precept went some way towards the CSP, however it also funded other services such as Victims First.
- What were the details of the new five-year domestic abuse contract? Office response – The CSP would continue to work closely with Berkshire Women’s Aid, however the new contract had been awarded to Cranstoun who would provide a 24/7 victims helpline, close working with victims to reduce risks to them and their family, in addition to offering refuge provision. The contract also provided for work with schools for young people who were victims of domestic abuse or who had witnessed domestic abuse. An update could be provided for the March Committee to update on the progress of the contract in its first six months.
- Did the substance misuse service work with those who had misused in the past and had changed their ways? Officer response – The CSP worked with a number of agencies and contract providers, and it was recognised that an experienced person was beneficial and could help others with recovery. There was a new contract in place which attracted additional funding, and had allowed for a specific young people service (Here 4 You) to be created.
- How effectively was the local Prevent service working? Officer response – There were good and robust local processes in place to safeguard individuals. This was about partners communicating with each other clearly and flagging up concerns. Concerns were then flagged up to the “Channel Panel”. Locally, Prevent heard of a lot of cases of concerns and acted accordingly.
- Were operations still carried out to target shops who were selling alcohol to underage persons? Police response – This process was still carried out, however it required cadets to carry out the process. Due to C-19, cadets were unable to come on-board, however as soon as they returned then spot checks would be carried out. Trading standards and the police took “secret shopper” exercises very seriously.
- Were food delivery firms checking the age of recipients on delivery of alcohol? Executive member response – Delivery drivers were required to check the age of the person opening the door if the order included alcohol, and were instructed to remove items of alcohol and refund if the person could not prove that they were over 21 years old. Some firm’s drivers were not checking however.
- What work was being done to promote preventative measures against antisocial behaviour? Police response – There was a joint piece of work with the CSP which was looking how young people could be prevented at the earliest possible stage from engaging in serious violence.
- How was engagement with housing associations being improved? Police response – There was a strategic group set up to work with housing associations, which had a similar stock to that of WBC. Members could raise concerns where they knew of examples of housing associations not dealing with instances of anti-social behaviour.

The CSP worked with a number of housing associations on a strategic level on a number of issues including anti-social behaviour.

- The domestic abuse bill broadened the definition of domestic abuse, what strategy was in place to deal with any increase in service requests? Officer response – Officers were in the process of ensuring that the service was compliant with the new domestic abuse bill, including bringing website content up to date, including information about safe spaces.
- Would the healthy relationship course be opened to all schools? Officer response – The CSP was working with children in all schools, and various pathways were being looked at to provide the best support for children within the Borough. There was a very detailed piece of work taking place under housing needs assessments to work with the victims of domestic abuse, both children's and adults, to ensure that their housing needs were met.
- The Committee were keen to hear from the “voice of a child”, and to have a report sent back to Committee.
- What were the CSP and EMRAC doing in relation to county lines? Police response – There were a number of operations underway to combat county lines, however the rates in the Wokingham Borough were much lower than in other areas.
- What were the thoughts on how the Borough worked with the CSP? Police response – It had been an interesting year which was hard to qualify, however the police had been hugely impressed by the work of the Narinder Brah and Simon Price. There were a number of sub-groups which needed sufficient levels of response, and the CSP needed to see how they could make the services provided as best as possible.
- Effective data sharing was key between different organisations, was this being carried out effectively and in a timely fashion? Officer and Police response – Thames Valley police had a considerable amount of data, and shared what they felt was useful with the CSP on a quarterly basis. Additional data could be provided upon request. The creation of the violence reduction dashboard would use Thames Valley Police data and data from Local Authorities, and in future data from Health Services would be added. Data ensured that projects and funding were being put in the right places, whilst looking at new and existing trends.
- Was there an opportunity to send a police officer into schools to talk about substance misuse? Officer and police response – Each school had a liaison officer assigned to them. When a drug incident happened at a school, the police were often led by the school to make contact prior to the police responding. There had been a national increase in cannabis use, not just locally. The new contract would allow for additional offers for children and young people, including increased education around substance misuse.
- How was knife crime reduction being targeted and achieved? Police response – There was a new strategic partnership which looked at serious crime including knife crime. The partnership was looking at identifying pupils at risk, and where a high risk individual was identified then this would be escalated to the multi-agency team.

- Were there any areas of the Borough which would benefit from a neighbourhood action group? Police response – If there were any gaps which the community would like filled, the police would be happy to facilitate this process. This could involve setting up a new group, or involving the nearest group and expanding it.
- The Committee thanked the police and the CSP for keeping crime levels low despite cuts to their budget from Central Government over a period of time.
- Was there any data relating to prosecutions of race related crimes? Police response – There were small but still unacceptable numbers of race crime within the Borough, which were increasing. This was a difficult crime to detect as it could happen in the street, with the perpetrators moving on very quickly. The police and CSP wanted more people to feel confident about coming forward and reporting these crimes, and as such if reported crime figures went up then this would be a good thing.
- Had there been increased engagement between the community and PCSOs? Police response – Neighbourhood policing was difficult last year due to keeping the community safe from C-19. There would be two neighbourhood teams from August, including one problem solving team, which would provide effective engagement and give people confidence.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Bill Soane, Felicity Parker, and Narinder Brah be thanked for attending the Committee;
- 2) Additional details relating to cybercrime statistics be added to future update reports;
- 3) Data relating to anti-social behaviour be circulated to the Committee;
- 4) Clarification regarding attendance at Kicks sessions be provided to the Committee;
- 5) An update on the first 6-months of the new domestic abuse contract be provided to the Committee at their March 2022 meeting;
- 6) An update report relating to the “voice of a child” be provided to the Committee;
- 7) An annual update on the work of CSP return to the Committee in the months’ time.

13. COMMUNITIES, INSIGHT, AND CHANGE DIRECTORATE PRIORITIES

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 37 to 42, which outlined the directorate priorities for the Communities, Insight, and Change Directorate.

The report outlined a number of areas of work for the year ahead, including providing IT capabilities and resilience, launching the business change strategy and embedding the change framework methodology into the organisation, tracking of customer satisfaction through various channels, ensuring that services were open to everyone by minimising any barriers or equality issues, maintenance of Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) housing stock in addition to increasing customer satisfaction to 90%, and supporting communities to be clean and safe.

Gregor Murray (Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions), Shahid Younis (Deputy Executive Member for Corporate Strategy, Insight &

Change), Keeley Clements (Director – Communities, Insight, and Change), and Simon Price (Assistant Director – Neighbourhood and Communities), attended the meeting to answer Member queries.

During the ensuing discussions, Members raised the following points and queries:

- What was the satisfaction rate of Council tenants currently? Director response – At a low point, satisfaction reached 76%. Currently, satisfaction levels were around 88%, and the service was looking to improve this level further.
- What preparation had been done in anticipation of the eviction ban coming to an end? Director and officer response – The Council’s “all in” policy had been very successful at keeping people off of the street during the Covid-19 (C-19) pandemic. WBC was expecting landlords to look to sell some properties due to changes in their circumstances, and WBC would need to review the overall position in the coming months. Due to the court backlog and a possible extension to the eviction ban, evictions may not take place for three to four months.
- Could some clarity be provided relating to the proposed strategic use of the HRA? Director and officer response – Officers were looking at unlocking the HRA to understand the borrowing capacity to be able to contribute to strategic projects. The aim was to buy some of the newly developed S106 properties, in addition to redeveloping and buying speculatively where appropriate.
- What was being done to improve the customer experience, including action tracking? Director response – Workflow tracking was planned in the medium term, and the service already knew of 5 to 6 areas where customers were more engaged. Where customers had queries, WBC needed to respond appropriately and in a timely fashion. A website UX UI Specialist had been hired to streamline the WBC website and reduce “clicks” needed to reach useful information.
- What was the strategy for taking graduates on board at WBC? Director response – A cohort of graduates had been taken in under change management for rotation around the organisation, to build their depth and breadth of knowledge and skills.
- What was the Insight Strategy? Director response – There was a difference between data and insight, as insight was about contextualising and understanding what the data was telling us. As a Council, we needed to build up and connect our datasets to allow us to understand what the insight was telling us, which would allow better customer interactions and enable us to progress as an organisation.
- Were there any developments relating to investigating fly tipping in the Borough? Director response – A lot of work had been done in this area and the overall situation had improved as a result of additional cameras and communications efforts. C-19 had definitely had an impact on fly tipping, and plans were in place to continue enforcement efforts going forwards. Communications relating to Christmas waste had helped over the festive period. Recently, some officers had been redeployed to help with surge testing and surge vaccinations. There was a working group which was looking at this overall issue, and WBC was working with the police to check vehicle licence plates when transporting and dropping of waste, to ensure that they were registered waste disposal businesses. Where breaches were found, fixed penalty notices were being issued.

- How were equality assessments being made a key priority in everything we do? Director response – An equalities impact assessment was required for any change in service or proposition, and it was the responsibility of each directorate to carry this out for each change within their area. The equalities plan sat within the Communities, Insight, and Change Directorate, and this was about how an overall strategy could be developed for the Borough, whilst being a dynamic policy.
- The 21st Century reorganisation strove for all customer contacts to be done digitally wherever possible. After the C-19 pandemic, was it possible that a surge of people would want face to face interactions, and if so was WBC prepared? Director response – This reorganisation was carried out before this Directorate, or Director, formed part of WBC. Every customer should be able to engage in the best way for them personally, and if there was an uptake in demand for face to face interactions, then customer services would support this.
- When was the poverty strategy expected to come forward? Director response – This was hoped to come forward as soon as possible, however the manager of the strategy and planning area had recently left WBC, who needed replacing. There were five blocks of work which needed actions, one of which was the voice of the customer which had recently been carried out, and had provided some very useful insight for the organisation.
- Did the Directorate have enough staff to fulfil its ambitious programme? Director response – A number of inherited areas of the Directorate had been looked at, with a number of areas such as accounts payable being moved to a more appropriate Directorate to increase response times. There were some vacant posts which did cause strains on existing staff who had to fill in the gaps, and there was some work to do to fill some of the key roles within the Directorate.
- What was WBC doing to protect itself from cyberware and ransomware attacks? Director response – This could be picked up with Members separately.
- Could highways issues tracking be prioritised, as Members were pushing residents to report directly to WBC rather than having to go through their local ward member. Director response – There was a piece of work looking at priority areas where residents engaged most with the organisation, which would allow resources to be targeted in streamlining the customer experience in these high contact areas initially.
- The report made mention of 1000 planned library events due to take place, in a normal year would 1000 events take place? Officer response – The libraries team was continually engaging with younger communities, including online book clubs and other online events. Details could be shared with the Committee at a future meeting.
- How was customer feedback captured, including conversational feedback? Director response – “Gov Metrics” had been deployed across the WBC website, and options were being explored to expand this to phone and email interactions. There was a cultural change required to log any comment of dissatisfaction as a complaint, which would enable the voice of the customer to feed into the organisation’s central thinking.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Gregor Murray, Shahid Younis, Keeley Clements and Simon Price be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) Information related to the Council's strategy to protect against cyberware and ransomware attacks be provided to Members confidentially where requested;
- 3) Additional information relating to library services return to a future meeting of the Committee;
- 4) A number of key priorities from the Communities, Insight, and Change Directorate return to the Committee during the current municipal year, after discussion between the Chairman and the Director.

14. PLANNING APPLICATION CONSULTATION - COMMITTEE REQUEST

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 43 to 46, which gave an update on how Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) consulted on planning applications.

The report outlined that WBC followed the statutory obligation to either display a notice on the site for no less than 21 days, or by serving a notice to any adjoining owner or occupier. WBC chose to serve notices to neighbours, and also ask that applicants voluntarily display a site notice which was provided to them. This approach was set out within the statement of community involvement. There were additional requirements for major applications within the Borough.

Wayne Smith (Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement) and Marcia Head (Service Manager – Place and Growth) attended the meeting to answer Member queries.

During the ensuing discussions, Members raised the following points and queries:

- Some residents had reported that they had not received notices of nearby planning applications. Whilst most objections to applications did not lead to refusals, residents wanted to be consulted and ward members wanted to ensure that residents were engaged and consulted. What exactly was sent out to residents? Officer response – An A5 postcard was sent out with the WBC crest printed on the top of the card. The postcard was not sent in an envelope, and had the planning application details written on it. If there was a sensitive application, then more houses would usually be informed. Residents did not have to be consulted to comment on an application, and many residents spoke to each other about applications which usually led to a comments being left via the WBC planning section on the website for that specific application.
- The Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement commented that in addition to neighbours being consulted, Town and Parish Councils and local ward members were informed of every planning application in their area. 26,000 postcards had been sent out over the past year, and Covid-19 (C-19) had not slowed the planning process.
- Had there been a change in the average number of postcards sent out for each application? Officer response – The average was 6 as a usual residential property consulted with three properties, adjoining neighbours and the property to the rear, however larger or more sensitive applications attracted far more postcards which took the average to 6.

