



WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

An Extraordinary Meeting of the **EXECUTIVE** will be held in the Council Chamber - Civic Offices, Shute End, Wokingham RG40 1BN on **MONDAY 7 MARCH 2022 AT 7.00 PM**

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

Susan Parsonage
Chief Executive
Published on 25 February 2022

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/Ci7pLVQh1g0>

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

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WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

Our Vision

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

Enriching Lives

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

Safe, Strong, Communities

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

A Clean and Green Borough

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

Right Homes, Right Places

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

Keeping the Borough Moving

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

Changing the Way We Work for You

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

MEMBERSHIP OF THE EXECUTIVE

John Halsall	Leader of the Council
John Kaiser	Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Finance and Housing
Parry Bath	Environment and Leisure
Graham Howe	Children's Services
Pauline Jorgensen	Highways and Transport
Charles Margetts	Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services
Stuart Munro	Business and Economic Development
Gregor Murray	Resident Services, Communications and Emissions
Wayne Smith	Planning and Enforcement
Bill Soane	Neighbourhoods and Communities

ITEM NO.	WARD	SUBJECT	PAGE NO.
107.		<p>APOLOGIES To receive any apologies for absence</p>	
108.		<p>DECLARATION OF INTEREST To receive any declarations of interest</p>	
109.		<p>STATEMENT BY THE LEADER OF COUNCIL The Leader of Council made the following statement.</p>	
110.		<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 items on this agenda only.</p> <p>Subject to meeting certain timescales, questions can only relate to items which are 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>	
111.		<p>MEMBER QUESTION TIME To answer any member questions</p> <p>A period of 20 minutes will be allowed for Members to ask questions submitted under Notice relating to items on this agenda only.</p> <p>Any questions not dealt with within the allotted time will be dealt with in a written reply.</p>	

Matters for Consideration

112.	None Specific	CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE REPORT AND ACTION PLAN	5 - 38
113.	None Specific	COUNCIL PLAN REFRESH 2022/23	39 - 78
114.	None Specific	ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY - POSITION STATEMENT	79 - 88
115.	None Specific	WOKINGHAM BOROUGH SECONDARY SCHOOL PLACES (11 TO 16) STRATEGY	89 - 104
116.	Finchampstead South	DELIVERING THE GORSE RIDE REGENERATION PROJECT - PROCUREMENT OF CONSTRUCTION WORKS AND SERVICES	105 - 124

EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Executive may exclude the press and public in order to discuss the Part 2 sheets of Agenda Item 116 above and to do so it must pass a resolution in the following terms:

That under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act (as amended) as appropriate.

A decision sheet will be available for inspection at the Council's offices (in Democratic Services and the General Office) and on the web site no later than two working days after the meeting.

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TITLE	Corporate Peer Challenge Report and Action Plan
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Monday, 7 March 2022
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Chief Executive - Susan Parsonage
LEAD MEMBER	Leader of the Council - John Halsall

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

This report presents the final report of the Local Government Association team that undertook a Corporate Peer Challenge for the Council in November 2021, together with a proposed action plan to address the recommendations set out in the Corporate Peer Challenge report.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive:

- 1) notes the final report of the Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge in November 2021 attached at Appendix 1;
- 2) approves the Action Plan attached at Appendix 2 that addresses the recommendations set out in the Corporate Peer Challenge report;
- 3) notes that the Local Government Association will be undertaking a “six month check-in” later in 2022 to allow the Council’s senior leadership to update on the Council’s progress against the action plan.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The LGA Corporate Peer Challenge that took place in November 2021 highlighted the Council’s strengths and much that we can be proud of. Feedback from the visit was provided verbally on 17 November and the LGA’s final report is published with this report along with a detailed action plan.

The Peer team confirmed that the Council delivers valued, well performing services that provide a high quality of life for residents. The Council achieves good outcomes for its residents, despite receiving no central government grant funding and notwithstanding the recent pressures of COVID is financially stable.

The feedback also set out a number of opportunities for future development identifying areas for further focus. An Action Plan is included (at Appendix 2) which will require careful ongoing management of capacity to ensure successful delivery.

The LGA Peer Team will return to the Council in late spring 2022 to assess progress in responding to the review and their recommendations.

BACKGROUND

1. One of the services that the Local Government Association (LGA) offers its member councils is a Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC). By bringing together political and managerial leadership, through the use of Elected Member and officer peers, a CPC aims to provide a robust, strategic and credible challenge as well as support to councils.
2. The LGA views the CPC process as one of its key tools to support improvement in the way councils operate nationally. The CPC process is designed to be forward-looking and problem-solving, is not a form of inspection and does not rank or score the Council.
3. Each CPC covers five core elements as detailed below as well any local needs or specific challenges requested by a council:
 - Local priorities and outcomes
 - Organisational and place leadership
 - Governance and culture
 - Financial planning and management
 - Capacity for improvement.
4. In addition, the Council asked the team to consider the following specific areas of interest:
 - How do we get our residents and communities to recognise the things we've achieved?
 - How can we improve our horizon scanning capability?
 - How can we further foster a data and insight driven organisation?
 - How can we make our Overview & Scrutiny function more meaningful and effective?
 - How will we ensure that our Change approach is sufficiently agile to meet our ambitions?
5. The on-site CPC process involved a leading Councillor and senior officers from other councils across the country visiting Wokingham Borough to meet a number of Councillors and a wide mix of staff, as well as partners and other organisations, that operate in the Borough to review processes, policies and practice to see what we do well and where we could improve.
6. Initial feedback was given by the LGA at the end of the on-site process on 17th November and this has now been followed up by the written report attached at Appendix 1.
7. The LGA CPC report highlights many positive aspects in the way the Council operates noting that the Council delivers valued, well performing services that provide a high quality of life for residents. The report concludes that the Council achieves good outcomes for its residents, despite receiving no central government grant funding and notwithstanding the recent pressures of COVID is financially stable.

8. Importantly the LGA CPC report also identify areas where the Council can improve and these are set out in the following five key recommendations in the report and are reproduced below:
- Restate and bring to life a narrative about the Council's ambitions for its residents to deliver the future vision for Wokingham - the place, the people, and the opportunities.
 - Recognise the role the council plays in community and place leadership – and sometimes that means taking criticism and tough decisions.
 - Ensure that there is adequate capacity in core corporate services to drive forward change where needed – HR, Finance, change...
 - Continue to embed Equality, Diversity and Inclusion for members and officers, and through the delivery of services.
 - Ensure there is a commitment to a long-term vision for the Borough co-designed and co-delivered with partners to become the focus for the entire community.
9. The Action Plan can be found at Appendix 2 which shows the Council's response to the key recommendations as well as further detailed recommendations across the lines of enquiry set out in paragraphs 3 and 4. The successful delivery of this plan will require careful management of capacity and will therefore be kept under close review.

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

None

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

The LGA report and associated action plan will be published on the Council's Website.

Public Sector Equality Duty

This is an update report. An EqIA has not been completed

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

Ensuring good governance is in place assists in achieving all the Council's strategic outcomes including those around climate emergency.

List of Background Papers

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Report – February 2022

WBC Action Plan – February 2022

Contact Andrew Moulton	Service Governance
Telephone Tel: 07747 777298	Email andrew.moulton@wokingham.gov.uk


LGA Corporate Peer Challenge

Wokingham Borough Council

9th-10th November and 15-17th November 2021

Feedback report





1. Context.....	3
2. Summary of the peer challenge approach	4
3. Executive Summary and Key Recommendations	6
4. Feedback on core themes of Corporate Peer Challenge	8
5. Summary and next steps	18
6. Annex I – Full list of Recommendations	20
7. Annex II – communications best practice	23

1. Context

Wokingham Borough Council is a unitary council formed in 1974 and covers a semi-rural area with three main towns: Wokingham, Woodley and Earley. The Borough is situated in central Berkshire, and benefits from excellent transport links to Reading and London. The population of the Borough is 173,971 in 70,810 households, an increase of over 4,000 households since 2016. The Borough is expecting to continue to grow at a similar pace with the population projected to reach 192,000 by 2043.

The Borough benefits from a strong local economy, with some major high skilled employers choosing to locate themselves in the area. Quality of life is high, and Wokingham's residents can expect to live two years longer than average. Deprivation levels are some of the lowest in the country, but the Council recognises that pockets of deprivation exist, and it is working to better understand these.

The Council operates elections in a cycle of thirds with the next election being May 2022. The Council is Conservative controlled with 31 seats and an Executive led by Cllr John Halsall, who has been leader since 2019. The remaining 23 seats on the council are controlled by Liberal Democrats (18 seats), Independent (3 seats) and two Labour councillors. At the time of writing the Local Government Boundary Commission for England has just announced a review into the electoral arrangements at the council.

The Council operates a revenue budget of approximately £147m and has a sound financial position with a reasonable level of reserves. The Council has been able to weather the financial impacts of the COVID pandemic without it negatively impacting on its financial sustainability. The Council has a strong record of delivering budgets without the need to rely on using reserves to balance the budget. Based on its current position and previous experience of managing within its financial envelope the Council is confident it can continue to deliver a balanced budget going forward.

This is the second Corporate Peer Challenge commissioned by the Council, followed the peer challenge delivered in February 2016 and follow up visit in 2017. It is intended as a basis for future improvement.

2. Summary of the peer challenge approach

2.1. Scope and focus

The peer team considered the following five themes which form the core components of all Corporate Peer Challenges. These areas are critical to councils' performance and improvement.

1. **Local priorities and outcomes** - Are the council's priorities clear and informed by the local context? Is the council delivering effectively on its priorities?
2. **Organisational and place leadership** - Does the council provide effective local leadership? Are there good relationships with partner organisations and local communities?
3. **Governance and culture** - Are there clear and robust governance arrangements? Is there a culture of challenge and scrutiny?
4. **Financial planning and management** - Does the council have a grip on its current financial position? Does the council have a strategy and a plan to address its financial challenges?
5. **Capacity for improvement** - Is the organisation able to support delivery of local priorities? Does the council have the capacity to improve?

In addition to these questions, Wokingham Borough Council asked the peer team to consider the following questions

- How do we improve the relationship and the image of the Council with our residents?
- How can we further foster a data and insight driven organisation and improve our horizon scanning capability?
- How can we make our Overview & Scrutiny function more meaningful and effective?
- Is our approach to change sufficiently agile to meet our ambitions?
- How do we move organisationally to a culture of higher support and higher

challenge?

Feedback on these is provided in the main body of the report.

All the findings and recommendations proposed by the peer team are set within the challenge of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. The peer team recognise that the Council is still investing significant resource in managing the impacts of the pandemic and working with its community to help promote recovery and renewal. It is also important to acknowledge the very significant impact that the pandemic has had on the organisation's capacity and resilience and that the longer-term impacts of this are not yet fully understood.