- Was 26,000 postcards per year sufficient to ensure that residents were aware of local planning applications? Officer response – WBC received tens of thousands of comments on planning applications per year. Planning was a balance, where objections had to be weighed up against planning law. Even where an application received no objections, officers still weighed up the impact of the development on the local community.
- Could the notification system be modernised, via sending consultations digitally? Officer response – This had been looked at in the past via an account system where you could opt-in to receiving digital notifications, however if the homeowner moved then WBC would not be fulfilling their duty to notify immediate neighbours about a planning application. A two-tiered system would be required, which would be a big IT change.
- Had consultations always been sent out as a postcard? Officer response – Some years ago, letters were sent out within an envelope which was addressed to “The Occupier”. Some people were confused why the letter was not addressed to them, and the letter was then changed to a postcard. Members and Town and parish Councils could ask local applicants to voluntarily place notices on their sites to increase engagement.
- It was noted that there was a general reluctance for residents to send in comments directly, rather than through a ward member or a Town or Parish Council.
- Was their scope for a communications exercise, such as within the Borough News, outlining different types of planning applications and what grounds objections could be raised on? Executive Member response – Training had occurred over the past couple of years, and was also planned for this year, around planning and enforcement. Information had also been provided within the Borough news in the past, as well as at Borough events. A piece was planned in the borough news regarding development of one and two bedroom properties within the Borough, and further pieces could also be included, for example relating to HMOs or permitted development rights.
- As more people were at home over the last year, could this have accounted for more people noticing development and planning applications? Executive Member and officer response – WBC had seen an increase of 89% increase in householder planning applications in the first 5 months of this year compared to last year, and there had also been a significant increase in requests to the planning enforcement teams. Fifty percent of contacts with the planning enforcement teams were not a breach of planning control, but still required a member of the team to visit the site and interact with the landowner. Many residents were seeing buildings being developed and fences being erected, thinking that they all required planning permission. A piece regarding what does and does not require planning permission could be included within WBC’s communications approach.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Wayne Smith and Marcia Head be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) This issue be raised with the Borough Parish Liaison Forum, with the Chairman of the Committee being invited to the Forum meeting where the issue was to be discussed. This item could then return to the Committee at a later date if required.

15. COVID-19 - BUSINESS & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RECOVERY UPDATE

Guy Grandison proposed an extension to the meeting by a maximum of 30 minutes. This was seconded by Alison Swaddle and subsequently carried.

The Committee considered a report, set out in supplementary agenda pages 3 to 12, which gave an overview of the Council's ongoing business and economic development recovery from the Covid-19 (C-19) pandemic.

The report stated that whilst most of the work to date has been reactive, there was now a transition into the recovery phase for the Borough's economy and businesses. Over the coming year, the plan was to speak to all of Wokingham's businesses to develop a strong lasting relationship with the business community.

Stuart Munro (Executive Member for Business and Economic Development) and Rhian Hayes (Interim Assistant Director Housing and Place) attended the meeting to answer Member queries.

During the ensuing discussion, Member raised the following points and queries:

- Members commented that Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) had gone above and beyond in being a supportive organisation throughout the pandemic for businesses across the Borough.
- Were there any statistics on the numbers of new businesses that had popped up during the pandemic, and how WBC might be able to support them going forwards? Officer response – This was typically a statistic which had a large time lag, however this information would be available in the future, and WBC was keen to support emerging businesses.
- The Committee wished to extend their thanks to all those who enabled such a thorough response in such a difficult period of time.
- What was the key to the successful deployment of business grants? Officer response – WBC staff delivered for our residents, and in particular Andrew Kupusarevic and the business rates team worked incredibly hard to ensure smooth delivery of business grant payments on or before time.
- How long would the Covid Marshals be kept on for? Officer response – The opening up fund would enable the tenure of the marshals to be extended for another couple of months.
- How was WBC planning to engage with all of the businesses across the Borough, and identify their needs properly? Officer response – Businesses had a wide range of varying needs. WBC was planning to speak to each business to understand their specific needs.
- It was noted that there was still a strong demand for commercial space within the Borough.

- Were companies letting us know if they planned on letting staff go after the furlough scheme ended? Officer response – Whilst there was no requirement for businesses to do so, WBC would seek to capture this information wherever possible.
- Was there any update on the claimant count within the Borough? Officer response – The current rate was 3.3%, down from 3.5%, and officer were watching this rate to see which direction it would go.
- How many Borough residents had been furloughed in the Borough? Officer response – 10,900 people, or 13 percent of total jobs, had been furloughed within the Borough.
- The business change survey had identified a number of businesses that were struggling and were not likely to continue trading. Was there an update on these businesses? Officer response – All responding businesses would be called, which had not occurred yet due to officers being involved in surge testing. Officers would be looking to see whether there was anything that WBC or another agency could do to support these businesses.
- How had the £300,000 grant related to the public realm been spent? Officer response – This grant had been used to purchase signage around social distancing, providing information leaflets regarding legislation and advice, and to employ some of the Covid marshals.
- What could be done to achieve a better response from future surveys to businesses? Officer response – This was difficult at businesses received a large amount of surveys. The next survey was planned for about six months' time, and more face to face contact was planned.
- Were the Covid marshals being considered for different roles within WBC once their contracts expired? Officer response – These staff had done an excellent job, and WBC always looked to retain skilled staff where possible and appropriate.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Stuart Munro and Rhian Hayes be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) All staff and Members involved in the business response to the pandemic be thanked for their hard work during a difficult time.

16. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME/MEETING SCHEDULE

The Committee considered the provisional list of items scheduled for upcoming meetings, including the extraordinary meeting scheduled for 21 July. Officers commented that further items would be scheduled for future meetings once discussions with the appropriate Executive members, Directors, and officers had been achieved.

RESOLVED That the work programme be noted.

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**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON 21 JULY 2021 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.24 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Guy Grandison (Chairman), Sam Akhtar, Anne Chadwick, Phil Cunnington, Paul Fishwick and Clive Jones

Committee Member in Attendance

Councillors: Shirley Boyt

Executive Members Present

Councillors: Wayne Smith (Executive Member for Planning & Enforcement) and Bill Soane (Executive Member for Neighbourhood and Communities)

Officers Present

Stephen Brown (Interim Assistant Director - Place), Neil Carr (Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist), Steve Moore (Interim Director - Place & Growth), David Thrale (Interim Public Protection Consultant) and Callum Wernham (Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist)

17. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

Shirley Boyt attended the meeting virtually, and was therefore marked as in attendance, and was not able to propose, second, or vote on items.

18. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

19. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

20. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

21. BRINGING THE PUBLIC PROTECTION SERVICE BACK IN-HOUSE

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 5 to 10, which set out the areas for a verbal update regarding bringing the public protection service back in-house.

Bill Soane (Executive Member for Neighbourhood and Communities), Wayne Smith (Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement), Steve Moore (Interim Director – Place and Growth), David Thrale (Interim Public Protection Consultant), and Stephen Brown (Interim Assistant Director – Place) attended the meeting to verbally update the Committee and to answer Member questions.

The Executive Member for Neighbourhood and Communities stated that Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) would leave the public protection partnership (PPP) on 31 March 2022. WBC had appreciated the partnership working over the years, however it was not felt that the residents of Wokingham would be better served by an in-house service. Low level antisocial behaviour was one area where residents could be better served by a service with more in-depth local knowledge. Progress was going well in terms of staffing

and negotiation, and the aim was to minimise costs for all three local authorities. A modern new IT system would be procured once the service had transitioned in-house. Regarding Building Control Solutions, the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (RBWM) had left the service, whilst West Berkshire were deciding on their future. The move away from the PPP to an in-house service was being done to provide a better service for the Borough's residents.

The Interim Director (Place & Growth) stated that there was unilateral thanks to the staff and the PPP as a whole for the work that they had done. The transition was a work in progress, and the goal of creating a localised service which worked better for the Borough's residents was a top priority. Areas including the staff transition plan and the customer process design were a work in progress, whilst other areas such as budgeting and the exit plan were to be progressed with the next steps of the transition. Ongoing staff dialogue would be carried out throughout the process, and keeping staff up to date and informed was key to a successful transition.

During the ensuing discussion Members raised the following points and queries:

- What was the progress of the transition, and what were the challenges faced so far? Director response – A range of issues were being worked on including HR and IT, and transitions out of a partnership always presented challenges. WBC was working closely with Bracknell and RBWM to ensure a smooth transition.
- Had any risks regarding pensions been considered? Interim Director response – Indicative cost modelling had been carried out, and this was an item included within the risk register. A fit for purpose HR function was critical to the transition process, and conversations were currently taking place regarding this issue.
- Was there anything to suggest that WBC would have been better off to wait prior to deciding that they wished to leave the PPP? Executive Member and Interim Director response – This decision was made prior to the Interim Director appointment, and part of this appointment was to oversee a successful transition process. The transition to an in-house service would allow for a more localised offer for the Borough's residents, whilst providing a quicker response time.
- When would full costings and the exit plan be available? Executive Member and Interim Director response – A number of options were being considered, but it was premature to say what the operating model would be and what it would cost. The Executive Member added that he would be happy to inform Council once he had been fully briefed.
- How much of the allocated £500k budget, to ensure the smooth transfer of services back in house, had been spent to date and how much more would be spent? Interim Director response – The provision of £250k for 2021/22 and the provision of £250k for 2022/23 was on target to be adequate, and there was no reason to suggest that any additional funding for the transition would be needed from a program or project perspective.
- Wokingham Borough was a relatively small unitary authority, where working together with other similar sized authorities could bring benefits in terms of knowledge and collaboration. What was the difference in the position between now and 2010 when the PPP was created? Interim Director response – The interim Director was not at WBC in

2010. The focus was now to implement this decision for the benefit of the Borough's residents, and to ensure no service reduction and to offer service improvements.

- It was noted that specialist staff would be crucial in providing an excellent service for the Borough's residents.
- The interim Director noted that staff were at the heart of the transition process, and they were being kept informed to ensure they understood what was happening, and to ensure that all information was aligned correctly from both a Wokingham and West Berkshire perspective.
- What level of confidence was there that a fully functioning in-house service would be operational on 1 April 2022? Interim Director response – The new service would not be any lesser than the service on offer now, whilst being a functioning in-house service. A wide variety of stakeholders would be listened to after the initial transition, including residents, Town and Parish Councils, and the wider community. This feedback would then be implemented within a second phase from around April 2022 to refine the service on offer to ensure that the needs of residents were being met.
- Would the processes within the new service be compatible with the current processes within the PPP? Interim Director response – Yes, there was also a separate work stream focussing on the technical offering to ensure that compatibility was maintained, and features were improved moving forwards.
- The Executive Member commented that the service would not have a hard switch between 31 March 2022 and 1 April 2022, as various aspects would gradually move back in house prior to these dates to ensure a smooth transition.
- Was any reduction in service expected during the transition phase, and who would pick up the responsibility should any slippage in service delivery occur? Interim Director response – It was not envisaged that there would be any slippage from an operational perspective, and there was confidence that the transition would complete by 31 March 2022.
- What other aspects of the PPP function, outside of antisocial behaviour, would see improvements from being brought back in-house? Interim Director response – There had been a heavy focus on a more localised approach, which would utilise local knowledge. This in turn would increase the responsiveness of the service offered. There was a real opportunity to strengthen partnership working such as with the police to target local issues, to target activities and resolve issues rather than reflect them. The move in-house would allow for more local community feedback to deal with a plethora of issues including antisocial behaviour, events, or food premises in a responsive manner.
- The Executive Member commented that local knowledge was an absolute must for a number of functions including licensing and food premises inspections, which would benefit from a localised service.
- The PPP website was excellent, and it could be a backwards step if these functions were taken directly into the WBC website. If these features could be maintained when moving in-house, that would be a continued benefit to the Borough's residents. The

Executive Member commented that there was an appetite to have a “one-stop-shop” site for residents, which would be easy and intuitive to use.

- Was there an option to revoke the termination notice? Executive Member response – There was no reason to consider this necessary.
- Was there any possibility of compensation being due to the other local authorities within the PPP as a result of WBC pulling out of the partnership? Interim Director response – There was a willingness from all sides to keep any liability costs down for all parties.
- Were all partners working collectively on an exit plan? Interim Director response – There was collective working to reach an agreement, and regular meetings were taking place between the three authorities. Each authority had a vested interest to make the transition as smooth as possible. It was important not to forget the staff that were involved, who needed confidence that this process was being carried out correctly.
- Were the needs of staff being met? Interim Director response – Absolutely. Staff were at the heart of this process and the future of the service, and there was an aligned approach to ensure their wellbeing in addition to regular communications. The aim was to meet with staff and to mitigate their concerns wherever possible.
- A number of points from the constitution were raised by Members, including 6.1.3, 6.3.24, 6.3.25, and 6.3.2.1. These points outlined various aspects regarding the remit of the Committee, including that the wider issue of the PPP was likely included within the Committee’s remit as was questioning of Executive Members and senior officers regarding their work. Officers commented that 6.3.25A stated that Overview and Scrutiny Committees were not entitled to any document currently in draft form. As such, whilst the wider issue of the PPP and the process of bringing its services back in-house came under the Committee’s remit, the fact that the exit plan was in draft form superseded this. Officers noted that items such as the Medium Term Financial Plan were reviewed in draft form by the Committee as the Executive had agreed that this could occur over and above the requirements of the constitution.
- The Chairman asked that a further verbal update return to the Committee on 6 October 2021, to update on progress made. The Interim Director stated that he would be happy to update the Committee periodically.
- Were there assurances services would not be compromised should staff have to move roles to help with the transition? Interim Director response – There was assurance that staff would not let anything be compromised. In addition, there was a consultant in place to liaise regarding frontline service delivery.
- Was there an opportunity to share the exit plan prior to implementation? Executive Member response – Once the information was available and had been agreed between Members of the Executive it would be shared with Members.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Bill Soane , Wayne Smith, Steve Moore, David Thrall, and Stephen Brown be thanked for attending the meeting;

- 2) Points raised by the Committee be noted;
- 3) An additional verbal update return to the Committee for the meeting scheduled on 6 October 2021.

22. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 11 to 12, which outlined the work programme of the Committee for the municipal year.

A number of requests and suggestions were made by Members, summarised below:

- An update on the building control standalone service be scheduled for the November meeting of the Committee;
- An update on the strategy and process for dealing with overgrown pavements be scheduled for the November meeting of the Committee;
- Officers investigate an appropriate time to consider an update regarding burial plot provision, the potential new in-Borough crematorium, and the implementation of the Arts and Culture Strategy.
- An update regarding the Council's in-house services and public facing services be provisionally scheduled for the January Committee;
- An update on the Council's Bus Strategy, linking the with "Bus Back Better" national strategy, be scheduled for the December meeting of the Committee. In addition, officers organise a briefing note for Committee Members on the process of implementing double yellow lines on a section of road.

Members were informed of a budget scrutiny training session, open to all Overview and Scrutiny Members, being held virtually on 27 September.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Callum Wernham be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) An update on the building control standalone service be scheduled for the November meeting of the Committee;
- 3) An update on the strategy and process for dealing with overgrown pavements be scheduled for the November meeting of the Committee;
- 4) Officers investigate an appropriate time to consider an update regarding burial plot provision, the potential new in-Borough crematorium, and the implementation of the Arts and Culture Strategy.
- 5) An update regarding the Council's in-house services and public facing services be provisionally scheduled for the January Committee;
- 6) An update on the Council's Bus Strategy, linking the with "Bus Back Better" national strategy, be scheduled for the December meeting of the Committee. In addition,

officers organise a briefing note for Committee Members on the process of implementing double yellow lines on a section of road;

- 7) The budget scrutiny training session scheduled for 27 September be noted.

TITLE	Update on Local Elections
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 1 September 2021
WARD	None specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Assistant Director Governance - Andrew Moulton

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

The purpose of this report to provide information on the learning from the May 2021 elections.

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is asked to note the report and associated action plan, and advise any further feedback to improve future election processes.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

On Thursday 6 May 2021, combined elections were held for the Thames Valley Police & Crime Commissioner election, Borough and Town/Parish council elections. These polls were delivered against the backdrop of significant public health restrictions which presented complex new challenges for all involved in the electoral process including residents, candidates, agents and elections staff. These elections were postponed from 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Committee considered the planning for the May 2021 elections on two occasions in 2020/21. This report offers an opportunity for the Committee to consider the learning from May 2021 and build this into the processes for delivering future elections.

The Committee also noted that the Audit Committee, through its responsibilities for overseeing the Council's Corporate Risk Register (CRR), had included "elections" to the CRR. Members of the Audit Committee have been invited to attend the Committee for this item.

Overall, the May 2021 elections were delivered successfully benefiting from extensive planning and cross-Council effort. This was recognised in the post-election feedback received. However, in the spirit of continuous learning, there are a small number of actions emanating from this review which are set out in paragraph 5 of the report.

Background

1. At its February 2021 meeting the Committee requested:-

“A joint meeting of the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Audit Committee be arranged in the late summer or autumn of 2021, to evaluate lessons learned from the running of this election in conjunction with the corporate risk register.”

Introduction to May 2021 Elections

2. On Thursday 6 May 2021, combined elections were held for the Thames Valley Police & Crime Commissioner election, Borough and Town/Parish council elections. These polls were delivered against the backdrop of significant public health restrictions which presented complex new challenges for all involved in the electoral process including residents, candidates, agents and elections staff. These elections were postponed from 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
3. Given the additional risks associated with this series of elections, it was agreed to add “May 2021 elections” to the Council’s Corporate Risk Register (CRR) which provided a further corporate focus and capacity to ensure the successful delivery of the polls. The Audit Committee, which is the responsible body for overseeing the Council’s risk management arrangements, considered the elections risk as part of its review of the CRR, and subsequently agreed at its June 2021 to remove the Elections risk following the successfully delivery of the May elections.

Returning Officers Report to Annual Council – 20 May 2021

4. The Council considered a report from the Returning Officer which gave details of the results of the local elections held on 6 May 2021. The report outlined the election process, the results and the turnout for each Borough ward contested. The overall conclusion reported to Council was “the elections processes for May 2021 were complex, labour intensive, and delivered in accordance with public health restrictions. In the main, the various processes ran smoothly and in accordance with plans. Where any improvements are identified, these will be built into our processes for future elections.”

Analysis of Learning from May 2021

5. Officers have used a combination of feedback forms and surveys to collate the following Action Plan. The Committee is invited to scrutinise these actions and put forward its own feedback on areas for further improvement for future elections.

Process	Description	Action
Nominations	The revised process worked satisfactorily with positive feedback from candidates agents. Informal pre-checks of nomination papers worked well together with a stricter appointment system for submission.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue with offering pre-checks prior to submission • Encourage use of appointment system for the formal submission of papers.
Postal voting	There was a significant increase in the numbers of electors choosing to vote by post. The printing, dispatch and return of postal votes worked well. One area for future focus is developing further support and guidance for voters in addition to the statutory guidance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with Communications colleagues to develop further support for postal voters e.g. video on “how to fill in Postal Vote Statement etc.
Polling Places	Significant additional work took place to ensure all polling places were safe for voters and staff. This included the temporary re-designation of a small number of polling places (largely schools). Residents raised concern about one polling place (Oaklands School).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake an interim review of selected polling places to be reported to Council in January 2022. NB: there is a statutory requirement to undertake a full polling places review every 5 years – the next will take place in 2023/24.
Counts	The usual count venue (Loddon Valley Leisure Centre) was used but spread over three days and spaced across two rooms with timed counts. Covid-security was achieved with generally positive feedback from staff, candidates and agents. The decision not to undertake an overnight verification/count helped in terms of availability of experienced staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning for May 2022 elections to assume a daytime verification/count on Friday 6th May.

Future Elections

6. The next planned elections will be held as follows:

Date	Description
May 2022	Borough elections (18 seats)
May 2023	Borough elections (18 seats) Town & Parish Councils
May 2024	Scheduled Parliamentary elections Police & Crime Commissioner Borough elections

Other Information

7. The Elections Bill 2021 is currently being considered by Parliament. The Bill contains a number of measures that, if passed into law, will impact the planning and delivery of future elections. Appendix A contains a summary for Members' information.

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
None

Cross-Council Implications
Delivering elections requires a cross-Council approach recognising the importance of this major corporate event.

Public Sector Equality Duty
This is an information report for which an equalities assessment is not required.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2
Not applicable.

List of Background Papers
Elections Bill 2021

Contact Andrew Moulton	Service Governance
Telephone No 0118 974 6000	Email andrew.moulton@wokingham.gov.uk



Elections Bill 2021

Summary of the Measures

Voter identification - Voters will be required to show an approved form of photographic identification before collecting their ballot paper to vote at a polling station for UK parliamentary elections in Great Britain, at local elections in England, and at Police and Crime Commissioner elections in England and Wales. A broad range of documents will be accepted including passports, driving licences, various concessionary travel passes and photocard parking permits issued as part of the Blue Badge scheme. Any voter who does not have an approved form of identification will be able to apply for a free, local Voter Card from their local authority. In Northern Ireland voters have been required to produce personal identification before voting in polling stations since 1985, with photographic identification being required since 2003. The Electoral Commission have noted: ‘Since the introduction of photo ID in Northern Ireland there have been no reported cases of personation. Voters’ confidence that elections are well-run in Northern Ireland is consistently higher than in Great Britain, and there are virtually no allegations of electoral fraud at polling stations’.

Postal and proxy voting measures - These measures will strengthen the integrity of absent voting by addressing issues that have been highlighted as matters of concern at recent elections. The new measures will require those using a postal vote on a long term basis to re-apply every three years. To negate ‘postal vote harvesting’ the Elections Bill bans political campaigners from handling postal votes. It also introduces a limit on the number of electors on behalf of whom a person may hand in postal votes to a returning officer or at a polling station. The Bill provides that a person may be appointed to act as a proxy for a maximum of four electors, and within that four, no more than two may be electors who are not overseas electors or service voters. Finally, the measures add security to remote voting and protect those at risk of having their vote stolen by extending the secrecy of the ballot requirements in polling stations to absent voting.

Clarification of undue influence - It is a core tenet of our democracy that electors should be able to cast their vote freely and safely. Although it is already an offence to unduly influence an elector, the outdated legislation requires modernising in order to provide electors with the protection they deserve. Therefore, the Bill clarifies and updates the offence so that:

- Undue influence encompasses a wide range of **harms**, such as physical violence, damage to a person’s property or reputation, undue spiritual pressure and injury, or inflicting financial loss.
- **Deceiving** an elector about the conduct or administration of an election or referendum can also amount to undue influence.
- **Intimidation** of electors is explicitly listed as a form of undue influence. This will address the concern of the Tower Hamlets Election Court which noted the current legislation “does not penalise thuggish conduct at polling stations of the sort that occurred in 2014”.

Accessibility of polls - To improve the electoral process for people with disabilities, the Bill places a new requirement on Returning Officers to consider a wider range of support for voters with disabilities in polling stations, supported through Electoral Commission guidance produced in partnership with the Government's expert Accessibility of Elections Working Group. The Bill also removes current restrictions on who can act as a 'companion' to support voters with disabilities to cast their vote in the polling station.

Overseas Electors - These measures will scrap the 15 year limit on overseas electors' right to vote in UK Parliamentary elections and enfranchise all British citizens overseas who were previously registered or resident in the UK. The Bill also delivers improvements and consequential amendments to the registration process for overseas electors, including the processes by which applicants have their identity and connection to a UK address verified. The registration period for overseas electors will be extended from one year to up to three years and electors will be able to reapply or refresh their absent vote arrangements (as appropriate) at the same time as renewing their registration. These changes will facilitate participation by making it easier for overseas electors to remain on the register with an absent vote arrangement in place.

EU Voting and Candidacy Rights - Now that the UK has left the EU, and with the ending of free movement and introduction of the new points-based immigration system in last year's Immigration and Social Security Coordination (EU Withdrawal) Act, the basis for an automatic grant of voting and candidacy rights to European citizens no longer exists. This measure will amend the local voting and candidacy rights of EU citizens in local elections in England and Northern Ireland, elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly and Police and Crime Commissioner elections in England and Wales (other local elections in the UK are devolved). Once these measures are introduced, in addition to satisfying the usual eligibility requirements which apply to all electors (e.g. age, residence etc.), EU citizens must be part of one of two groups to participate in the above elections. They must either:

1. be a citizen of an EU member state with which the UK has a voting rights agreement (currently Spain, Portugal, Luxembourg, Poland), or
2. have been continuously resident in the UK or Crown Dependencies since before the Implementation Period completion date - 31 December 2020.

An EU citizen elected before these measures come into force, and who otherwise remains eligible, will be able to serve their full term Citizens of Cyprus and Malta, which are both EU and Commonwealth states, will retain the right to vote and stand as candidates in all elections for which the UK Government is responsible. The voting and candidacy rights of Irish citizens are also not affected by these measures, as these long-standing rights pre-date EU membership.

The Electoral Commission - To improve the parliamentary accountability of the Electoral Commission, the Bill makes provision for the introduction of a 'Strategy and Policy Statement', to be approved by the UK Parliament (with an affirmative vote). This Strategy and Policy Statement will provide the Electoral Commission with guidance they must have regard to in the discharge of their functions. The Bill also amends the function of the Speaker's Committee beyond its current limited remit to give it the power to examine the Commission's compliance with their duty to have regard to the Strategy and Policy

Statement. Finally, to avoid imposing an undue burden on taxpayers' funds and duplicating the work of the Crown Prosecution Service and Public Prosecution Service Northern Ireland, the Bill legislates to expressly prevent the Commission from bringing criminal prosecutions in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Notional Expenditure - Following the Supreme Court ruling on *R v Mackinlay and others* in 2018, the current rules in this area have led to widespread uncertainty and risk a democratic chilling effect by discouraging parties from campaigning in marginal constituencies. The Bill will amend the law to make it clear that candidates only need to report benefits in kind which they have actually used, or which they or their election agent have directed, authorised or encouraged someone else to use on the candidate's behalf and do not need to fear being responsible for benefits in kind, of which they had no knowledge. This clarification will also be extended to other campaigners who are subject to notional expenditure controls. This will defend the British tradition of party leader 'soapbox' visits. Expenditure which promotes an individual candidature will continue to count towards a candidate's own spending limit.

Political finance - These five measures improve and tighten three important components of the political finance framework: fairness, transparency and controls against foreign spending. These measures will complement separate Home Office forthcoming legislation to Counter State Threats, which will help tackle the evolving threat from hostile activity by states and actors.

- **Third-party campaigner registration:** This measure will introduce a new 'lower' tier of registration with the Electoral Commission for third parties spending above £10,000 across the constituent parts of the UK but less than the current per-country registration thresholds. Groups in this 'lower tier' would be subject to basic transparency requirements and would need to be UK-based or otherwise eligible to register (e.g. a registered overseas elector).
- **Restriction of all third-party campaigning to UK-based entities and eligible overseas electors:** This will restrict third-party campaigning during a regulated period to only those groups eligible to register with the Electoral Commission, even those spending below the registration threshold. This will remove the scope for spending by ineligible foreign third-party campaigners.
- **Ban on registering as both a political party and a third-party campaigner:** Campaigners can currently register as both a political party and third-party campaigner at the same time, allowing them to potentially make use of two spending limits. This measure will prohibit entities from appearing on both registers at the same time, to ensure this cannot happen.
- **Restrictions on coordinated spending between parties and third parties:** Currently, when one or more third parties work together on a campaign, they must all account for the costs. This new measure will extend similar principles to third-party campaigners and political parties who work together on a joint campaign, to ensure they cannot unfairly expand their spending limits by sharing costs.
- **Asset and liabilities declaration for the registration of new political parties:** This measure will introduce a requirement for new political parties to declare their assets and liabilities (if over £500) when registering with the Electoral Commission. This will allow for earlier public scrutiny of political party finances.

Intimidation: new electoral sanction - The Bill introduces a new electoral sanction to protect candidates, future candidates, campaigners and elected officeholders from intimidation and abuse, both online and in person. Under this new electoral sanction, someone convicted of intimidating a candidate, future candidate, campaigner or elected officeholder will face a five-year disqualification from standing for, being elected to and holding elective office. This five-year disqualification is in addition to the punishment for the underlying criminal offence of an intimidatory nature, such as a fine or imprisonment, depending on the severity of the intimidation.

Digital imprints - This measure introduces a new digital imprints regime, requiring political campaigners to explicitly show who they are and on behalf of whom they are promoting digital campaigning material. We have balanced the need to avoid unreasonably restricting the free speech of individuals, and avoid imposing disproportionate measures which would discourage political campaigning. Under the new regime, all paid for digital political material will require an imprint, regardless of who it is promoted by. Further to this, certain campaigners, such as elected representatives and political parties, will also require a digital imprint on their organic material if it constitutes digital election material, referendum material or recall petition material.