2.2. The peer challenge process

Peer challenges are improvement focused; it is important to stress that this was not an inspection. The process is not designed to provide an in-depth or technical assessment of plans and proposals. The peer team used their experience and knowledge of local government to reflect on the information presented to them by people they met, things they saw and material that they read.

The peer team prepared by reviewing a range of documents and information to ensure they were familiar with the council and the challenges it is facing. The team then spent time over a period of two weeks, both virtually and onsite at Wokingham Borough Council, during which they:

- Gathered information and views from more than 200 hours of meetings, in addition to further research and reading.
- Spoke to more than 100 people including a range of council staff together with members and external stakeholders.

This report provides a summary of the peer team's findings. In presenting feedback, they have done so as fellow local government officers and members.

This report sits alongside the presentation shared with the council on 17th November 2021.

2.3. The peer team

Peer challenges are delivered by experienced elected member and officer peers. The make-up of the peer team reflected the focus of the peer challenge and peers were selected based on their relevant expertise. The peers were:

- Paul Najsarek – Chief Executive, LB Ealing
- Jon Bell - Director of HR, LB Barnet
- Claire Foale - Assistant Director Policy and Strategy, City of York Council
- Cllr Kevin Bentley – Leader, Essex County Council
- Clare Hudson – Peer Challenge Manager, LGA
- Suraiya Khatun – Programme Support Officer, LGA

3. Executive Summary and Key Recommendations

The Council delivers valued, well performing services that provide a high quality of life for residents. The Council achieves good outcomes for its residents, despite receiving no central government grant funding and notwithstanding the recent pressures of COVID is financially stable.

Over the last three years, the Council has made significant improvements in key areas, such as:

- Developing a clear vision for the Borough and recognised Corporate Plan that is delivering the key priorities
- Development of meaningful partnership relationships, including Health, Voluntary and Community Sectors, and Thames Valley Police with an ambition to deepen these
- Renewed focus on data and insight to inform Demand Management and improve decision making
- Commitment to enhance and improve the customer experience
- Significant service improvements within the Adults and Children’s Directorates as

recognised by regulators

This is recognised as a journey of continuous improvement for the Council, there are further plans in place that will continue to develop, deliver and shape the future aspirations for the Borough.

During the last 3 years the Council has focussed on achieving much improved services and outcomes for residents. Additionally, the Council has clear ambition, leadership and direction and this combination of strengths will enable the Council to continue its positive trajectory. The Council should be proud of its achievements in particular throughout the COVID pandemic. The peer team feel the council displayed organisational strength, resilience, and played a pivotal role in ensuring that the local community had the support it needed. This pulled together voluntary and community capacity under the council's leadership. The staff the peer team spoke to feel valued and supported to come up with new ideas and approaches and understood the council's ambition to improve. There has been a strong focus on promoting staff wellbeing led by senior officers.

The Council has focused on delivering a robust response to COVID whilst also delivering significant service improvement in people services in the last three years and delivering complex change and demand management programmes. Additionally, the Council's investment in service improvement in Children's and Adults Services is reflected in recent inspection results. There has been a focus on deepening collective leadership between the Executive and Corporate Leadership Team and this provides a strong foundation for the Council to build on. Officers and members have worked together to enhance the Council's strategic capacity. As it moves towards recovery from the pandemic the Council should restate how members and officers can most effectively work together and articulate its current narrative to change.

Leaders voice a clear political aspiration that residents should be 'at the heart of everything' that the Council does. The Council's corporate narrative and resulting priorities on people and place towards residents, towards staff, and partners needs deeper engagement, further articulation, and communication. A compelling narrative is being developed to support this.

The Council now needs to further continue to deliver great outcomes for all of its

residents in a way that promotes fairness, equality and diversity through the Equalities strategy and action plan, economic and community resilience. To progress this these are the key recommendations from the peer team:

Key Recommendations

1. Restate and bring to life a narrative about the Council's ambitions for its residents to deliver the future vision for Wokingham - the place, the people, and the opportunities.
2. Recognise the role the council plays in community and place leadership – and sometimes that means taking criticism and tough decisions.
3. Ensure that there is adequate capacity in core corporate services to drive forward change where needed – HR, Finance, change...
4. Continue to embed Equality, Diversity and Inclusion for members and officers, and through the delivery of services.
5. Ensure there is a commitment to a long-term vision for the Borough co-designed and co-delivered with partners to become the focus for the entire community.

4. Feedback on core themes of Corporate Peer Challenge

4.1. Local priorities and outcomes

“We are here to serve the residents”

The Council is very focused on making it clear they are here to serve the residents. How the council serves the other elements of the Borough that impact on its ability to deliver the best outcomes for residents needs further consideration by senior leaders. The council has ambitions to ensure it engages more widely, including with key partners such as town and parish councils, building on the collaborative approaches that have been successful with other partners.

This is a healthy borough with a high quality of life but with some pockets of persistent deprivation. The Council is seeking to deepen its understanding of where those pockets of deprivation exist, and why. It is working closely with partners to do this and plans to engage parts of the community who might not naturally approach the Council. This is why continuing to enhance the Council's approach to engagement is critical.

The Council is keen to address the big challenges its community faces. It was one of the first councils to declare a 'Climate Emergency' and has committed to 250,000 trees being planted to help tackle CO₂ emissions. The Council has invited in external expertise to help guide them in their response and understands that this is a wide-ranging issue it must tackle with differing policy responses needed for different problems.

The Council wants to improve its understanding of what residents' value and has invested in greater use of residents' surveys to help inform decision making. The Council is now working through how to make best use of this to inform policy development and service improvement. The Council has invested in greater use of data and insight to drive performance and recognises there is more work to do to embed and interpret this across the organisation.

The Council has already introduced co-production as part of the development for new strategies e.g. Domestic Abuse, Voluntary and Community Strategy, Anti Poverty with clear ambition to further strengthen this engagement.

The Council has a strong track record in housing delivery, and in recent years this has included building 300 council owned social houses a year with a clear ambition to build more high-quality affordable housing. The Council is committed to driving and delivering this and recognises that new housing as well as upgrading existing housing is needed. The Council is delivering significant town centre regeneration including new retail, hospitality and leisure offers to improve the public realm and promote the town centre as a destination for leisure and independent business, including the Peach Place and Carnival Hub developments.

The Council has a range of strategies to tackle the key challenges it is facing – anti poverty strategy, climate change strategy, equality and diversity strategy. However, it needs to be able to reconcile the potentially competing priorities between these

strategies and develop an understanding of the impacts of this on lower-priority activities.

Housing growth and affordability remains a huge challenge and difficult to navigate. This will form an important element of the Council's future vision and how it manages resident engagement.

Recommendations – Local priorities and outcomes

6. Further embedding of the Council vision to act as a golden thread throughout all the strategies & consider future opportunities there are for building citizen pride through place making
7. Identify the impact the adopted strategies have on the council's priorities and delivery plans and what a priority and non priority means. Also invest in identifying how the outcomes of the adopted strategies will be evaluated, analysed and reported against
8. The Council has already introduced co-production as part of the development for new strategies e.g. Domestic Abuse, VCS strategy, Anti Poverty. It is recommended that this partnership approach continues and to further enhance it, use of the new WBC Engagement Platform should be exploited to support early opportunities to seek the voice of the customer and partners in strategic planning

4.2. Organisational Leadership

“We have come together as a team and want to make this a great place to work”

The Council's senior leadership has demonstrated real commitment to promoting employee wellbeing and has been honest about their own mental health, which has been valued by colleagues. Senior leaders are visible and relatable which helps staff feel supported. Staff recognise the organisation as a "place for growth" and were able to share with the peer team examples of their own continuous professional development, as well as a widely held commitment to continual organisational growth. The organisation is taking significant steps to promote its role in equality,

diversity and inclusion and these are forming future organisational development plans which will embed promoting equality, diversity and inclusion throughout the Council – for both members and officers. Steps to deliver this are being guided by the Equalities and Diversity strategy which is sponsored by the Corporate Leadership Team as a core priority.

The Council has introduced a new change framework that delivers effective change at an organisational and directorate level, this methodology has replaced the previous approach of traditional, large scale transformation programmes. The Council made the strategic decision following the last large change programme, which ended in 2019, as this approach had significant ramifications on back-office service delivery which the Council is still working through. The Council has built its strategic change capacity to help shape and deliver change and the Council may want to consider taking this as an opportunity to recommunicate to staff that the previous large-scale change programme is closed down and the Council is now working to promote recovery from the pandemic. The Council continues to be agile it is approach to change needs and resource is built into the financing of new initiatives.

Members have confidence in financial and performance reporting provided by officers and can speak clearly about the organisation's financial position and future challenges. There is a sense of ownership amongst senior leaders that they will work together to tackle challenges, whether they be corporate or within service areas. Senior leaders have come together to advance strategic policy discussions and build strategic capacity. As this progresses members and officers will need to ensure that there is clarity over the distinct roles of members and officers in tackling these challenges to ensure the roles of political direction and operational management are understood.

A strong sense of team was demonstrated in the Council's response to the pandemic and took many forms. For instance, the Communications team worked across Berkshire councils to provide coherent responses to the COVID response and provided clear advice and support to residents. The Council also appears to have responded well to the move towards agile working and is embedding new ways of working.

The Council recognises the critical role that its staff play in delivering its ambitions. However, it has some distance to travel with some of its key workforce strategies and developments, including embedding its values, having a systematic approach to talent management, and in its overall approach to organisational development (OD).

Recommendations – Organisational Leadership

9. Build on the Council's ethos as a "place for growth" by developing a strategic approach to organisational development, including talent management, leadership development, organisational culture and through continuing to promote its role in equality, diversity and inclusion

4.3. Governance and culture

"We need to articulate more clearly what kind of culture we are aspiring to"

The peer team heard on many occasions that the Council operates a mutually supportive culture where staff feel valued, encouraged to progress and people enjoy working. In recent years the Chief Executive and Leader have demonstrated a stable, united front, setting direction and driving aspiration, innovation and partnership working for the council whilst valuing staff as the Council has navigated COVID alongside delivering significant service improvements¹ and significant regeneration. This stability has been valued by staff and partners.

Staff are proud to work for a Council that has overseen a strongly community led response to COVID and are keen to take forward some of the experiences into business as usual. The single front door approach to supporting residents during the pandemic with Citizens Advice was cited as a model that should be further developed (by staff and partners) and there have been significant steps in advancing integrated health and social care system leadership.