TITLE	Broadband Provision
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 1 September 2021
WARD	None specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Place and Growth - Steve Moore

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

Members of the Committee will have a greater understanding of the work underway and planned to secure access to high quality, high speed broadband for residents, businesses and communities across Wokingham Borough.

In turn this will help promote and communicate plans and aspirations more effectively across the Borough to other stakeholders.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee

- 1) notes the content of the report (and related presentation);
- 2) endorses the work of the Berkshire Digital Infrastructure Group (DIG) in seeking to expedite provision of digital infrastructure across Berkshire;
- 3) constructively considers how Wokingham Borough Council can best contribute to the successful delivery of high-speed broadband in the Borough and maximise accessibility for all residents.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

This short report and the related presentation have been prepared in response to a request from the Community & Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Committee for an item regarding: "What is being done to ensure that every resident has the best access to high-speed broadband".

The report and presentation:

- **Provides some context for the delivery of broadband infrastructure nationally and locally.** The vast majority of business and residential properties will be provided for by the commercial offer of the main providers but a proportion will not be viable without subsidy, including in Wokingham Borough with its widespread rural communities. The need for public intervention to address this disparity has long been recognised by government and continues to be an integral component of policy to meet the needs of the estimated 20% of premises nationally that are not commercially viable.
- **Describes the current position with regard to the existing Superfast Berkshire Broadband project** that is currently being delivered and due to be

completed by April 2022. This project will give broadband coverage with speeds of over 24 Mbps to 98.64% of households in the Borough.

- **Outlines the emergence of the DIG** and the development of an associated Berkshire Digital Strategy. In the context of technological advances 'Superfast' as previously defined will clearly not meet current or future needs and aspirations, with 'Full Fibre' connections being the most appropriate way of future-proofing digital infrastructure and guaranteeing high speeds and capability. The strategy sets an explicit target to increase full-fibre coverage in Berkshire to 95% by the end of 2025 from the current baseline of 13.86%. Achievement of this target will require actions to try and ensure that both commercial and subsidised provision is expedited and that investment in Berkshire's digital infrastructure doesn't lag behind other parts of the country.
- **Looks at emergent national initiatives** that have relevance to the Borough, including most notably the recently announced 'Gigabit' government initiative, a £5b project that is being led by Building Digital UK (BDUK). This is the government's key initiative to deliver gigabit connectivity for everyone in the UK, targeting the estimated 20% of premises that require subsidy. Delivery is via a national centralised procurement process and Wokingham Borough is included in Phase 2 of the implementation plan with procurement commencing in May 2022 and an anticipated start date of April 2023.

Background

Digital infrastructure and in particular ultrafast broadband are increasingly being seen as essential utilities for modern day life and critical for the future of the economy. The pandemic has heightened the awareness of the significance of digital connectivity and home-based access to high-speed broadband to facilitate high productivity whilst working remotely. The vast majority of businesses and residential premises, nationally and locally, will be provided for by the mainstream commercial operations of the major providers. However, there will be a proportion of primarily rural and/or remote communities where commercial provision is not viable. At a national level the Government estimates that 80% of premises will be commercially viable but a residual 20% will require some form of subsidy. These proportions will vary in different parts of the country with more urbanised areas being more attractive to the market for commercial provision and those that have a higher proportion of rural / remote areas (such as Cumbria or Cornwall) requiring greater levels of subsidy. This plays out locally in Berkshire with West Berkshire and Wokingham (in particular) having greater proportions of 'non-viable' premises than Slough or Reading, for example.

The need for public intervention to address this disparity has long been recognised. The Superfast Berkshire Broadband project was initiated in 2011 with the involvement of all 6 Berkshire unitary authorities and the LEP and funding from Government (the history of this programme is summarised within the link contained within the background papers section of this report. In June 2016, Superfast Berkshire embarked on Phase 3 which incorporated a significant focus on Wokingham Borough, one contract was awarded to BT anticipating an increase of 11,147 connected properties in Berkshire towns and another contract has been awarded to Gigaclear anticipating an increase of 11,447 connected properties in the Berkshire countryside. On completion it is

anticipated that the Superfast Berkshire project will provide broadband access with speeds of over 24 Mbps to 98.64% of households in the Borough.

In this context it should be noted that for both commercial and subsidised digital infrastructure, providers need substantial geographical coverage that goes beyond individual local authority boundaries to be cost-effective, providing both economies of scale for implementation and a significant potential customer base.

Following initial delays and set-backs Phase 3 is now well underway and due for completion by April 2022. The current position for Wokingham Borough is as follows:

Programme	Target No.s	Ready for Service	To be Completed
Openreach Superfast	756	617	139
Gigaclear Superfast	3,118	1,696	1,422
Total	3,874	2,313	1,561

Analysis of Issues

Of course, particularly in the world of digital, technology moves on and it is now 10 years since the origin of the Superfast Berkshire Project and 5 years since the commencement of phase 3. The original definition of 'superfast' is therefore nowadays something of a misnomer and the following definition of speeds may be helpful in the context of future needs and aspirations:

Superfast = speeds of over 24Mbps

Ultrafast = Speeds of over 100Mbps

Full Fibre = FTTH or FTTP (fibre to the house or premises) speeds of 1Gbps

Gigabit = Capable of speeds of 1Gbps using FTTH/FTTP or DOCSIS 3.1 (Virgin Cable)

'Superfast' as previously defined will clearly not meet current or future needs and aspirations, with 'Full Fibre' being the most appropriate way of future-proofing digital infrastructure and guaranteeing high speeds and capability. In recognition of this the former Superfast Berkshire Project Steering Group has evolved into the Berkshire Digital Infrastructure Group with officer representation from each of the Berkshire unitary authorities and from the LEP and Chaired by one of the local authority Chief Executives (currently Tim Wheadon from Bracknell Forest). The establishment of the DIG has been endorsed by all the Berkshire Chief Executives and all the partners have agreed a contribution of £16k to increase the capacity of the Superfast Berkshire Project Office to progress initiatives to ensure delivery of next generation digital infrastructure.

The DIG has now developed a 'Connected Berkshire' Vision and strategy which in relation to Broadband is intended to both:

- Ensure that Berkshire receives an adequate share of government subsidy to address the needs of rural communities; and
- That Berkshire is attractive for commercial investment sooner rather than later in a national context of limited delivery capacity from the main providers.

The Vision / Strategy seeks to:

- Increase full-fibre coverage to 95% by the end of 2025 from the current baseline of 13.86% (accepting that a small proportion of premises will not be economically viable for full fibre connections).
- Eliminate 4G 'not-spots' by the end of 2022.
- Establish a 5G testbed and small cell rollout by 2023.
- Eliminate digital poverty.

With regard to subsidised provision the government has recently made more announcements regarding 'Project Gigabit' the government's national mission to deliver lightning-fast, reliable broadband to everyone in the UK. To be delivered under the auspices of BDUK the country has been divided onto regional 'lots' that will be procured from the market on a competitive basis. Wokingham is included in Lot 26 that covers Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire and East Berkshire. This will form part of Phase 2 of the national exercise with the procurement commencing in May 2022 and an anticipated start date of April 2023. Further details of the national programme can be found in the Government's recent update via the link contained within the background papers section of this report.

As part of 'Project Gigabit' the Government is also providing up to £210m of voucher funding as immediate help for people experiencing slow broadband speeds in rural areas. Vouchers worth up to £1,500 for homes and £3,500 for businesses are available to help cover the costs of installing gigabit broadband. Further details on the voucher scheme can be found in the link contained within the background papers section of this report.

As outlined above, the majority of premises will be provided with full-fibre connectivity through the commercial operations of the main providers. For example, we know that both Openreach and City Fibre have extensive local investment plans that cover large parts of Wokingham Borough. In addition, it is worth noting that Gigaclear's investment under the current Superfast Berkshire project is for a full fibre to the premises solution that will provide gigabit capability.

In this arena the ongoing work of DIG is directed towards making Berkshire an attractive location for investment by removing barriers and ensuring a consistent approach across the area to encourage providers to expedite infrastructure provision. The key premise being that unless Berkshire can create favourable conditions for the market to invest in fibre infrastructure there is a risk they'll focus their attentions and limited capacity elsewhere. A series of linked work streams are currently being pursued to meet this objective and DIG has already led on a successful bid to MCHLG's 'Getting Building Fund', securing £1.4m to provide gigabit capable full-fibre connections to a number of rural schools across Berkshire, including in Wokingham Borough.

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	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£16k	Yes	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	N/A	N/A	N/A

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

All the DIG partners (6 LAs and the LEP) have agreed to contribute £16k to support the work of DIG. This budget of £112k will be managed by DIG to commission work to deliver the vision / strategy.

Cross-Council Implications

The work to encourage investment in and effective delivery of digital infrastructure will involve a range of Council services and functions including planning, highways, assets, legal and economic development. In broader terms the advent of gigabit capable broadband is likely to impact how residents and businesses utilise new technology in their daily lives and in turn how the Council delivers services to meet their needs.

Public Sector Equality Duty

This report provides an overview of the work underway and planned across Berkshire to secure access to high quality, high speed broadband for residents, businesses and communities across Wokingham Borough. It is not considered that an equalities impact assessment is required in this context.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2

N/A

List of Background Papers

[Programme History](#)
[Project Gigabit Delivery Plan - Summer Update - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#).
[Gigabit Vouchers \(culture.gov.uk\)](#).

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Wokingham Borough

37

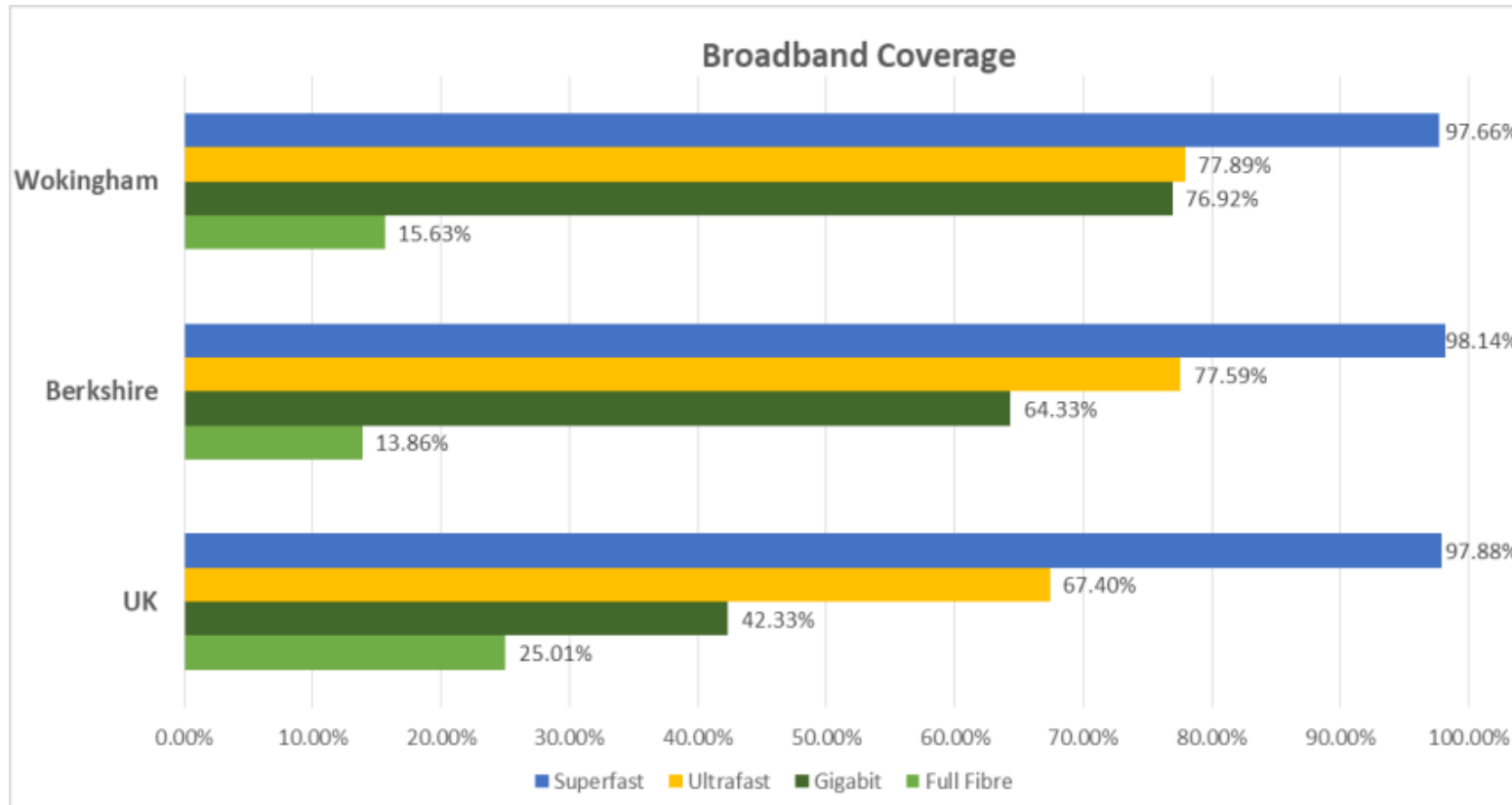
Broadband Provision

September 2021



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Current Broadband Coverage



Superfast = speeds of over 24Mbps

Ultrafast = Speeds of over 100Mbps

Full Fibre = FTTH or FTTP (fibre to the house or premise) speeds of 1Gbps

Gigabit = Capable of speeds of 1Gbps using FTTH/FTTP or DOCSIS 3.1 (Virgin Cable)

'Superfast' Berkshire Project Current Position

39

Gigaclear Superfast Programme Progress:

Area	Ready for Service	Not Ready for Service	Target
Three Mile Cross (South East)	105	248	353
Wargrave (South East)	158	56	214
Swallowfield (South East)	202	56	258
Farley Hill (South East)	260	11	271
Arborfield East (South East)	0	212	212
Arborfield Garrison (South East)	327	24	351
Arborfield Cross (South East)	342	1	343
Sindlesham South (South East)	132	18	150
Finchampstead East (South East)	0	190	190
Gardeners Green (South East)	0	165	165
Hurst (South East)	130	28	158
Finchampstead North (South East)	0	150	150
Finchampstead West (South East)	0	246	246
Sindlesham North (South East)	40	17	57
Total	1696	1422	3118

Total Planned = 3,874 (100%)

Ready for Service = 2,313 (59.7%)

Not ready = 1,561 (40.3%)

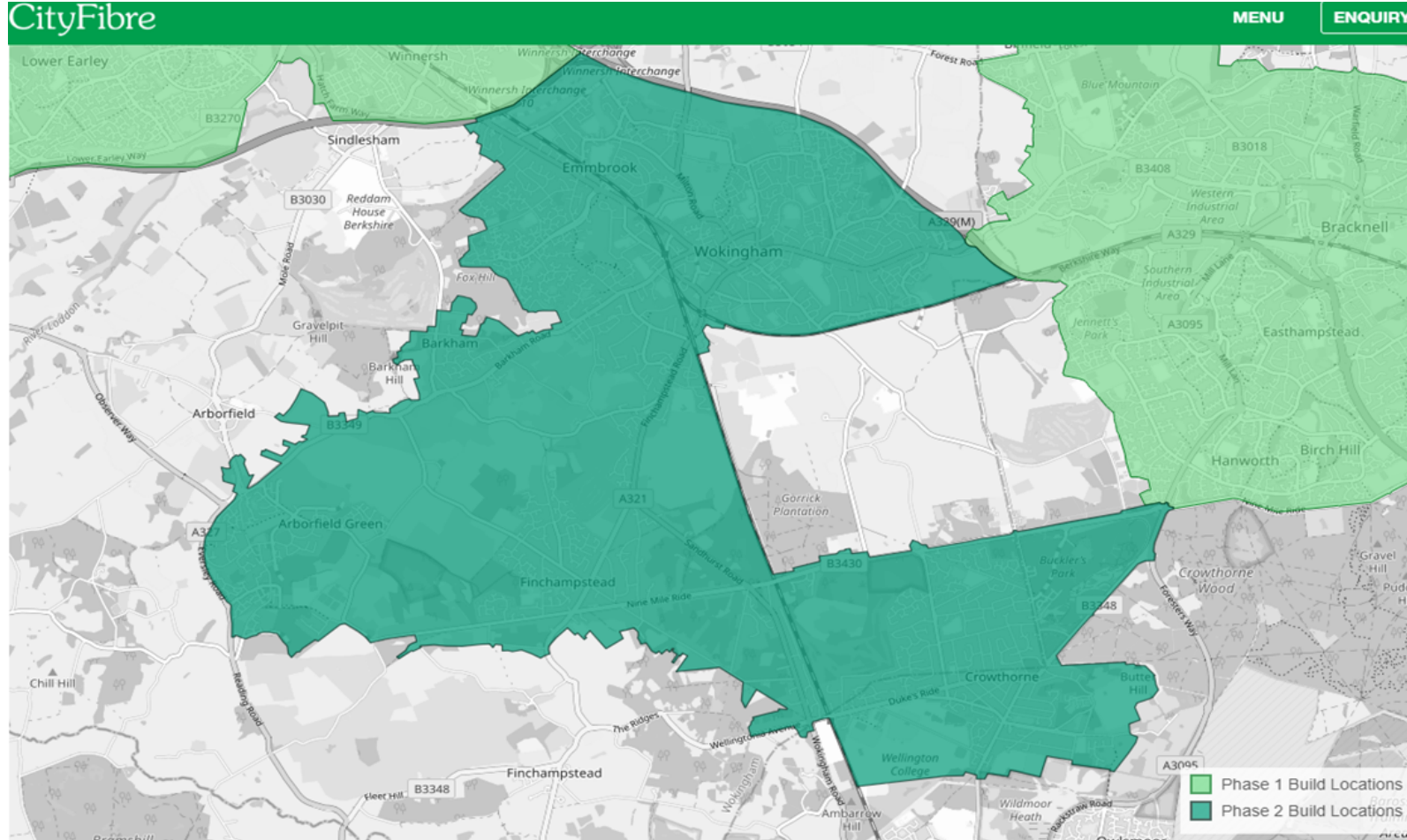
Planned completion by April 2022

Openreach Superfast Programme Progress:

Area	Ready for Service	Not Ready for Service	Target
Wokingham Borough	617	139	756

Commercial Suppliers Full Fibre Plans for Wokingham

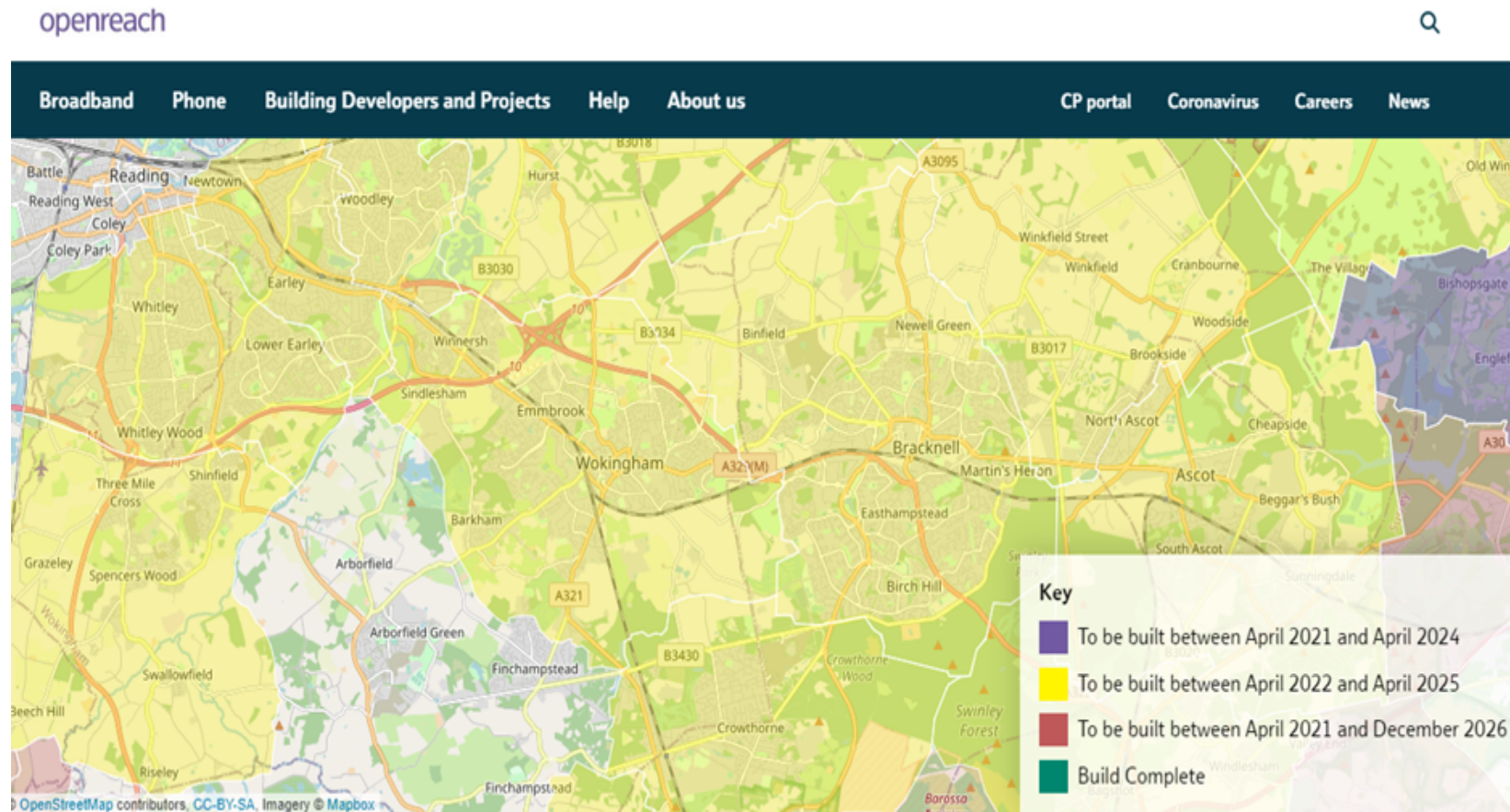
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Source: [Nationwide Full Fibre Rollout Programme - CityFibre](#)

Commercial Suppliers Full Fibre Plans for Wokingham

41



Source: [Where and when we're building Ultrafast Full Fibre broadband | Openreach](#)

Project Gigabit

‘Project Gigabit’ is the government’s national mission to deliver lightning-fast, reliable broadband for everyone in the UK

£5 billion mission to connect every corner of UK. Includes both major centralised procurement (see below) and a ‘live’ voucher scheme ([Gigabit Vouchers \(culture.gov.uk\)](https://www.culture.gov.uk/gigabit-vouchers)).

Private sector will deliver gigabit connectivity to the most commercial 80% of the country by 2025. Government will continue to remove barriers to broadband deployment. For the hardest to reach 20% of UK premises, there is consensus that public subsidy will be needed to complete gigabit delivery.

BDUK will work closely with local authorities and devolved governments to extend gigabit coverage through a centralised procurement approach.

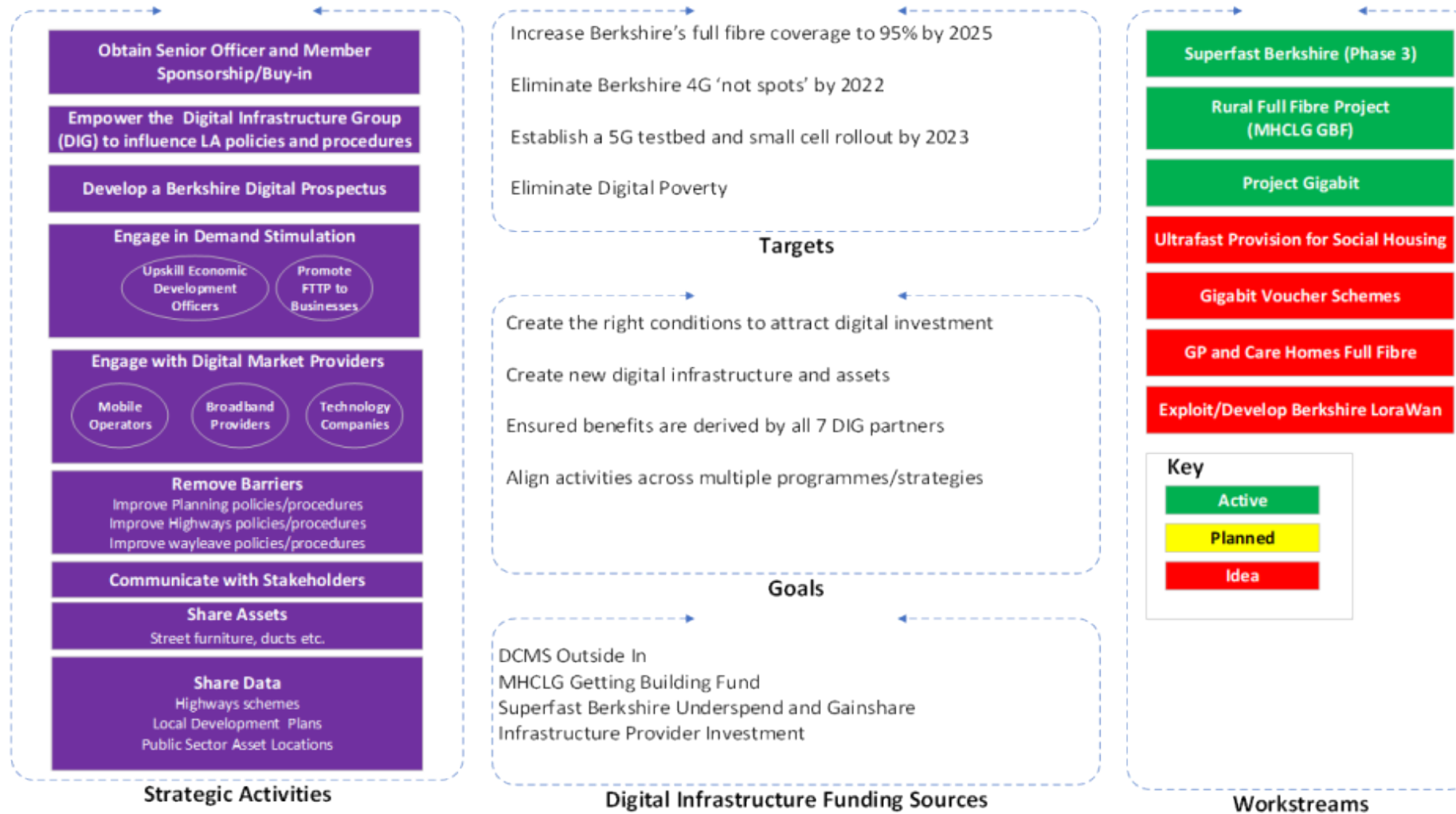
Wokingham is in Phase 2, Lot 26, procurement is due to begin May 2022 with contracts expected to commence April 2023.

Latest announcement from BDUK can be found at [Project Gigabit Delivery Plan - Summer Update - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/project-gigabit-delivery-plan-summer-update)

Digital Infrastructure Group – Vision on a Page

'Connected Berkshire' Vision and Activities

43



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TITLE	Library Service
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 1 September 2021
WARD	None specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Place and Growth - Steve Moore

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

Library Services support the achievement of vibrant and self-sustaining communities through the provision of materials and services for enjoyment, education, creative and engagement activities.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee notes the activities of the Library Service and its areas of good practice and offers comment.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

This report provides an overview of the Council's statutory requirements for providing a library service, an overview of its performance prior to the Covid pandemic, details of how the service was adapted during the Covid pandemic, future plans for the delivery of the service and other options currently being considered to ensure it continues to deliver best practice services for residents.