As it builds on those bonds that have been strengthened with residents during the last 20 months the Council is taking forward the agreed strategy and action plan to promote equality, diversity and inclusion and is actively working on engaging with the

¹ Ofsted said improvement in social care was 'remarkable' - <https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50166875>

workforce, its Councillors and its residents on this topic. The new Equalities strategy was launched in March 2021, with a cross Council programme group of Officers and Members that is supporting the delivery of the action plan. The way the Council approaches performance and risk management has been recognised as an area to develop and steps are underway to progress this, with significant investment in corporate capacity to do this. There are signs that this is an organisation that wants to be guided by data and insight, as well as be able to anticipate future needs. How that translates into day-to-day decision-making needs further articulation and the Council is creating a Data and Insight strategy to support this development.

The Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee is often the scene of lively debate and is seen as a political arena rather than creating 'good policy' and positive challenge. Following the peer challenge the Council should ensure that all members engaged in scrutiny understand the Terms of Reference of each Scrutiny Board and recognise what 'good scrutiny' looks like.

The focus on I delivery, balancing this with strategic planning and responding to COVID has absorbed capacity but has bought the organisation together for a common purpose. As the Council moves towards recovery from COVID this feels like the right time to restate the Council's values and commitment to good governance.

What good governance means to the Council needs to be clearly and widely articulated. It must reflect the differing roles of members and officers and establish clarity around those roles and behaviours that underpin them. The Peer Team recognised that in some instances Members were keen to be close to operational delivery. Whilst the desire to support the shaping and delivery of services is understood, it is important for Members and Officers to work together with clear roles and responsibilities to avoid adding additional complexity.

Overall, the peer team came across some instances where governance structures and lines of accountability and responsibility could be more clearly stated and lived. This will ensure the Council can maintain an appropriate balance between strategic and operational leadership with role responsibilities widely stated and understood. In addition the council may want to explore introducing an independent person to the Audit Committee to strengthen governance.

Debate and communication within the Council can be very dominated by party

politics, and this can sometimes get in the way of what the Council is trying to achieve. The current electoral cycle of elections in thirds can contribute towards a short-term focus and the Council has an opportunity with the boundary review to develop a clear position on what electoral cycle might help to foster a more collaborative culture. Equally, the peer team feel that if the Council had a longer term vision then confrontational political debate on shorter term issues may lessen as the Council's future vision and delivery plan would be clearer and potentially allow less space for unproductive debate.

Recommendations - Governance and Culture

10. Define the accountability and responsibilities of Executive, Scrutiny and the Corporate Leadership Team and the differences between the roles and what that means for civic leadership. Subsequent to clarify the roles of statutory officers, their lines of accountability and how you hold each other to account to drive improvement.
11. Review whether the responsibilities and reporting lines of the Deputy Chief Executive, Monitoring Officer and Head of Internal Audit represent good governance and promote accountability
12. Consider how to make Overview and Scrutiny more about positive challenge and producing good policy and less dominated by party political debate. Ensure regular opportunities for member development particularly on overview and scrutiny, modelling equality and diversity & behaviours that underpin good governance & visible leadership
13. Recommend a review of the current election cycle.

4.4. Financial Planning and Management

“We are trying to make it a living budget so that if we need extra resources there is a decision-making process around it and we can flex as needed”

Members speak confidently about the council's current financial position and what options it now faces. There is an expressed clarity on the future commercial investment strategy following a period of commercial investment to deliver and drive

regeneration. There are strong underlying principles to the council's commercial investments centred on strong yields with low-risk borrowing. The Council has implemented a robust, risk-based approach to commercial investments and is embedding a more commercial mindset in the Council that goes beyond commercial investments to promote income generation. The Council is clear it aims to be free of debt by 2033 but with secure, long term income streams that have promoted a new retail and leisure offer in the town centre promoting independent retail offerings.

Within the Council's General Fund, pressures are being effectively managed. There are savings and transformation programmes within major service areas that are owned and managed by Directors. There is no current need for a major corporate savings programme as the current Directorate led programmes are successfully achieving significant improvement and agreed MTFP efficiencies. The Council has previously delivered a corporate savings programme through the 21st Century Council programme and is now appraising whether its level of corporate and support services resourcing is fit for the future.

The Council operates a 'business as usual' budget to allow it to try and understand the impact of COVID. It has recently agreed to release supplementary funds to allow it to progress at pace on key issues such as equality and diversity. This approach allows for budgets to support "invest to save" projects and be agile in nature to emerging pressures and ensure that the budget is 'living' and responds to in-year changes.

The fundamental principles of financial controls and management are understood, and the Council is confident it can deliver a balanced position going forward. There have been concerns expressed by external auditors that the Council needs to address capacity issues in its finance function, and with an impending change in senior officers in the function imminent the Council needs to ensure its finance capacity is adequate going forward.

There is wide engagement in the budget setting process with scrutiny committees discussing the draft budget plans up to 6 months before the budget is adopted. There is a recognition that this scrutiny could be more meaningful and positively challenging.

The Council maintains reserves levels above the minimum recommended level of

£6.6m and at the time of writing are forecasting General Fund Reserves levels to be higher than initially thought earlier in the financial year 2021-22 at £10.2m.

The Council is well versed in describing its risks and operates a detailed corporate risk register. Whilst risk reporting is extensive, it is important for the Council to restate what risk management and mitigation means for the organisation; who is accountable for delivering it; and what the consequences of non-delivery are.

Recommendations - Financial Planning and Management

14. Restate what risk management and mitigation means for the organisation; who is accountable for delivering it and what the consequences on non-delivery are.
15. Develop financial scenario planning to test and flex wide scale savings plans. To enable the Council to 'future proof' its future financial sustainability in the advent of significant potential financial pressures.

4.5. Capacity for Improvement

“There is a strong ethos that this is an organisation that encourages colleagues to grow”

The Council has restructured its services to enhance its capacity and resilience, which proved vital in the response to COVID. The Council recognises that working in partnership with the voluntary and community sectors is vital to its focus on putting 'residents at the heart of everything'. This was strengthened during the pandemic and both residents and partners praised the approach of the single front door with Citizens Advice who clearly understand their audience and the community's diverse needs.

There has been a focus in recent transformation approaches in streamlining the customer journey and there is potential to further improve this and make communications more focused on supporting this. The Council undertakes regular public consultations and residents, and partners would like to see more feedback throughout the consultation process and a greater focus on more regular

engagement.

Residents utilise existing council-led communication methods that are viewed as trusted and reliable. There are examples of utilising a range of communications channels for sharing information and insight through partner networks to ensure the best reach locally. The Council has sought other means of communication to complement the local media channels and to broaden reach. The Council has plans to explore how to enhance its engagement with residents through communication mechanisms that are not online, and digitally hard to reach and this should aim to be as fully representative of the community as possible.

The Council utilises social media channels in a predominantly broadcast manner and there is some negativity on social media about the Council and its approaches. Members worry about the impact of this, and the peer team would urge the Council to genuinely consider how much relevance to give to this.

The Council recognises it has more to do to build on engagement with, and understand its residents' needs, and in addition to investing in a new Engagement Platform it has also developed greater use of a residents' survey platform to help inform decision making which complements the traditional engagement methods for those who don't have digital access. Whilst the impacts of this are emerging, this is a positive statement of intent and investment in resources. The peer team will be particularly interested to hear about the impact of this across different audiences in the revisit in 6 months' time.

The Council retains a significant housing stock and has well established mechanisms for tenant engagement. These are well received, and, with sufficient time, tenants feel they can make a genuine contribution to both policy and design.

The Council operates a well-developed change management/Programme Management Office which is adding value and strategic capacity. These can provide the capacity to support the emerging change narrative and delivery of key strategies.

The Council has shown a strong commitment to growing future talent through the National Graduate Development and Kickstart Programmes. There is scope to further link this to a wider approach to talent management and career progression, and to support the Council's advancing agenda to promote equalities, diversity and inclusion. These approaches to career progression and talent management are

foundations for the development of an Organisational Development strategy and the Council should continue to advance these at pace.

The Council has a number of senior positions filled on an interim basis – this is not unusual and in the coming months as the Council continues to strike a balance between responding to the pandemic and driving recovery from it there will be a need to ensure that this does not negatively impact on strategic capacity. Whilst strategic capacity is being enhanced there remains concerns over the corporate and support capacity of the organisation, with a heavy reliance on self service approaches in key services such as HR.

The Council has stated that it wants to be an employer of choice. However, it needs a clear understanding of what this means in terms of its Employee Value Proposition (EVP), including its organisation culture, pay structure, employment policies and overall employer brand.


Recommendations – Capacity for Improvement

16. Ensure that the Finance, HR & Change functions have appropriate resource and capacity to deliver what the council needs.
17. Articulate and accelerate an ambitious Organisational Development strategy including a clear employer brand.
18. Undertake a communications review to support building a communications and engagement strategy to use social media to show success and pride in a proactive way and to build and share the future vision identified in the Key Recommendations.

5. Summary and next steps

It Wokingham Borough Council is very focused on delivering for its residents. It has taken some bold decisions to deliver regeneration and financial stability through delivering efficiencies and commercial income. The Council has provided a valued response during the COVID pandemic and is well placed to continue to support its community to recover and renew.

The Council clearly wants to deliver the best for its residents, and it now needs to



invest in more meaningful engagement with its stakeholders and partners to help define a longer-term vision for the Borough. A commitment to a long-term vision for the Borough co-designed and co-delivered with partners can become the focus for the entire community. This can guide the Council's resources, capacity and leadership and provide a space for positive challenge, innovation, and civic pride. To equip itself to successfully deliver this the Council should address the recommendations raised by the peer team on governance and continues to focus on delivering the best outcomes for its residents.

Both the peer team and LGA are keen to build on the relationships formed through the peer challenge. The CPC process includes a six-month check-in meeting. This will be a short, facilitated session which creates space for the council's senior leadership to update peers on its progress against the action plan and discuss next steps. This is due to take place at the end of May 2022.

In the meantime, Mona Sehgal, is the main contact between your authority and the Local Government Association. Mona Sehgal is available to discuss any further support the council requires. mona.sehgal@local.gov.uk, 07795 291006.

Clare Hudson, Peer Challenge Manager, on behalf of the peer team

6. Annex I – Full list of Recommendations

6.1. Key Recommendations

1. Restate and bring to life the narrative about the Council's ambitions for its residents and the future vision for Wokingham - the place, the people, and the opportunities.
2. Recognise the role of council leadership in community and place leadership – and sometimes that means taking criticism and tough decisions.
3. Ensure that there is adequate capacity in core corporate services to drive forward change where needed – HR, Finance, change
4. Continue to embed Equality, Diversity and Inclusion for members and officers, and through the delivery of services.
5. Ensure there is a commitment to a long-term vision for the Borough co-designed and co-delivered with partners to become the focus for the entire community.

6.2. Recommendations – Local priorities and outcomes

6. Further embedding of the Council vision to act as a golden thread throughout all the strategies & consider future opportunities there are for building citizen pride through place making
7. Identify the impact the adopted strategies have on the council's priorities and delivery plans and what a priority and non priority means. Also invest in identifying how the outcomes of the adopted strategies will be evaluated, analysed and reported against
8. The Council has already introduced co-production as part of the development for new strategies e.g. Domestic Abuse, VCS strategy, Anti Poverty. It is recommended that this partnership approach continues and to further enhance it, use of the new WBC Engagement Platform should be exploited to support early opportunities to seek the voice of the

customer and partners in strategic planning

6.3. Recommendations – Organisational Leadership

9. Build on the Council’s ethos as a “place for growth” by developing a strategic approach to organisational development, including talent management, leadership development, organisational culture and through continuing to promote its role in equality, diversity and inclusion

6.4. Recommendations - Governance and Culture

10. Define the accountability and responsibilities of Executive, Scrutiny and the Corporate Leadership Team and the differences between the roles and what that means for civic leadership. Subsequent to clarify the roles of statutory officers, their lines of accountability and how you hold each other to account to drive improvement.
11. Review whether the responsibilities and reporting lines of the Deputy Chief Executive, Monitoring Officer and Head of Internal Audit represent good governance and promote accountability
12. Consider how to make Overview and Scrutiny more about positive challenge and producing good policy and less dominated by party political debate. Ensure regular opportunities for member development particularly on overview and scrutiny, modelling equality and diversity & behaviours that underpin good governance & visible leadership
13. Recommend a review of the current election cycle.

6.5. Recommendations - Financial Planning and Management

14. Restate what risk management and mitigation means for the organisation; who is accountable for delivering it and what the consequences on non-delivery are.
15. Develop financial scenario planning to test and flex wide scale savings plans. To enable the Council to ‘future proof’ its future financial

sustainability in the advent of significant potential financial pressures.

6.6. Recommendations – Capacity for Improvement

16. Ensure that the Finance, HR & Change functions have appropriate resource and capacity to deliver what the council needs.
17. Articulate and accelerate an ambitious Organisational Development strategy including a clear employer brand.
18. Undertake a communications review to support building a communications and engagement strategy to use social media to show success and pride in a proactive way and to build and share the future vision identified in the Key Recommendations.

7. Annex II – communications best practice

Set out below are a range of best practice to set standards for communications which the peer team suggest the Council explores, alongside commissioning an LGA Communications Review:

Government Communications Service [GCS | The professional body for government communicators \(civilservice.gov.uk\)](#) – membership includes local government communicators who are encouraged to draw on standards set by GCS

[Professional standards for government communicators - GCS \(civilservice.gov.uk\)](#)

Modern Communications Operating Model (or how to run a CEM team): [Strategic Communication: MCOM Function Guide - GCS \(civilservice.gov.uk\)](#)

Communications campaign planning uses OASIS: [Guide to campaign planning: OASIS - GCS \(civilservice.gov.uk\)](#)

Competency framework describes what a government communications professional should be able to do: [Competency Framework - technical specifications - GCS \(civilservice.gov.uk\)](#)

[Strategic communication - GCS \(civilservice.gov.uk\)](#) is focused around four principles – insight, ideas, implementation, impact

Impact, or knowing the difference you've made and learning from it is measured in a specific way in government to ensure what you do (outputs, send press releases) leads to outcomes (for example engagement in priorities, attending events, putting bins out on time, etc.etc.) [Evaluation Framework 2.0 - GCS \(civilservice.gov.uk\)](#)

Communications strategy template [Strategic communication - GCS \(civilservice.gov.uk\)](#) (requires an understanding of who your audiences are, and what you need from them – awareness, advocacy, action?)

Local Government Association

Future Comms interprets GCS standards and guidance and applies it to local government context: [#FutureComms - building local public services for the future](#)

[through modern communications | Local Government Association](#)

Strategic communications [Strategic communications in local government – the challenges and opportunities | Local Government Association](#) (defines the purpose of communications in a council)

What good looks like [What good looks like – the conditions and skills needed for success | Local Government Association](#)

Place marketing [Place marketing: Telling the story of your place in a way that works for everyone | Local Government Association](#)

Engagement standards are set in New Conversations: [New Conversations Guide refresh 11.pdf \(local.gov.uk\)](#) – toolkit that defines inform, engage, converse to help focus attention on engaging instead of often, currently, just informing/broadcasting

Peer Review

November 2021

33



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Five key recommendations

1

Restate and redefine a clear narrative about the Council's ambitions for its residents and the future vision for Wokingham - the place, the people and the opportunities.

What will we do?

We are refreshing our Council Plan that sets out our ambitions for the borough; this will reflect key post-pandemic concerns such as equalities and poverty as well as changes to health and social care, the ongoing climate emergency and uncertain financial future. We will promote this vision to residents through dynamic marketing and engagement that promotes a sense of civic pride and celebrates success.

Supporting recommendations

34

Further embedding of the Council vision to act as a golden thread throughout all the strategies, identifying the impact that the adopted strategies have on the council's priorities and delivery plans and consider future opportunities there are for building citizen pride through place making

Identify the impact the adopted strategies have on the council's priorities and delivery plans and what a priority and non priority means. Also invest in identifying how the outcomes of the adopted strategies will be evaluated, analysed and reported against

Undertake a communications review to support building a communications and engagement strategy to use social media to show success and citizen pride in a proactive way to build and share the future vision identified in the Key Recommendations

Five key recommendations

2

Recognise the role of council leadership in community and place leadership – and sometimes that means taking criticism and tough decisions

What will we do?

We will work with partners, including town and parish councils and the wider community, to involve them in decisions and support them to take ownership of the issues that matter most to them. We will clearly set out our purpose and explain the decisions we take – including those that are most challenging

Supporting recommendations

Consider how to make Overview and Scrutiny more about positive challenge and producing good policy and less dominated by party political debate. Also, ensuring regular opportunities for member development particularly on overview and scrutiny, modelling equality and diversity & behaviours that underpin good governance and visible leadership

Recommend a review of the current election cycle

Review whether the reporting and reporting lines of deputy chief executive, monitoring officer and head of internal audit represent good governance

Define the accountability and responsibilities of Executive, Scrutiny and the Corporate Leadership Team and the differences between the roles and what that means for civic leadership. Then clarify the roles of statutory officers, their lines of accountability and how you hold each other to account to drive improvement



Five key recommendations

3

Ensure that there is adequate capacity in core corporate services to drive forward change where needed – HR, Finance, change

What we are doing:

We will build on the success of our change programmes to make sure we have the right structures and resources to develop services in line with residents needs and aspirations. Our Corporate Leadership Team will oversee this to make sure there is the capacity needed and that it is targeted at the right priorities.

Supporting recommendations

36

Restate what risk management and mitigation means for the organisation, who is accountable for delivering it and what the consequences on non-delivery are.

Develop financial scenario planning to test and flex wide scale savings plans. To enable the Council to 'future proof' its future financial sustainability in the advent of significant potential financial pressures

Ensure that the Finance, HR & Change functions have appropriate resource and capacity to deliver what the council needs.



Five key recommendations

4

Continue to embed Equality, Diversity and Inclusion for members and officers, and through the delivery of services

What will we do?

We will continue successful delivery of our Equality Plan Action Plan to ensure Equality, Diversity and Inclusion is embedded into all service delivery. We will also review our codes of conduct (for elected members and officers) against behaviours that support good governance and leadership.

Supporting recommendations

Build on the Council's ethos as a "place for growth" by developing a strategic approach to organisational development, including talent management, leadership development, organisational culture and through continuing to promote its role in equality, diversity and inclusion

Articulate and accelerate an ambitious Organisational Development strategy including a clear employer brand



Five key recommendations

5

Ensure there is a commitment to a long-term vision for the Borough co-designed and co-delivered with partners to become the focus for the entire community

What will we do?

We will engage with the community as part of our Corporate Plan review that will look at the next few years and beyond to shape our longer term vision

Supporting recommendations

³⁸ The Council has introduced co-production as part of the development for new strategies, for example Domestic Abuse, VCS strategy, Anti-Poverty.

It is recommended that this approach continues and, to further enhance it, the new Engagement Platform should be exploited to support early opportunities to seek the voice of the customer and partners in strategic planning



TITLE	Council Plan Refresh 2022/23
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Monday, 7 March 2022
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Chief Executive - Susan Parsonage
LEAD MEMBER	Leader of the Council - John Halsall

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

There is a need to refresh the Council Plan to pick up on emerging priorities since it was developed and to ensure better clarity and communication around the strategic priorities. The Annual Review is an important opportunity to look back at what has been achieved over the past year and use this to support further service delivery, improvement activity and changes in focus to the Council Plan for coming years.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive:

- 1) note the slight change in articulation of the strategic priorities as proposed;
- 2) agree the proposed changes to the Council Plan as summarised within this report and set out in Appendix 1;
- 3) recommend to Council that the proposed changes to the Council Plan and updates to strategic themes are approved;
- 4) adopt the Annual Review for 2020/21 as contained in Appendix 2 and highlights for 2021/22 as contained in Appendix 3.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Council Plan covers the period 2020-24 but since its development there have been many changes with Covid-19, Brexit and rising food prices impacting on people's lives and living standards. It is therefore important to refresh the Council Plan.

The changes proposed are set out within the report, which are designed to provide a more coherent set of strategic priorities; embed inclusivity throughout the plan; and incorporate emerging priorities, address feedback from the Local Government Association (LGA) peer review and include statutory services.

The report also presents the Annual Review, which provides context to the changes proposed to the Council Plan, by looking back at the achievements throughout 2020/21 and to date for 2021/22.

BACKGROUND

The Council Plan 2020-24 was approved by the Council just ahead of the Covid-19 pandemic starting and therefore it is now important that the impacts of this are considered as part of a refresh and then more detailed review of the Council Plan.

Having considered the Council Plan in its current state, some key areas for refreshing were identified:

- Changes to the key strategic themes
- Responding to the LGA Peer Review
- Increasing focus on emerging opportunities and shorter term priorities
- Incorporating statutory obligations

It is also recognised that with the current financial uncertainty it is appropriate to have a more comprehensive review of the Plan later in the year, alongside development of the Medium Term Financial Plan.

Key Strategic Themes

It is proposed to update the key strategic themes within the Community Vision and the Council Plan to make these sit together in a more cohesive manner with similar style for each. This also allows greater focus and clearer communication around five outward focused themes supported by two organisational themes as below.