Background

Statutory Requirements

Providing a library service is a statutory responsibility for local authorities as detailed in the Public Libraries & Museums Act (1964). It requires the Council to provide a *comprehensive and efficient* library service for all people that live or work in the borough and who want to make use of it.

In fulfilling this duty, the Council is required to keep adequate stocks of books and other items such as reference materials, films, and music, including items specifically for adults and children. The Council is also required to encourage our residents to make full use of the library service.

The other key elements that must be included within a library service can be summarised as:

- Lending of books must be free.
- Internet usage should be free of charge.
- Lending of ebooks should be free.
- Be able to obtain books we do not have in stock.

Whilst the Council is unable to charge for library membership or for the loan of books, it is not restricted in generating income through libraries in other ways.

The Localism Act in 2011 contains a wide range of measures to devolve more powers to councils and neighbourhoods and give local communities greater control over local decisions. It is for individual councils to decide how to allocate their funds in a way which meets the needs of local library users considering the resources available.

What a comprehensive and efficient service means will differ between councils and will depend on the needs of each area. It is therefore the role of councillors and officials at a local level to determine how much they spend on libraries and how they manage and deliver their service. This must be done:

- in consultation with their communities
- through analysis of evidence around local needs
- in accordance with their statutory duties

Further detail on the role of local authorities in designing and delivering a library service is included within appendix 1.

Libraries Overview

The Council operates nine libraries across the borough. There are three main libraries located in Wokingham, Woodley and Lower Earley, and a further six smaller libraries in Finchampstead, Twyford, Winnersh, Spencers Wood, Wargrave and Arborfield.

Until 2018 the Council operated a public library within the Maiden Erlegh School, but the school ended the agreement so that it could use the space for its own academic activities.

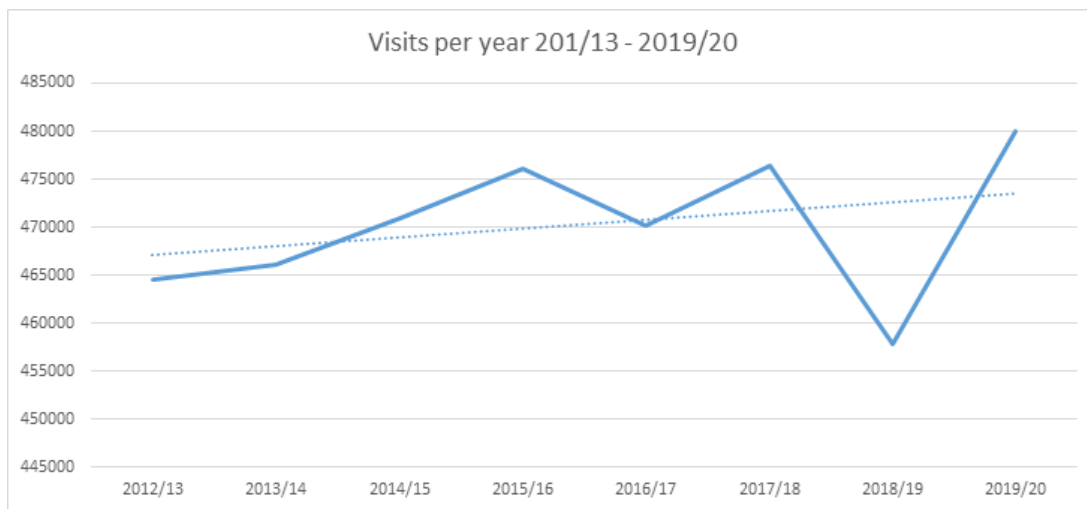
Library Offer

In 2016 the Council adopted a new 'Library Offer' to guide the development of its libraries and the services that residents could expect to find within them. This offer was produced after conducting research into different delivery options and conducting a comprehensive consultation with our residents.

The Library Offer is presented in Appendix 2.

Library Usage

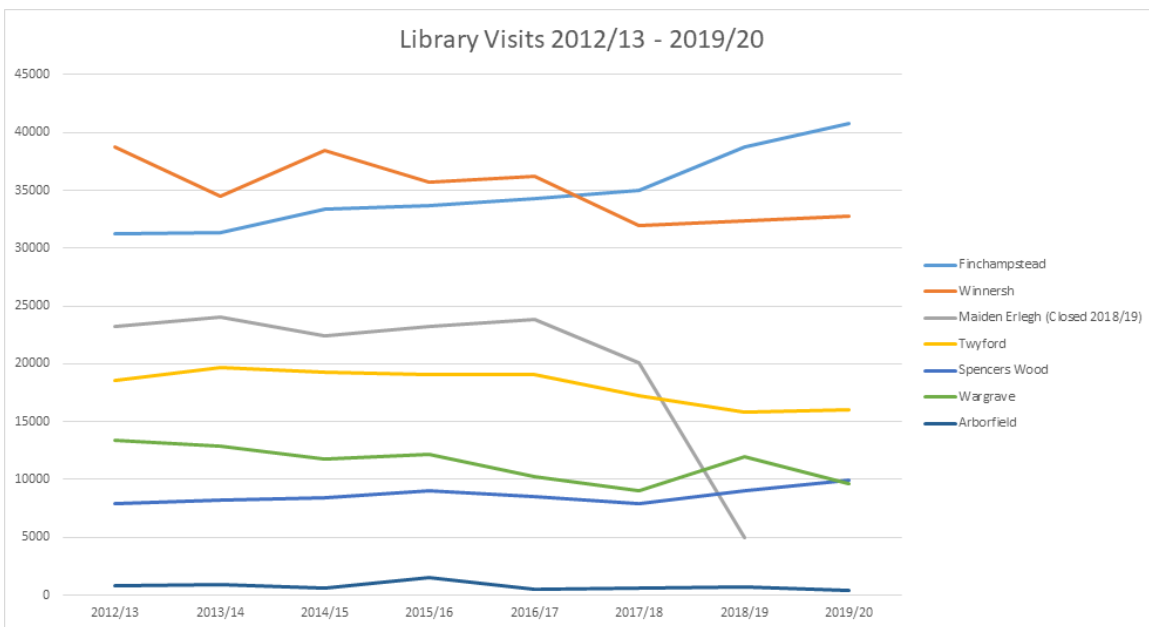
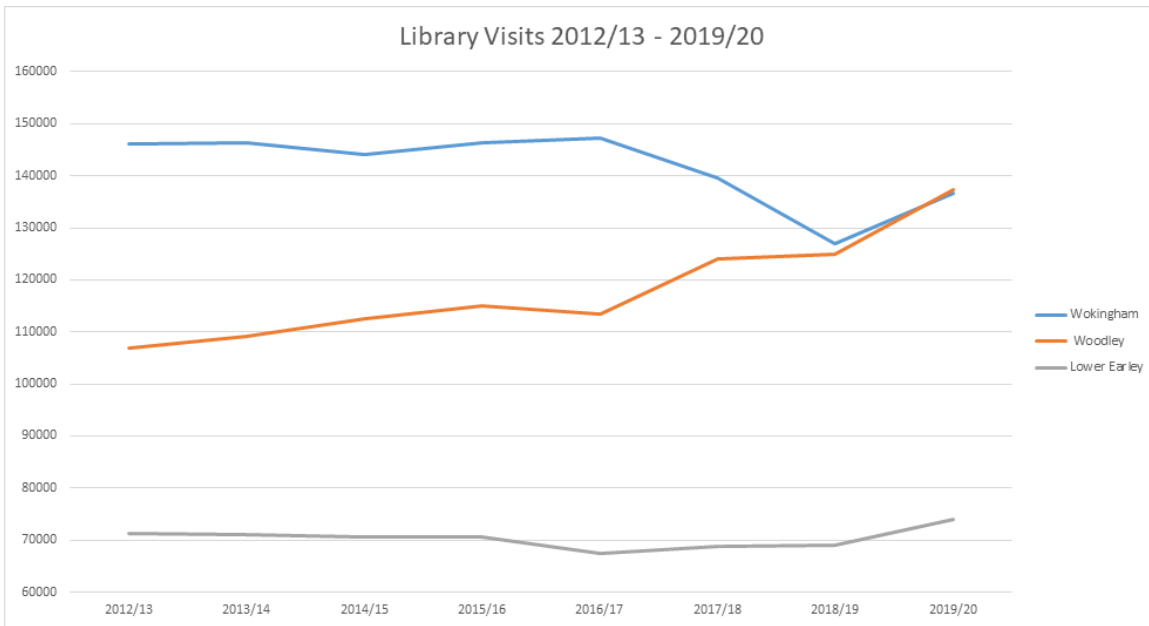
Library Visits: The graph below shows the visits to our libraries each year from 2012/13 to 2019/20. Whilst in recent years there are some variations in the number of visits each year because of external factors, the overall trajectory of usage is increasing.



A summary of the key factors impacting on library visits are:

- 2016/17: Closures at each of three main libraries for three weeks to install self-serve and new reception desks.
- 2018/19: Maiden Erleigh closure, Twyford closed for two months for repairs and loss of visits at Wokingham Library due to town centre regeneration.
- 2019/20: Woodley Library closed for six weeks to install new frontage and maintenance on heating system.

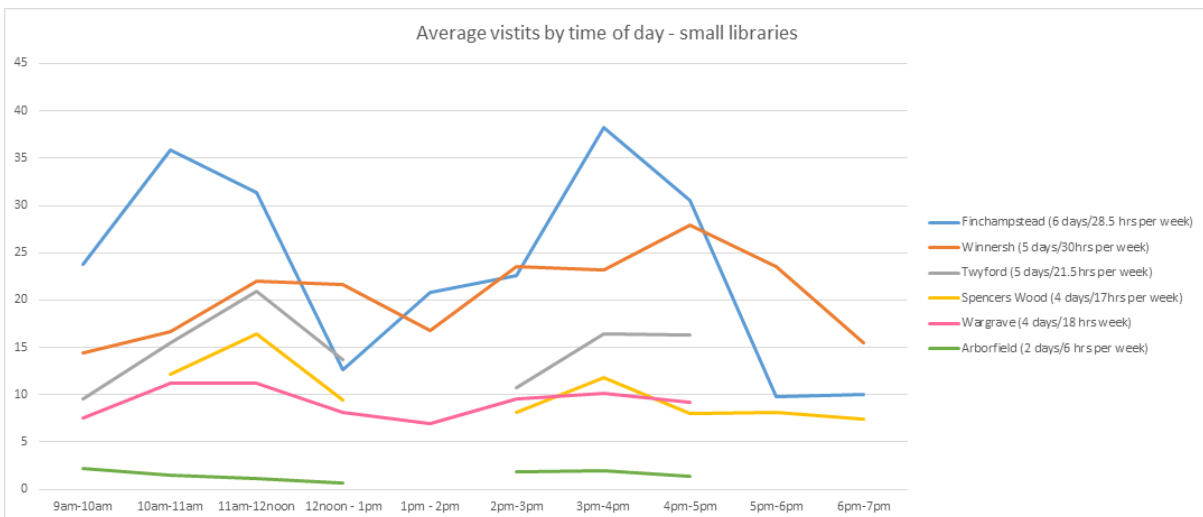
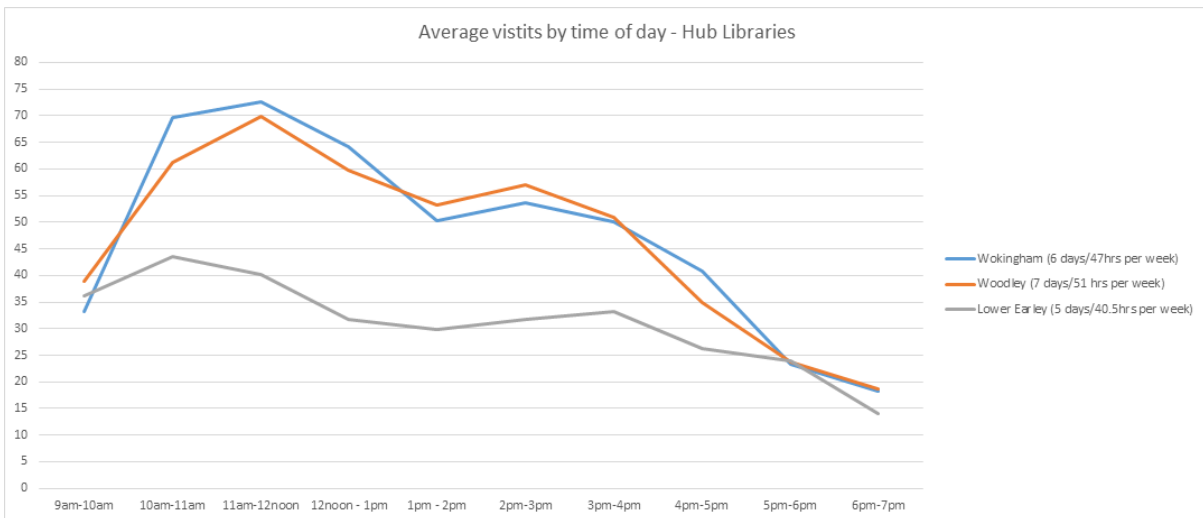
The graphs below show the number of visits per branch for the three main libraries in Wokingham, Woodley and Earley, and the smaller branches across the borough:



Items Borrowed: The table below shows the items borrowed from the Library Service over the past four years since the Library Offer was introduced. Whilst the number of physical items borrowed has reduced, the overall items borrowed has increased due to the expansion of our online services.

Year	Physical item loans	e-item usage	Total
2016/17	748,064	15,001	763,065
2017/18	754,938	17,209	772,147
2018/19	722,869	65,626	788,495
2019/20	682,298	141,526	823,824

Usage Throughout the Day: The graphs below show the average usage each hour for the three main libraries in Wokingham, Woodley and Lower Earley, and the other smaller libraries:



Research Facilities: Each of the nine libraries has a dedicated study area, including access to computers and free wi-fi. Across the service there are approx. 30,000 computer sessions booked across 52 computers each year.