Current Strategic themes

- Safe, Strong Communities
- Enriching Lives
- A Clean and Green Borough
- Right Homes, Right Places
- Keeping the Borough Moving
- Changing the Way We Work For You

Proposed revised strategic themes

- Providing Safe, Strong Communities
- Enriching Lives
- Enjoying a Clean and Green Borough
- Delivering the Right Homes, in the Right Places
- Keeping the Borough Moving

Supported by two organisational themes or enablers

- Being the Best we can be
- Changing the Way we Work for You

Emerging Priorities

Since the Plan was originally written there are several emerging priorities which are being built in through this refresh. The detail of these is contained in the Council Plan (see Appendix 1) but they are highlighted below:

- Equality – including working towards “Achieving” in the LGA Equality Framework
- Tackling poverty – being picked up through development of a partnership Anti-Poverty Strategy and supporting 4 year programme
- Customer excellence – ensuring that residents are put at the heart of everything we do and delivering a programme to support this
- Data and insight – driving better use of data at all levels of the council to provide intelligence and support evidence based decision making

- Health and wellbeing – supporting delivery of the new strategy and leading an early intervention approach
- UNICEF Child Friendly Area Programme – maximising on the opportunities of being one of the few councils accepted onto the programme embedding children’s rights within systems and services
- Social care reform – preparing for the changes to charging and responding to the increasing demand for care

As well as the priorities set out above which have been incorporated, it is clear that there is not much reference to the statutory, day-to-day services for which the council is responsible within the Plan. These have therefore been threaded throughout the refreshed Council Plan enabling staff to see how they are contributing to and involved in the Council’s success.

LGA Peer Review Feedback

Whilst there were no surprises to the feedback received from the LGA peer review held in November, there are three aspects which we identified for increased priority and prominence in addressing:

- Restate and bring to life a narrative about the Council's ambitions for its residents to deliver the future vision for Wokingham - the place, the people, and the opportunities
- Ensure there is a commitment to a long-term vision for the Borough co-designed and co-delivered with partners to become the focus for the entire community
- Further embedding of the Council vision ensuring a golden thread throughout all the strategies, identifying the impact that the adopted strategies have on the council’s priorities and delivery plans, and what a priority and non-priority means

These have all been incorporated within the refreshed Council Plan and work programmes are being developed to bring about the changes or focus required.

Annual Review

The annual review, included as Appendices 2 and 3, sets out some key achievements for the Council during 2020/21 and 2021/22: providing an opportunity to better promote the work and achievements of the Council.

BUSINESS CASE

It is important that the changes proposed and highlighted above are included at this point in time to demonstrate the priority given to these areas of work. It is expected that these changes will be delivered over a number of years, but it is not appropriate to wait longer before the full review of the Council Plan is concluded.

By acting now on these priority areas of work, the Council is best able to respond to the increased challenges that many people are facing; can be seen to be tackling inequality and poverty and embedding inclusivity as a key thread throughout our work.

Work to address the LGA peer review feedback will lead to short term improvements including:

- A clear communications and marketing strategy will be established with a supporting campaign to sell the council and the Borough
- Working with key partners across the public, voluntary and community sectors in the borough to establish a vision for Wokingham Borough, as a place, with clear aspirations

- Influencing alignment of shared priorities and objectives across our partners to maximise benefits for residents and focus Council strategies, policies and delivery plans
- Mapping strategies to establish a clear hierarchy and cascade from the Community Vision and Council Plan through other strategies, rationalising what is a strategy and ensuring that these are focussed on the agreed priorities.

All these initiatives help to better communicate what the council is about, what it is seeking to achieve and how it is working with partners to achieve this: increasing focus on priorities and improving outcomes for residents.

Whilst the LGA peer review programme is voluntary, it is important to address the feedback received in a timely manner. Failing to do so would impact the council's reputation with the LGA and amongst peers.

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

Other Financial Information

The Council Plan will be delivered within existing resources, if any additional funding is required a further report would be brought to the Executive.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

There is no consultation being carried out as part of this refresh: the more detailed review of the plan later in the year will include a more comprehensive consultation process, engaging with stakeholders in identification of changes.

Public Sector Equality Duty

The initial Council Plan was supported by an EqIA and the review to be undertaken later in the year will also take the same approach. The refresh is only making small changes that help to increase the focus on equalities, inequality and disadvantage across the Borough.

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

There are no changes proposed within this refresh that would impact negatively on carbon neutrality aspirations.

List of Background Papers
Council Plan 2020-24
Annual Review 2020/21
Annual Review 2021/22

Contact Mark Gwynne	Service Insight, Strategy & Inclusion
Telephone 07710 465612	Email mark.gwynne@wokingham.gov.uk

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Wokingham Borough Council Plan 2020 - 2024

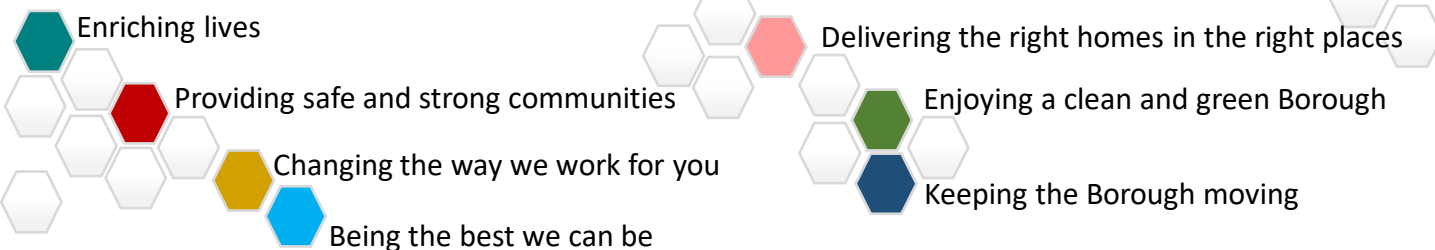
Supporting our Community Vision for Wokingham Borough to be:

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



Refreshed February 2022

Our Community Vision for Wokingham Borough



Our Community Vision is for Wokingham Borough to be a great place to live, learn work and grow and a great place to do business. This Council Plan is a tool for our organisation, supporting our vision, to identify how we will deliver on these commitments to our community.

Introduction from the Chief Executive, Susan Parsonage and Leader, John Halsall

Through consultation, our residents and partners told us that they were most concerned about the impact of development upon communities and that some people face challenges with finding an affordable home. People also told us of their frustrations with traffic delays and disruptions around the Borough. Hence within this plan we have identified what we can do to ensure we are **Delivering the Right Homes in the Right Places** and that we are **Keeping the Borough Moving**.

Residents also agreed with the importance of protecting our vulnerable people to ensure we are **Providing Safe and Strong Communities** and for Wokingham Borough to offer good leisure opportunities for children and adults, as well as excellent education so that we support our residents to lead happy, healthy **Enriching Lives**. To reflect this, we are increasing our focus on equality and tackling poverty with the Borough.

The impact of climate change is a pressing concern both globally and locally and we are committed to playing as full a role as possible to achieve a carbon neutral Borough so that we can live: **Enjoying a Clean and Green Borough** now and for future generations to come. To achieve these ambitions, we will continue to improve, **Changing the way we work for you** putting our residents and businesses at the heart of what we do, delivering a high standard of customer service whilst building resilience in our organisation and in our communities.

The Council Plan identifies our ambitions focused on **Being the Best we can be** and the steps we will take to nurture and develop colleagues across our organisation to realise these ambitions within the budget available.

We want to improve outcomes for our residents by delivering these strategic priorities together with staff and our partners. Despite the challenges we face, we are ambitious, committed to and passionate about, delivering improvements; striving for excellent and efficient services.

The Council Plan sets out what we want to achieve for each strategic priority, what we will do to get there and what success will look like. The Plan will be monitored and corporate performance measures have been developed to track our progress in delivering these strategic objectives.



Our Values

Our values help shape and guide our behaviour. By demonstrating these values, it will help us move forwards together to achieve our future ambitions for Wokingham Borough. Our values are:

Customer Focussed

Put ourselves in our customers shoes and listen, to deliver services we would like to receive.

Taking ownership

Taking responsibility for issues and address them with actions we see through to resolution. Be accountable for our service delivery in the context of our community wellbeing and Council objectives.

One team

Work jointly with our residents, colleagues, councillors and partners, across any boundaries, to ensure efficient, effective delivery on behalf of our communities.

Being ambitious

Aiming for excellence in the outcomes we pursue and the way we do things. Being forward-thinking, innovative, entrepreneurial and accepting risks where possible to do so.

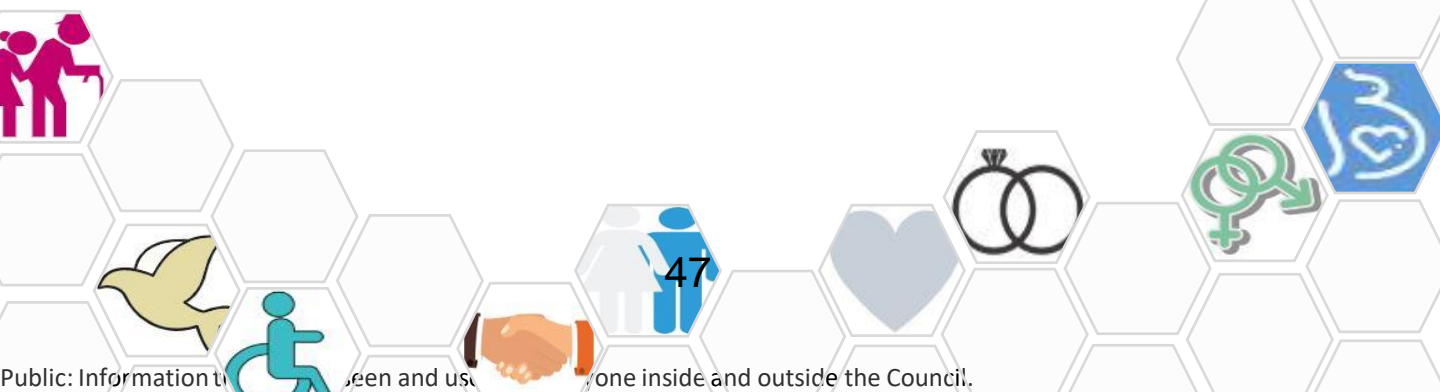
Our Commitment to Equality

Each Borough is unique in its diversity, challenges and opportunities and Wokingham is no exception.

Whilst being an affluent area with great opportunities and low levels of deprivation, there are challenges to ensure these benefits can be accessed and shared by all. Through this plan we want to achieve a more equal Borough, where everyone is respected and has access to the opportunities that the Borough has to offer. As such, we are building inclusivity as a theme to run through the Council Plan and the Council's supporting strategies.

To do this we commit to the following in all of our work and service provision:

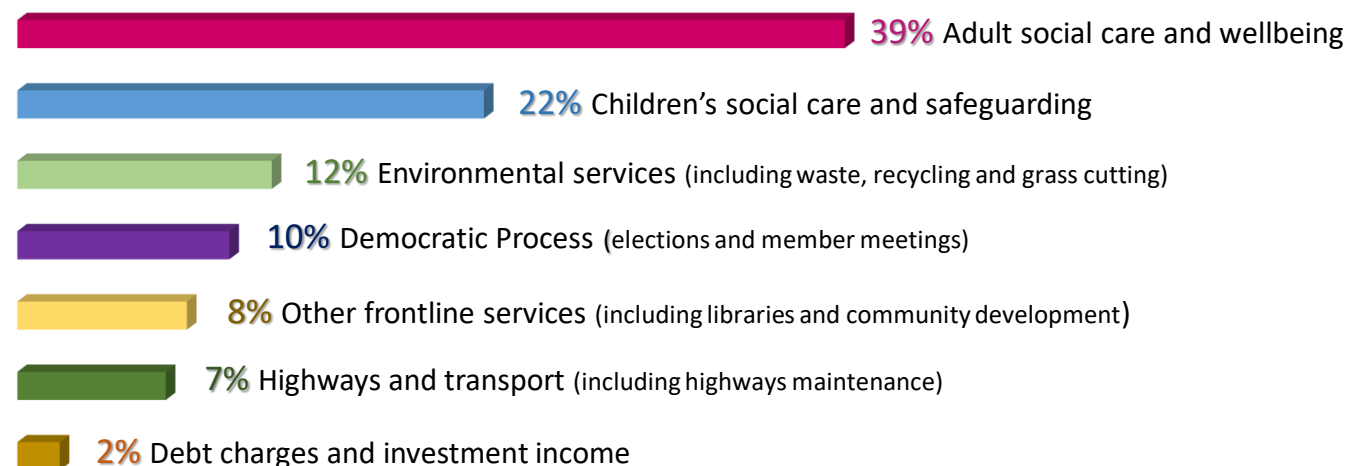
- Work with our partners to promote equality and good relations between communities and diverse groups
- Consistently strive to eliminate discrimination for reasons of a person's age, gender identity, ethnicity, sexual orientation, sex, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, religion or belief, or socio-economic circumstances within our communities and within our workplace.
- Ensure new projects, policies, strategies, service changes and communication take account of all the needs of our users.
- Increase our understanding of the communities we serve to inform the decisions we make.
- Continue to monitor the impact of our employment policies and practices.



Our Budget

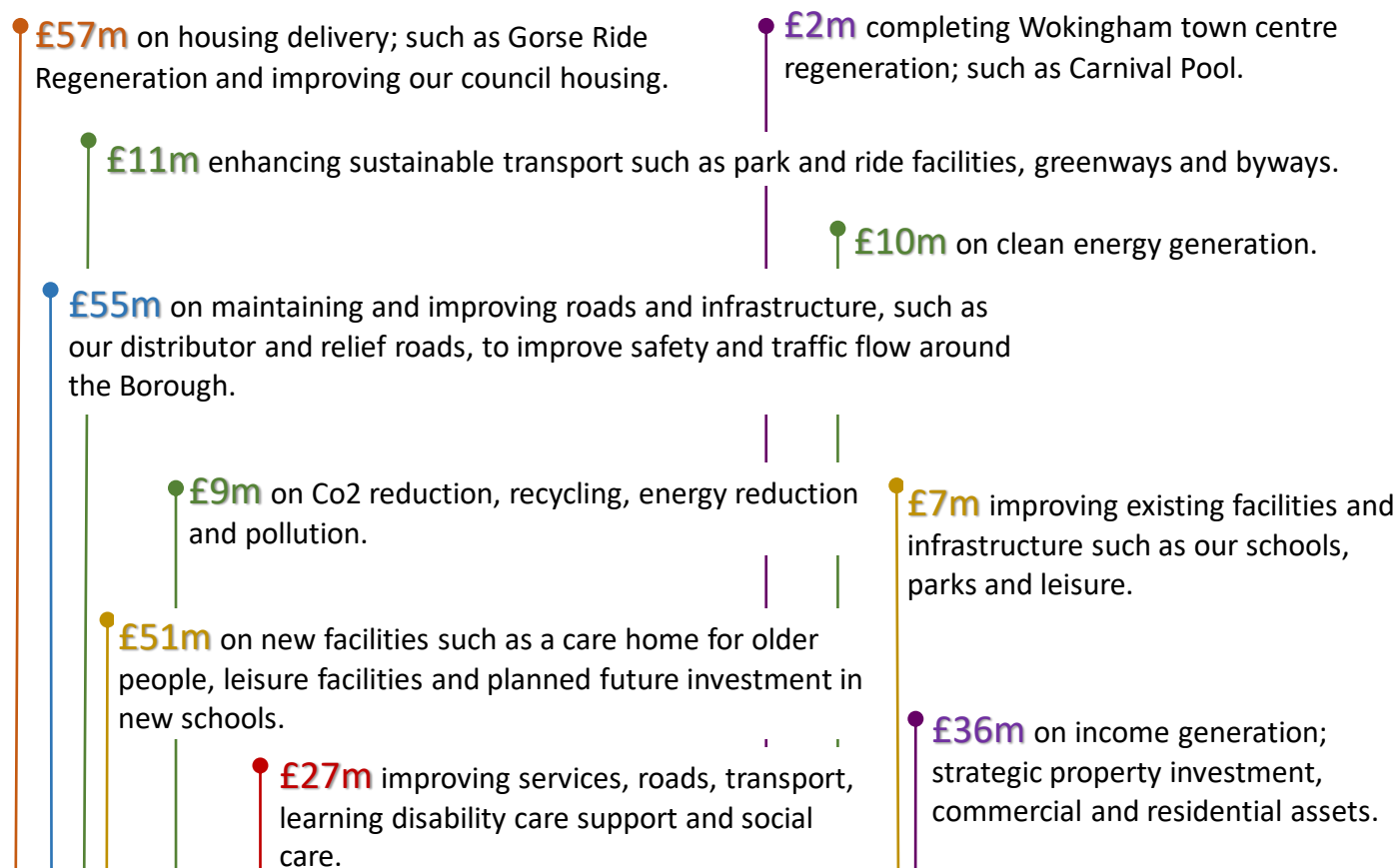
The budget represents the Council's strategies and priorities from a financial perspective. We have a duty to fulfil statutory services, such as adult social care, children's services and waste. The majority of our income is used for these statutory services and with increased demand, we continue to be innovative and diligent to safeguard those services you value the most and consider new ways of generating further income to invest back into our community.

Our £144.7m budget for the first year, 2022/23, of our Council Plan will be allocated as follows:



Our capital programme 2022-25

Some of the ways we are utilising our capital programme 2022-25 over the next three years are highlighted below. Further information about our budget for 2022/23 and future year estimates are detailed in our Medium Term Financial Plan and Capital Strategy.



Our challenges

Wokingham Borough has a growing population with many thriving communities but with an increasing proportion of residents with long term health conditions, such as dementia, and people with learning disabilities or difficulties, it is important to address and manage demand for long term care and maintain high quality services.

We will work with our partners to

- Protect and safeguard our children, young and vulnerable people.
- Offer quality care and support, at the right time, to reduce the need for long term care.
- Nurture our communities: enabling them to thrive and families to flourish.
- Ensure our Borough and communities remain safe for all.

What we will do

- Maintain a relentless focus on safeguarding.
- Work together to shape services around the needs of the individual and deliver them in a way that empowers residents to live independent and healthy lives.
- Plan, commission and monitor high quality services that deliver value for money.
- Work with residents and providers in an inclusive manner to ensure sustainable local provision of care services and a thriving voluntary sector.
- Work with families and young people to ensure planned transitions from children to adult services.
- Work with our health partners to improve access to primary healthcare and better integrate local health and social care services.
- Work with partners to tackle anti-social behaviour and increase the resilience of local communities.

What success will look like

- Residents feel safe and secure in their neighbourhoods and in the services they receive.
- Improvements in health, wellbeing and independence in the community.
- Greater access to opportunities through the voluntary sector: increasing inclusivity; reducing social isolation and preventing loneliness.
- Increased opportunities for self-support, reducing the demand for ongoing care and support.
- Wokingham Borough is the very best place for people with a learning disability to live, learn, work and feel supported.

Enriching lives

Our challenges

We are tackling health and well-being in Wokingham Borough, with a particular focus on emotional health and well-being, early intervention and prevention. Broad measures of well-being mask pockets of deprivation, health and economic need and those living in poverty. Over the last couple of years there has been an increase in the number of children, young people and adults seeking support for mental and emotional well-being support.

We will work with our partners to

- Champion excellent 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 enable healthy choices for everyone.
- Engage and empower our communities through arts and culture and create a sense of identity for the Borough which people feel part of.
- Support growth in our local economy and help to build business.

What we will do

- Work with our partners to make the Borough a place where businesses want to invest and are supported to stay and grow: providing opportunities for our residents.
- Support and challenge all schools to provide the right environment for effective learning and good emotional well-being for pupils.
- Work with our partners to provide excellent adult education and training opportunities that meets the skills needs of our employers.
- Work across the organisation with all partners to deliver our health and well-being strategy to support residents to lead happy, healthy lives.
- Maximise opportunities for physical and social activities and make sure everyone is able to participate if they want to.
- Increase the opportunity for creativity to flourish through a vibrant arts and culture offering which is accessible to everyone.

What success will look like

- A strong local economy with continued inward investment into the Borough.
- Thriving villages and town centres offering residents and visitors a range of retail and leisure options.
- Increased educational attainment overall and a narrowing of the gap between disadvantaged children, those with protected characteristics and their peers.
- Enhanced working across all partners to reduce health inequality.
- An increase in all residents engaging in active, healthy, cultural and social opportunities.
- More local people involved in volunteering and community activities, taking pride in their neighbourhood and, where possible, looking after their own wellbeing and that of their families and neighbours.

Our challenges

We have a challenge within Wokingham Borough to manage and balance need with requirements for new housing, whilst protecting the quality of our environment and the sustainability of our existing communities. Creating places fit for the future, that are inclusive to all and have the right infrastructure in place. Ensuring that our homes are affordable, sustainable and of good quality and supporting those with specialist needs or at risk of homelessness.