Self Service: In 2016 the Library Service introduced 14 self-service kiosks in six libraries. These kiosks are used for approx. 50% of all library service loans.

Active Library Users: Whilst the Library Service has approx. 480,000 visits each year, it's also useful to understand how many of our residents make use of our libraries to borrow an item. Currently there are 30,365 residents who are library members and actively use the lending library. This number has increased by 32% since the establishment of the Library Offer in 2016.

Weekend Opening: In total across the libraries there are 45 hours of weekend opening per week. Weekend hours are on average 29% busier than week time hours, with the busiest hours being:

Wokingham Library: Saturday 10:00am – 12noon – average 103 people per hour
 Woodley Library: Saturday 11:00- 12noon – 94 people an hour
 Woodley Library: Sunday 11:00 – 12noon – 76 people per hour

Age Breakdown of Library Users: Below is a breakdown of library users who have borrowed a book by age for the past full calendar year prior to Covid19.

Age	%
Under 10	25.33%
10 - 19	20.26%
20 - 29	2.71%
30-39	10.78%
40-49	15.95%
50-59	6.98%
60-69	6.49%
70-79	7.67%
80-89	3.32%
90+	0.51%

Events & Projects Overview: Each year we deliver over 1,000 events for adults and children across the borough. Some of the most notable are the Summer Reading Challenge which regularly has over 2000 young people taking part and the Bookstart project which support 1800 young people each year. We are currently delivering our 3rd Wokingham Children’s Book Festival as an online event with over 500 children attending each event.

Library Stock: We hold approx. 165,000 books and other items in stock, and purchase approx. 15,000 new items each year. In 2017 we brought the stock purchasing function back in-house and reduced the items purchased that were not borrowed in the first year from 11% to less than 0.2%. Stock that is removed from the service is either sold, provided to charities, or recycled.

Benchmarking

Comparison with Berkshire UA’s: The table below shows a comparison of the number of items borrowed from libraries across Berkshire for the last two years where data is available.

	Items Borrowed		
	2016/17	2018/19	% Change
Bracknell	498,827	470,992	-5.58%
Reading	712,156	514,420	-27.77%
Slough	546,115	512,076	-6.23%
West Berks	680,558	534,848	-21.41%
RBWM	773,694	546,316	-29.39%
Total	3,211,350	2,578,652	-19.70%
GB	2,222,52,880	197,460,662	-11.15%
Wokingham	763,065	788,495	3.33%

Library Sites / Population: The table below shows the number of libraries in each Berkshire UA and the populations they serve.

	Number of libraries	Population	pop per site
Wokingham	9	167,979	18,664
Bracknell	9	121,676	13,520
Reading	8	162,666	20,333
Slough	7	140,200	20,029
West Berks	9	158,450	17,606
RBWM	13	150,906	11,608
Average	9.17	150,312	16,959

Staff to Population Ratio: The table below provides a comparison of the ratio of Library Staff to residents to the known averages for unitary authorities and at national levels using Cipfa statistics:

	FTE	pop	staff to pop ratio
Wokingham	30	167979	1 : 5599
Unitary average			1 : 4452
England average			1 : 4538
GB Average			1 : 4219

Library Costs: The table below shows a breakdown of the costs of operating each library and an assessment of the costs in relation to usage for each library:

	Staff	Books	Property	Income	Net Cost	% of spend	% of visits
Wokingham	£253,215.84	£32,444.27	£83,824.00	-£31,207.00	£338,277.11	33%	30%
Woodley	£196,985.66	£20,604.55	£38,388.00	-£17,148.00	£238,830.21	23%	30%
Lower Earley	£139,583.55	£18,732.76	£23,952.00	-£12,748.00	£169,520.31	17%	16%
Finchampstead	£43,104.03	£5,157.95	£67,000.00	-£4,909.00	£110,352.98	11%	9%
Winnersh	£36,506.09	£9,950.00	£17,229.00	-£6,777.00	£56,908.09	6%	7%
Twyford	£27,854.86	£5,171.67	£3,056.00	-£3,675.00	£32,407.53	3%	4%
Spencers Wood	£24,710.41	£4,729.00	£6,012.00	-£1,910.00	£33,541.41	3%	2%
Wargrave	£23,396.86	£3,558.13	£11,080.00	-£1,576.00	£36,458.99	4%	2%
Arborfield	7,191.99	£767.70	£0.00	-£59.27	£7,900.42	1%	<1%
Totals	£752,549.29	£101,116.03	£250,541.00	-£80,009.27	£1,024,197.05		

Covid Response

When the Library Service went into lockdown in March 2020, the service quickly increased its range of online services. These include:

- Online membership applications launched first week of lockdown, and 2546 people have joined online since this was introduced.
- A music streaming service launched in the 3rd week of lockdown, with 23,646 streams and downloads taking place so far.
- There has been increased investment in eBooks / eAudio / eMagazines / eNewspapers, with a 70% increase to 100,346 accesses during lockdown.
- 26 online Rhymetime sessions have been held which regularly receive more than 300 views per event.
- 28 online Storytime sessions which regularly receive more than 500 views per event.
- 11 online interviews with authors which regularly receive more than 100 views per event.

We have also been adapting some of our popular events so that residents have been able to enjoy them during the recent lockdowns. Our Authors into Schools events in October and February were delivered online this year, with approximately 13,000 attendances across the two events.

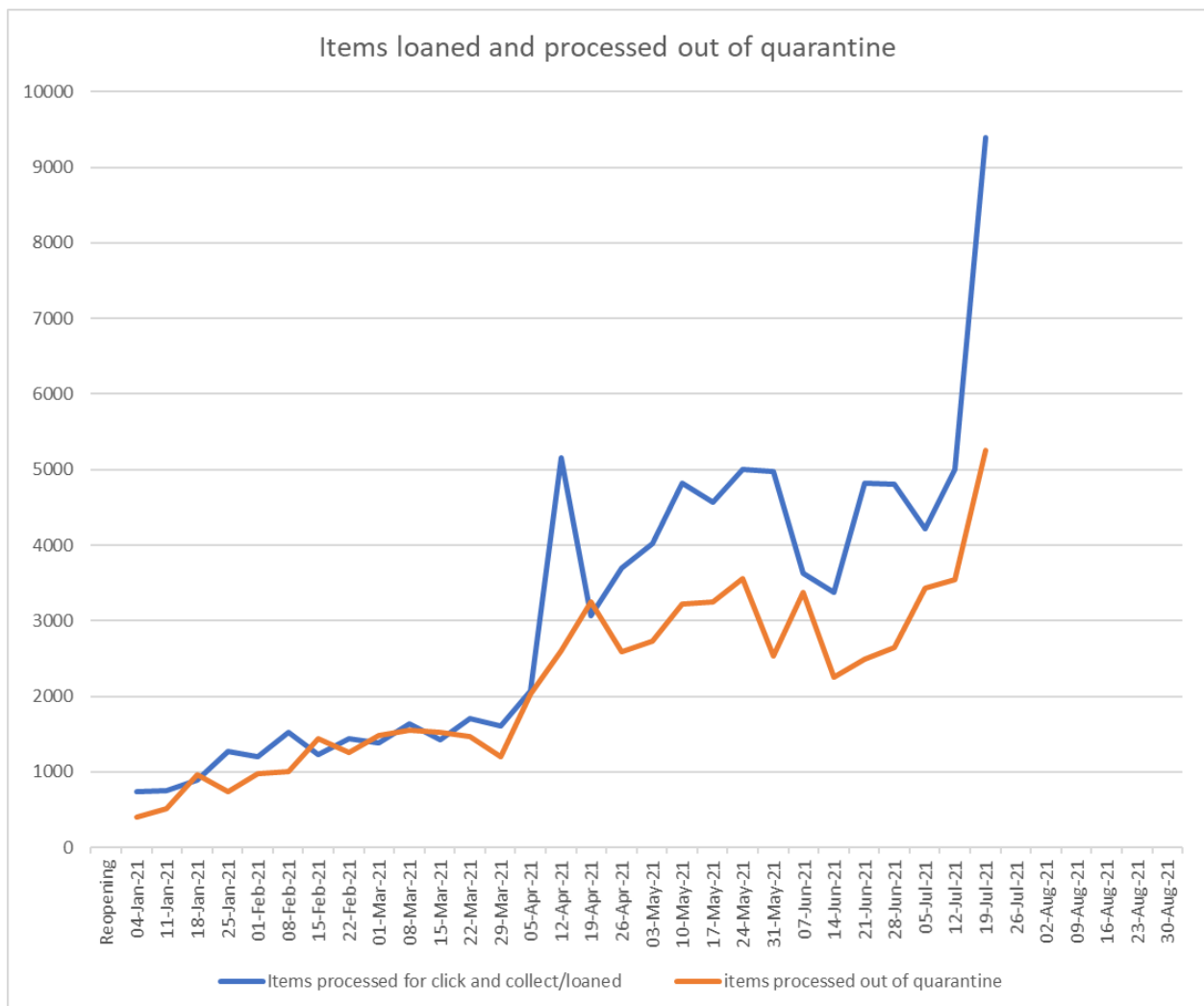
When libraries closed in March 2020 there were 37,000 books and other items out on loan and due for return. When libraries reopened in August 2020 after lockdown 1

books were also required to be quarantined for 72 hours prior to being made available to the public again. When libraries closed upon Wokingham entering Tier 4 60% of the backlog had been returned.

In the period between 4th Jan 2021 and 12th April libraries nationally were restricted from opening, but certain services were permitted; a Click & Collect service at the 3 larger libraries. Residents placed orders via a web-based form. The service was more labour intensive than standard library provision. In the period from January to April 18,890 books were supplied to 1628 residents

On commencing Click & Collect services on 4th Jan there was a backlog of 30,033 books predating the covid related closures; to date 62% of these have been returned.

The graph below shows the libraries usage and the number of items returned and processed out of quarantine each week since the libraries reopened at the beginning of 2021:



Even though the libraries were closed for approx. 50% of the year, and when they were open it was only for approx. 20% of normal hours – our overall items borrowed (which is a mix of physical and e-items) only dropped by 50% (810,000 in 2019/20 to 400,000 in 2020/21).

Libraries Enhancement & Library Relocations

The Council currently delivering two library relocation projects. The largest of these is the relocation of the main Wokingham Library to the new Carnival Phase 2 site where it will be collocated in a building with the new leisure centre from August 2022. The other project is to relocate the Twyford Library from a porta-cabin building into a renovated Victorian building owned by a local charitable trust. Work is currently due to be completed in February 2022.

As part of the provision of essential infrastructure for the Strategic Development Locations, the Council will be providing library facilities within the new community centres being delivered in Shinfield and Arborfield.

In autumn 2021 a new micro-library will open in the newly built Shinfield Community Centre. There will not be library staff on site running the library for the bulk of the hours it is available. The library will operate with a self-serve kiosk for residents to use to take items on loan. The site will also utilise a unit of intelligent shelving which is linked to the library services computerised system – residents will be able to return loaned books just by placing them on the shelves, the intelligent shelves will automatically sense and identify the book and remove it from the customer's ticket.

Work is currently underway to adapt Woodley Library to achieve the Borough's first carbon neutral library building as part of the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan. The project will deliver a new heating system driven by air source heat pumps, a new wind lobby and improvements to air tightness, and an array of solar panels across the roof and on land to the rear. The project is fully funded through a Saalex grant; work started spring 2021 and is due for completion autumn 2021.

Access to the library is also provided via a phone app. The app allows residents to renew their library books, search for and reserve books they want to read, and search for ebooks. It also allows access to ebooks, eaudio books via third party apps.

Virtual library events have worked well during lockdowns, but there remain advantages to physical events, not least in reducing social isolation. As the events programme is re-established technology will be invested in meeting room space to allowing for hybrid events with both physical and virtual attendees. Timing of this is dependent upon the financial investment required and whether the technology can be lifted and shifted to the new Carnival hub when the library relocates in 2022. An initial trial of a hybrid author event will take place as part of the Children's Bookfest delivered in partnership with Wokingham Town Council.

Key interdependencies for the modernisation programme, town centre redevelopment, housing development areas, accommodation review, voluntary sector hub and climate change strategy.

Libraries Added Value

Wokingham Borough libraries do more than hold and loan items to residents, they are also home to a wide range of activities that support local communities and enhance people's wellbeing. Below are a range of examples of what additional value our libraries add through their activities and services:

- Home Library Service-providing access to books for those not able to visit the library both in care homes and in their own homes
- Counteracting social isolation and poor mental health e.g. knit and natter, reminiscence groups, coffee mornings, shared reading aloud
- Providing opportunities to learn something new e.g. special interest talks and courses, craft activities for adults and children
- Expanding experience of culture and literature e.g. book groups, author talks, creative writing groups, art history
- Giving community groups the opportunity to meet up and run meetings and activities
- Providing information for residents with special needs- e.g. learning disabilities, dementia and specific physical and mental health conditions e.g. Reading Well information, Forget Me Not Service, Tall Tales Service
- Supporting children's learning, literacy and socialisation e.g. Rhymetime, Storytime, Bookstart
- Fostering a love for books and literature among children and young people e.g. Summer Reading Challenge, Children's Book Festival, Author's into schools programme
- Supporting and promoting specific local and national events e.g. Wokingham Winter Carnival, Heritage Open Days
- Promoting diversity via book displays, information and talks e.g. Black History Month, Windrush Day, Pride Month
- Promoting equality by giving free access to books and digital resources
- Giving volunteers the opportunity to give their time and skills to support others in the community
- Providing a safe space to vulnerable residents for reading, study and leisure
- Providing local access to other council services such as waste supplies and planning applications
- Providing internships and job placements for young people with additional needs in partnership with Addington school and Optalis
- Providing study space for young people who are in a pupil referral unit and cannot be in a classroom.

- Provide signposting information on local services, available support and groups/activities
- Providing space for local amateur and professional artists to display artwork.