We will work with our partners to

- Offer quality, affordable, sustainable homes fit for the future.
- Ensure the right infrastructure is in place, early, 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, where it is needed most, to live independently in their own homes.

What we will do

- Ensure a planned approach to house building and place shaping through master-planning and community involvement.
- Develop policies to make sure development is vibrant with the right mix of housing, employment, leisure, community uses and green infrastructure that is well connected and meets community needs.
- Ensure our existing built environment and valued green spaces are protected.
- Maximise the delivery of affordable housing through developers, social landlords and our own housing companies.
- Work closely with our partners and the voluntary sector to deliver a variety of housing options that meet the needs of vulnerable and disabled residents.
- Work with all landlords and home owners to improve the quality, efficiency and sustainability of the Borough's existing housing stock.

What success will look like

- Where possible, all new development is delivered through a planned approach minimising the impact on existing communities and protecting our valued green space.
- Local residents are supported and protected during any new development in their neighbourhood and that any essential infrastructure is delivered up front.
- New developments have their own sense of place that adds to the quality of life and sense of community for those residents living there.
- Sufficient affordable, specialist housing to meet the requirements of all those residents in priority need.

Our challenges

We have a challenge to effectively manage high volumes of traffic travelling through the Borough, to reduce congestion, deal with road works and address strategic connections. We must also balance this with supporting and enabling behaviour change in residents' travel choices and maximising the use of digital connectivity and smart city technology.

We will work with our partners to

- Maintain and improve our roads, footpaths and cycleways.
- Tackle traffic congestion and 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 in offering affordable, accessible public transport with good transport links.

What we will do

- Ensure a strategic approach to highway investment and maintenance.
- Increase opportunities across the Borough to access public transport and use electric vehicles.
- Continue to promote and develop the MyJourney programme as a tool to help residents and visitors make sustainable transport choices.
- Work with our partners and the community to review and implement the Local Transport Plan and the walking and cycling strategy.
- Work in partnership to explore new technologies that contribute to an intelligent transport system that makes the best use of the existing road network.

What success will look like

- Less congestion on our roads and more efficient journey times across the Borough.
- Increased use of public transport, walking and cycling initiatives.
- Increased number of electric vehicle charging points.
- A well maintained road network and improved safety for all road users.
- Improved air quality.

Our challenges

To tackle climate change, achieve carbon neutrality while adapting for a growing population and seeking out value for money. There is a challenge in encouraging behaviour change around waste, recycling and transport around the Borough whilst addressing air quality and respiratory health and protecting valued spaces.

We will work with our partners to

- Play as full a role as possible to achieve a carbon neutral Borough, sustainable for the future.
- Protect our Borough, keep it clean and enhance our green areas for people to enjoy.
- Reduce our waste, promote re-use, increase recycling and improve biodiversity.
- Connect our parks and open spaces with green cycleways.

What we will do

- Deliver against our Climate Emergency Action Plan and ensure becoming carbon neutral is given due weight through all our strategies and decision making.
- Ensure our colleagues across the council and our contractors, take measures where possible to reduce carbon emissions including making our own buildings more energy efficient.
- Help and support our residents and businesses to make behavioural changes that actively address the challenges of climate change.
- Continue to tackle fly-tipping, litter, graffiti and waste generation.
- Enhance our existing green areas and valued open spaces.

What success will look like

- Residents and businesses change their behaviours to do more to tackle climate change and the Council is seen as setting a positive example.
- The Borough is recognised as a flagship authority in addressing the causes and impacts of climate change.
- A greener Borough, with more trees and a richer biodiversity with improved and more accessible, open spaces.
- Increased recycling and a reduction in general waste produced by each household.
- A more joined up walking and cycling network with more people choosing to walk, cycle or use public transport.

Our challenges

Be a smarter and more efficient organisation, developing effective and accessible digital solutions: making it easier for our customers, residents and businesses to work and communicate with us. Develop a better understanding of our communities needs and demands and build capacity for innovation across our organisation. Ensure we continually improve the delivery our statutory obligations placing our residents at the heart of everything we do.

We will work with our partners to

- Be relentlessly customer focussed.
- Work with our partners to provide efficient, effective, joined up services which are focussed around our customers.
- Communicate better with customers, 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.

What we will do

- Strengthen our understanding of current and future needs and demand so that we can plan, design and deliver the best outcomes for all our residents.
- Listen to what our communities are telling us and use this feedback to shape service delivery, challenge how we do business and manage expectations in an open and honest way.
- Develop an inclusive service delivery approach, in a way that promotes the independence of residents, and harnesses the digital opportunities available.
- Work in partnership to deliver community led solutions that address the issues that matter most to our residents.
- Develop a proactive approach with our partners in communicating, celebrating our shared success and promoting how the community can get involved.
- Be ambitious in all that we do, ensuring we have the right resource and governance to allow us to deliver at pace and manage demand.

What success will look like

- A customer-centred way of working that is responsive to the needs of our communities, is built on a foundation of customer engagement and results in improved satisfaction levels.
- A community led approach to meeting the needs of our residents, that is focused on the right outcome, delivered in the right way at the right time.
- Communication and feedback that encourages engagement with residents, businesses and partners in an inclusive and informative way.
- Thinking differently about how to manage the needs of our community, using a demand management approach to service delivery, with high ambition and desire to continuously improve all that we do.
- Effective use of digital technology, underpinning the very core of our organisation, that drives innovative new ways of working, helps to understand how things will change in the future and inform decision making.

Be the best we can be

Our challenges

Strive to be the best we can be as service provider, an enabler, a partner, an employer and as colleagues. Be innovative and ambitious, harnessing the skills and enthusiasm of all our colleagues, in an inclusive manner, be recognised nationally and locally as an excellent organisation and a great place to work. Be clear with our residents of our ambition and vision for the Borough and its place in the wider Berkshire community.

We will work with our partners to

- Be an organisation that values and invests in all our colleagues and is seen as an employer of choice.
- Embed a culture that supports ambition, promotes empowerment and develops new ways of working.
- Use our governance and scrutiny structures to support a learning and continuous improvement approach to the way we do business.
- Be a commercial council that is innovative, whilst being inclusive, in its approach with a clear focus on being financially resilient.
- Maximise opportunities to secure funding and investment for the Borough.
- Establish a renewed vision for the Borough with clear aspirations.

What we will do

- Place our shared vision for the Borough at the centre of the Council's plans and underpinning strategies.
- Develop a People Strategy that is centred around recognition and development of all colleagues across the Council.
- Nurture our colleagues and encourage them to be the best they can be, through opportunities to learn and develop.
- Strengthen our scrutiny approach to ensure we learn from our experiences, consider risks and make improvements.
- Create a commercial mind-set in the council, that promotes the ability to deliver services differently, demands innovation and ensures we are able to maximise our assets for the benefit of our communities and to deliver financial sustainability.
- Be assertive and robust in our approach to the financial challenges, by developing our investment strategy, enhancing commissioning and contract management, seeking additional investment and grant funding to realise our ambitions.
- Develop a communication, engagement and marketing strategy that will promote the Borough and communicate the work of the council to residents and beyond.
- Develop a corporate strategy function that enables a golden thread to run down from our shared vision, ensuring our strategies, policies and plans are focused to deliver what matters most to our residents and the Borough.

What success will look like

- Colleagues are passionate about what they do and proud to work at our organisation, they understand our goals and their role in helping us to achieve them.
- All colleagues are given the support and opportunities to develop and grow and, where possible, are able to follow a career path that supports their passion and ambition.
- We will have a proportionate approach to risk that encourages innovation whilst ensuring successful delivery.
- A forward thinking, innovative approach to organisational planning and delivery, with a strong commercial approach to everything that we do.
- A council wide approach to the financial challenges and solutions, increased grant contribution to support service delivery, and shared expertise in contract management across the organisation.

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WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

**CORPORATE PLAN:
ANNUAL REVIEW
2020/2021**

**ACHIEVEMENT IN THE
FACE OF ADVERSITY**





SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION:

In February 2020, we set out our vision of Wokingham Borough as "A great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business". Later that same month, the first case of Covid-19 was reported in the borough signalling the start of the most challenging 12 months we have faced as a local authority.

Our vision is underpinned by our strategic priorities.

There are five outward focused priorities:

- Safe, Strong Communities
- Enriching Lives
- Right Homes, Right Place
- Keeping the Borough Moving
- A Clean Green Borough

Additionally, there are two inward focused enablers:

- Being the best we can be
- Changing the way we work for you

These set our ambition to continuously improve, whilst effectively and proactively meeting the needs of our communities.

This Annual Review sets out how we have risen to the challenge of Covid-19 and how we have made progress towards these priorities during 2020/21. It documents our achievement in the face of adversity.

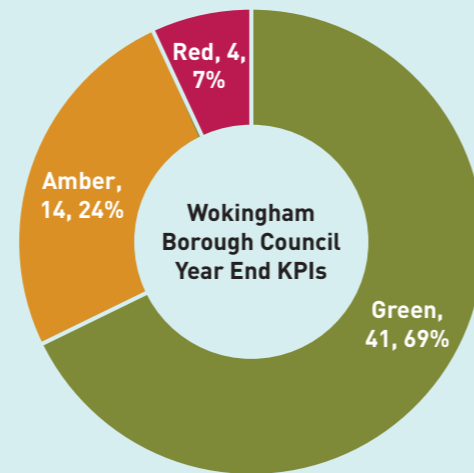
Summary of Operational Performance Indicators

Our key performance indicators (KPIs) show how we are performing against our priorities and statutory obligations. We have 59 KPIs, of which 55 were above or near target for the year 2020/21 despite the impact of Covid-19.

The 4 red results all had significant impact from Covid-19:

- Leisure Centre visitor numbers
- Leisure Centre participation
- Library visits
- People with long term care receiving a review

The first three of these were impacted through closure of the services.



SECTION 2: COVID-19 RESPONSE:

Through the spring and early summer of 2020, the need to respond to Covid-19 was almost all-encompassing for us and it continued to be a key area of focus throughout 2020/21, in particular in Adult Social Care.