Analysis of Issues

For many years, Wokingham Borough Council libraries have been bucking the national trend of declining library usage. This continued positive performance has been sustained through several specific local challenges, including the forced closure of a library, a reduction in service to conduct essential maintenance and a significant drop in visits to Wokingham town centre during its redevelopment.

As benchmarking data shows, this success isn't something that has been achieved by other local authorities across the region. Our success relates to the specific investments and the consistent reviewing of service usage to target our activities where they are most needed and valued. A key example of this would be focusing opening times at weekends rather than during weekday evenings as many other local authorities have done.

The research and consultation to develop the Library Offer in 2016 provided a clear mandate for the Council to retain some of the core elements of a local library service (such as retaining books as the primary stock type), but to also diversify its activities and take advantage of opportunities to improve its facilities. This is why the library service delivers or hosts over 1,000 activities a year, why we are relocating our main library to a shared hub with other leisure and cultural activities, and why we are exploring new types of libraries within new community facilities.

Both local and comparative data also shows that our libraries are efficiently run, with good use of officer resources and a strong correlation between operating costs for each library and its usage.

Our investment within the library service has also delivered real improvements and efficiencies that have enabled the council to retain its libraries where other local authorities have had to reduce their service or look at alternative delivery models. Self-service kiosks handle nearly 50% of library transactions, our in-house stock purchasing is significantly more effective than buying items through a consortium, and our usage of e-books and e-magazines has increased steadily in recent years.

As with many other Council services, what the Covid pandemic has shown is how flexible and adaptable the library service is. The online offer which was quickly developed has been well used, and the service has safely opened its doors to the public when it has been able to do so, including completely reopening the service on the 19th July 2021. The library service achieved this whilst also making a significant direct contribution to the Covid response by redeploying 31 officers for many months to these activities.

There are a number of key projects in place which will continue to improve the services available to our residents, including building new libraries, technology improvements, and energy efficiency investments. As our services hopefully continue to return to more

normal operations, there are opportunities to provide more support to the broader council aims of strengthening our local communities, supporting or vulnerable residents and ensuring that our services are actively promoting and celebrating equality and diversity within our borough.

After five years of successfully guiding the operations of the Library Service, it is now time to review our Library Offer to residents to ensure that it continues to provide a correct sense of direction and mandate for future investments and innovations within the service.

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	R
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£0	Yes	R
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£0	Yes	R

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

None

Cross-Council Implications

None

Public Sector Equality Duty

Please confirm that due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty has been taken and if an equalities assessment has been completed or explain why an equalities assessment is not required.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2

N/A

List of Background Papers

Library Offer 2016

Contact Mark Redfearn	Service Customer and Localities
Telephone No 0118 974 6000	Email mark.redfearn@wokingham.gov.uk

Appendix 1 – Libraries: Government Guidance on the Role of Local Authorities

The Localism Act in 2011 contains a wide range of measures to devolve more powers to councils and neighbourhoods and give local communities greater control over local decisions. It is for individual councils to decide how to allocate their funds.

Every council in England is required to provide a ‘comprehensive and efficient’ library service under the Act. It must do so in a way which meets the needs of local library users taking into account the resources available. The public library service is not a national service, but a local service. What a comprehensive and efficient service means will differ between councils, and will depend on the needs of each area. It is therefore the role of councillors and officials at a local level to determine how much they spend on libraries and how they manage and deliver their service. This must be done:

- in consultation with their communities
- through analysis of evidence around local needs
- in accordance with their statutory duties

Councillors need to make decisions about how money is invested in the interests of the whole community. They will have competing priorities across a wide portfolio of local service provision and councillors and officers must reconcile these matters against the background of their legal requirements. Councils can take their available resources into account when deciding how to deliver their public library service.

Councils therefore have the freedom to design their library service, based on their analysis and assessment of local needs. There are no longer prescribed national standards, which risked ignoring the specific circumstances or needs of individual library authorities.

Library authorities are also required to provide DCMS with such information as the Secretary of State may require for carrying out their duties.

We would like councils considering changing their library service to inform the DCMS Libraries team about their proposals before public engagement or consultation. Details about such proposals should be emailed to dcms-libraries@culture.gov.uk.

This will help by:

- providing early sight of proposals and assisting DCMS in the superintendence role
- giving the council an opportunity to talk through its early thinking or proposals with the DCMS Libraries team

Library authorities should be able to demonstrate:

- plans to consult with local communities alongside an assessment of their needs (including any projections of need)
- consideration of a range of options (including alternative financing, governance or delivery models) to sustain library service provision in their area
- a rigorous analysis and assessment of the potential impact of their proposals

In coming to a decision about future library provision DCMS will expect the council to act reasonably and rationally. A council looking to introduce changes to their library service provision should consider a number of things, including the following.

Evidence that proposals would continue to meet local needs

A council must be able to evidence the link between the design and delivery of its library service and identifiable local need. They:

- will already hold much of the data on local needs that they can use in considering their statutory compliance
- need to comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty (and the requirement to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination and advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between persons who share certain protected characteristics and those who do not), which will involve an analysis and assessment of the equality implications of the proposals
- should engage with the community when designing the library service to meet local needs within the available resources

Strategic planning of any changes

Library strategies should include a clear vision for the library service, outlining what the service should achieve and deliver. Points to include or consider are:

- how well the strategy meets local needs, now and in the future, using documented evidence held locally, as well as members and officers' local knowledge
- an assessment of the equality impact on all 'protected groups' as specified in the Equality Act 2010
- a careful consideration of feedback received before making a definitive decision
- a demonstration of how steps have been taken to mitigate the impact
- an openness to new options
- another consultation before implementing changes
- an investment in working with communities and other partners to put new solutions in place, drawing on learning from elsewhere

More information on strategic planning can be found in the [Strategic planning of library services toolkit](#) published by the Libraries Taskforce.

Alternative delivery models

Councils should regularly review how they provide library services so they remain effective and efficient. In line with broader public sector reform, councils should actively examine alternative delivery models and revenue streams. These could unlock additional investment and exploit opportunities for joint working with other councils and/or partners to maintain and enhance service delivery.

The Optimo partnership, on behalf of the Libraries Taskforce and DCMS, designed an [alternative delivery models toolkit](#). This supports library service managers, council commissioners, transformation teams, councillors, Friends Groups and community groups considering alternative delivery models. The toolkit demonstrates and describes a staged approach to investigation and establishment. It also describes the characteristics and potential advantages or disadvantages associated with each type of alternative delivery model.

Use of council scrutiny process

Depending on an individual council's constitution, its Overview and Scrutiny Committees may play a role in actively reviewing local library provision through pre-decision scrutiny, helping to advise the portfolio holder (an Executive member of a council cabinet) responsible for the library service as policy is developed. It could, for example, take evidence from local library users and other stakeholders to develop recommendations on how the service might be redesigned and adapted to changing circumstances.

Overview and Scrutiny Committees can also provide internal challenge to proposals which contain significant changes to library services before they go to the portfolio holder for a formal decision. They do this by examining the underlying rationale of the proposal and if necessary suggesting alternative approaches that could be explored prior to decision.

Once a formal decision is taken, councillors may also be able to use call-in powers to raise any outstanding issues or concerns; for example to challenge the assumptions and evidence behind decisions. Call-in provides a mechanism for councillors to intervene where they feel that a decision being made by the executive needs to be revisited (or possibly changed). It provides a significant check and balance in the leader/cabinet system of governance.

More information is available in the Local Government Association's publication [Scrutiny for Councillors](#) or via the [Centre for Public Scrutiny](#) which provides guidance on a variety of aspects of scrutiny.

Appendix 2 - Wokingham Borough Council Library Offer

Access to Services

- The Library Service will adapt to meet the growing population and changing behaviours of our residents.
- The Library Service will utilise opportunities to provide residents with a flexible mix of physical and virtual options for accessing all services
- Improve access to other Wokingham Borough Council services in line with Customer Services vision
- Strong partnership working to ensure flexibility of delivery and access to library services

Library Stock

- Maintain the approach of books being the primary stock type
- Stock purchased will be responsive to the behaviour and needs of our residents
- Increase the numbers of items available in other formats
- Continue to ensure that we hold the books that people most want

Visiting and Using Buildings

- The environment within libraries will be welcoming and enjoyable
- Buildings will be flexible and adaptable to changing demands for their use
- Enable access to other types of services including other council services, health services and local community and voluntary services
- They will provide space for locally focused events and activities that develop a sense of community
- Actively identify events and services that support the broader Council vision

Technology

- The Library Service will continue to grow its online services to provide more opportunity for residents to access services when they want them.
- Invest in technologies that support learning and self-sustaining behaviours in residents.
- Increase the range of services within libraries by enabling payments for other Council services.
- Respond to natural opportunities to deliver a greater range of Council services within libraries.

Income Generation

- Income generation ideas will feel a natural extension of our services and activities
- Where opportunities for investment present themselves we will look to gain the most value from them so as to minimise the need for further investments in the future

Supporting Wokingham Borough Council Vision

- The library service will continue to identify ways to directly support Wokingham Borough Council's vision for the borough
- Maintain or improve on the usage of library services so that they remain a valuable method of supporting and promoting other Council services.

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Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2021/22

1.	Scrutinising the development of the Council's Budget for 2022/23
2.	Reviewing the work of the Community Safety Partnership, the effectiveness of local policing and fire and rescue services
3.	Exercising the Council's flood risk management responsibilities by monitoring flood risk activities and partnership working with Towns and Parishes
4.	Reviewing the Assets Review Programme and the operation of the Council's Property Portfolio Investment Fund
5.	Reviewing the effectiveness of the Council's partnerships with Town and Parish Councils and the voluntary sector, including WBC's protocol and performance in responding to any issues raised
6.	Reviewing whether Sports & Leisure facilities meet the needs of local residents
7.	Scrutinising burial capacity across the Borough and the Council's plans to ensure adequate future capacity
8.	Reviewing library provision across the Borough including how best practice could be adopted
9.	Scrutinising service and policy developments relating to the Council's public facing services and its in-house support services
10.	Reviewing highways and transport issues including highways contracts, customer service, civil parking enforcement, car parking, parking on blind spots and bends, Bus Strategy and cycling infrastructure
11.	Reviewing the Council's Arts and Culture Strategy as it is implemented
12.	Reviewing what is being done to ensure that every resident had the best access to high speed broadband
13.	Scrutinising the Council's Housing Services to ensure that the needs of local residents and communities are being met
14.	Scrutinising the operation and performance of the Council-owned companies and shared service arrangements
15.	Scrutinising how WBC responds to complaints related to overgrown pavements
16.	Reviewing how the Council communicates and engages with residents
17.	Appointing Task and Finish Groups as appropriate

DATE OF MEETING	ITEM	PURPOSE OF REPORT	REASON FOR CONSIDERATION	CONTACT OFFICER
6 Oct 2021	Medium Term Financial Plan	To consider the draft Medium Term Financial Plan for 2022-25	Work Programme	Graham Ebers
	Leisure Strategy and Leisure Service Provision	To consider the draft Leisure Strategy and the Leisure Service provision within the Borough	Work Programme	Bev Thompson/Susan Bentley
	PPP Exit - Verbal Update	To consider a verbal update on the move to in-house provision of the services currently provided by the PPP	Committee Request	David Thrall/Steve Moore
	Work Programme	To consider the work programme for the Committee for 2020/21	Standing Item	Democratic Services

DATE OF MEETING	ITEM	PURPOSE OF REPORT	REASON FOR CONSIDERATION	CONTACT OFFICER
3 Nov 2021 Extraordinary	Medium Term Financial Plan	To consider the draft Medium Term Financial Plan for 2022-25	Work Programme	Graham Ebers
	Work Programme	To consider the work programme for the Committee for 2020/21	Standing Item	Democratic Services

DATE OF MEETING	ITEM	PURPOSE OF REPORT	REASON FOR CONSIDERATION	CONTACT OFFICER
24 Nov 2021	Medium Term Financial Plan	To consider the draft Medium Term Financial Plan for 2022-25	Work Programme	Graham Ebers
	Overgrown Pavements Update	To consider how sections of overgrown pavements are managed	Work Programme	Richard Bisset/Emma Pilgrim
	Work Programme	To consider the work programme for the Committee for 2020/21	Standing Item	Democratic Services

DATE OF MEETING	ITEM	PURPOSE OF REPORT	REASON FOR CONSIDERATION	CONTACT OFFICER
13 Dec 2021	Medium Term Financial Plan	To consider the draft Medium Term Financial Plan for 2022-25	Work Programme	Graham Ebers
	Work Programme	To consider the work programme for the Committee for 2020/21	Standing Item	Democratic Services

DATE OF MEETING	ITEM	PURPOSE OF REPORT	REASON FOR CONSIDERATION	CONTACT OFFICER
5 Jan 2022	Medium Term Financial Plan	To consider the draft Medium Term Financial Plan for 2022-25	Work Programme	Graham Ebers
	Borough Wide Parking Management Strategy Update	To consider the Borough Wide Parking Management Strategy	Work Programme	Andy Glencross
	In House & Public Facing Services Update (Provisional)	To consider an update on in-house public facing services	Work Programme	Steve Moore
	Work Programme	To consider the work programme for the Committee for 2020/21	Standing Item	Democratic Services

DATE OF MEETING	ITEM	PURPOSE OF REPORT	REASON FOR CONSIDERATION	CONTACT OFFICER
28 March 2022	Flood Risk Management Update	To consider an update relating to flood risk management within the Borough	Work Programme	Francesca Hobson
	Police & Fire Update	To receive an update from the Local Police and Fire Services	Work Programme	Simon Price
	New Domestic Abuse Contract 6 Month Update	To consider the implementation of the new Domestic Abuse Contract	Committee Request	Narinder Brah
	Work Programme	To consider the work programme for the Committee for 2020/21	Standing Item	Democratic Services

NOTE

Items in the process of being scheduled: Bus Strategy, Arts & Culture Strategy implementation, BME Forum Update, Burial Grounds capacity/Crematorium Update