- Adults Social Care along with 153 redeployed staff carried out 20,000 welfare checks to the vulnerable. Additionally, made 2,400 calls to adults known to social care were made and 500 calls to carers
- More 400,000 pieces of PPE distributed to frontline carers
- Care Home Taskforce created to rapidly put in place a cohesive protocol that could be immediately implemented to ensure providers were effectively supported to mitigate the risks of COVID. This ensured providers were well supported and enabled enduring relationships and partnerships to develop. This also enabled statutory oversight into care settings to be maintained

- The Public Health Team provide consistent Public Health and Health Protection data and advice to elected members, corporate leadership and the COVID Taskforce to ensure agile responses across the pandemic underpinned by evidence, national guidance and based on Public Health expertise
- Provided leadership in the management of outbreaks in high-risk settings across communities within the Borough
- Supported local children with free school meal provision during lockdown and over the school holiday periods
- 400 more people than the previous year were discharged from hospital back into the borough
- Voluntary and Community Sector action group was created to support the COVID response, in particular the development of the One Front Door initiative, access to prescriptions, social isolation and creation of the Food Hub - 5,000 food deliveries to 1,500 residents and more than 900 prescriptions delivered during the first lockdown





SECTION 3: SOUND FINANCES TO UNDERPIN ALL COUNCIL ACTIVITY:

- £53 million in support to local business through 1,147 separate grants worth £33 million and reliefs and discounts of £20 million
- 4,800 engagements with businesses through the Public Protection Partnership and COVID Marshall to businesses across the borough
- Provided accurate and timely information to residents with health advice, Government guidance and regulations, sign-posting to support and service update via Covid-19 e-newsletters with more than 40,000 subscriptions
- More than 500 volunteers worked at our vaccination clinics and 200 signed up to help at our rapid testing centres
- Public Health Co-leadership in the set up and running of the COVID data cell to ensure a data driven response considering the data and evidence to keep all communities within the Borough safe
- Test and trace - 1,292 calls made to residents who were self-isolating. 220 of these have been referred to One Front Door for additional support
- More than £360,000 paid out in the Covid Winter Grant Scheme
- Worked continuously with partners in the set up and ongoing planning and implementation of the COVID vaccination delivery programme for the protection of the health of our residents.
- Sourced emergency accommodation for care workers coming into the Borough to assist in our care homes
- Seamless move to almost all colleague working from home allowed for almost all services to continue uninterrupted
- Looked ahead by building a robust Recovery Strategy that will allow the community and local businesses to thrive.
- Retained face-to-face visits to the most vulnerable children and families, keeping them safe in unprecedented circumstances. This dual task was addressed through swift assessment and prioritisation of children and young people for retention of face-to-face visits, use of strict PPE and safety protocols, and introducing virtual visiting across the broad range of support activity. In 20/21 over 95% of visits to children subject to Child Protection Plans were conducted face-to-face, amounting to over 4000 visits.
- Enhanced support to schools to promote safe and effective learning. The Council provided a daily email update to all headteachers informing them of Department of Education guidance and legislative changes that affect schools in relation to COVID, weekly virtual drop in's for senior school leaders that have been well attended; weekly thematic sessions for teaching staff to support COVID related responses in schools; guidance in relation to accessing technology for pupils to support their remote learning, through periods of lockdown or bubble closure; support for Lateral Flow Testing arrangements and contact tracing (including outbreak management support); and celebrating the achievements of pupils, students and teachers who have worked tirelessly throughout these challenging times.
- During the early phase of Lockdown, our GP and Voluntary Sector Partners noted that people in the Borough were finding managing their mental health challenging. In response, a health and social care system wide Mental Health Training session was implemented
- Produced a library of free online workout videos for residents to help people stay healthy in lockdown

Following the start of the COVID pandemic, we took immediate action to set up robust, enhanced financial monitoring and reporting. Financial trackers were introduced across all Directorates with a Council wide tracker developed at both a summary level and a detail level. The finance team prioritised the monitoring of the financial impact, working closely with all services to understand the implications. This was a complex task.

Where known, implications were considered as part of budget setting for the 21/22 financial year and will also be considered in future budget setting rounds.

Despite the impact of COVID the Council was able to deliver on its savings targets. A revenue budget of £143.5m (£129.7m expenditure plus £13.8m depreciation) was approved at its meeting on 20 February 2020. The actual spend for 2020/21 was £0.8m favourable variance to budget.

The Council continues to invest in its asset base in order to improve services to residents and to support the financial sustainability of the organisation. Capital expenditure in the year totalled £123.5m (2019/20 £171.3m) as set out in report to the Council's Executive on 24 June 2021. Occupation levels in the Wokingham Town Centre Redevelopment site has remained on target with no losses of tenancy.

We adopted a sympathetic approach to the collection of both Council Tax and Business Rates through the pandemic that balanced the need to protect income streams against the pressures felt by residents and businesses. Collection of both of taxes has remained high, at similar levels to the year before, at a 99% collection rate with support mechanisms in place to implement government schemes for those in hardship.

For full details of the Council's financial performance please see the End of Year Statement of Accounts.





SECTION 4: DELIVERING ON OUR PRIORITIES



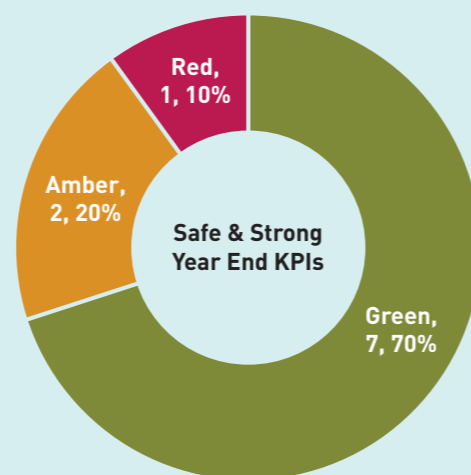
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SAFE, STRONG COMMUNITIES

Strong performance is shown in the KPIs set against this focus area, with nine out of ten KPIs on or near target. The single red KPI is as "Proportion of people receiving long term care who were subject to a review in the last 12 months" and this was due to a change of focus during COVID which has had an impact in the last quarter of the municipal year.



60

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS:

Launched 'Kooth' to provide online mental health support for young people:

Kooth provides young people a safe and secure means of accessing support from a professional team of qualified counsellors, therapists and support workers. In the first nine months, the 1,295 young people in the region registered for Kooth logging in approximately 10,000 times. 97.8% of children and young people would recommend Kooth to a friend. 92% found it what they were looking for.

Increased spending to domestic abuse support:

Awarded the £1.5million contract to provide domestic abuse to Cranstoun. Additional funding was included to manage the increased demand for services.

Mental health support:

Launched 18-month pilot service with Berkshire Community Foundation and Oxfordshire MIND to help people suffering problems such as anxiety, isolation and stress.

Formed the Adult Safeguarding Hub to improve the safety of vulnerable adults:

Adults Social Care maintained an average of 87% of safe guarding concerns raised having decisions assigned in 48hrs despite the number of safe guarding concerns increasing by 37.5% compared to the previous year.

Delivered core Adult Social Care responsibilities:

Adult Social Care managed 25% more demand, an increase of 1,193 contacts, whilst improving performance. Implemented a new way of working called the Strengths Based Approach. All staff have received training in an approach which enables them to spend more time with our customers to identify what is important to the person, to build on their own strengths and support networks, and to utilise the wealth of voluntary services available in the community. The emphasis of this approach is about positive outcomes for our residents.

Local Action Groups:

The Public Health team has facilitated the setting up and ongoing co-chairing of these groups to engage key partners and bring them together to deliver against health and wellbeing priorities.

Substance misuse provision:

Recommissioned a specialist substance misuse provision for local residents, including securing additional funding through successful bids.

Adult Healthy Weight Management programme and Active Movement Programme:

These two programmes have been recommissioned for schools, with national funding secured for additional local provision.

High Quality Care:

The borough has 52 care homes and 44 registered home care providers. These providers deliver a high level of quality and 100% of our nursing home providers were rated as either good or outstanding in their most recent Care Quality Commission inspections. 95% of residential care and 85% of home care providers are rated as either good or outstanding.

Adopted an Adult Social Care Strategy:

The strategy has four priorities

- Prevent, reduce and delay the need for formal care and support
- Keeping people safe
- Involve people in their care and support
- Work in partnership and commission services that deliver quality and value for money

Adopted our Learning Disability Strategy:

This aims to:

- Provide more social activities and social interactions for learning disability clients
- Improve housing for learning disability clients to maximise their independence
- Create a dedicated learning disability team within the Adults Social Care structure
- Create a transitions service that can help learning disability clients transition into adulthood safely.
- Improve partnerships with Health to ensure better health outcome for learning disability clients
- Support carers who care for learning disability clients





SECTION 4: DELIVERING ON OUR PRIORITIES



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SAFE, STRONG COMMUNITIES

Adopted our Voluntary Sector Strategy:

This aims to prevent, reduce and delay the need for formal care and support by providing information, advice and the right support at the right time so people can remain independent for longer. In the last municipal year it has:

- Created a VCS action group & Wokingham Borough Community Response. Delivering welfare checks in partnership with the Link Visiting Scheme
- Established the VCS Partnership Board
- Delivered improvements through the MIND mental health service
- Retendered VCS including a service gap analysis to ensure the services the Council commissions meets the needs of residents.

Provided more specialist accommodation:

A programme launched to source specialist accommodation for people with Learning and/or Physical Disabilities or Mental Health needs. Working with Place Commissioning, Housing Services and providers to match people with suitable properties to meet their needs. This has delivered:

- A Specialist bungalow built and now occupied
- Identified 10 schemes that will provide specialist accommodation for 45 people with complex needs over the next 2 years

Home for Hospital:

Worked with health and other key partners to ensure that residents can be discharged from hospital into the right setting as quickly and safely as possible. This approach resulted in 400 more people discharged back into the borough compared to the previous year. The Council now has:

- Robust system wide governance and performance monitoring in place
- Implementation of the Rapid Community Discharge Team
- Launched an additional service run by AGE UK, a voluntary sector partner, on behalf of the Wokingham Integrated Partnership. As Winter Pressure on the Hospital increased, alongside the pressures of COVID, the partnership sought support to safely discharge people without a care need into their homes. AGE UK supported with ensuring the person returned home safely, had the heating on, had shopping in the cupboards and medication all ready. They also then contacted the person for several weeks after the discharge. Over 150 people have been supported since April, with 464 referrals to 35 organisation made.

Optalis – Council owned company providing direct care:

Optalis has continued to provide high levels of good quality support. This is supported by effective quality assurance and governance systems, resulting in 'GOOD' Care Quality Commission ratings. Supported employment service has remained no.1 in the South East for two years running and no.3 in the UK for Learning Disabilities employment outcomes

Mental Health Support Teams in schools:

As part of the National Pilot, the programme has supported 205 children across 12 schools in providing immediate mental health and emotional wellbeing support. It is anticipated that following the National Pilot, MHST's will be rolled out to all schools.

Domestic Abuse:

Domestic abuse is a high priority for the Council as we recognise the significant impact living with domestic abuse has on individuals, families and the whole community.

A report commissioned on our response led to the appointment of a Domestic Abuse coordinator in November 2020 and the decision to substantially increase our investment in the commissioning of specialist support services.

A review of the training offer on domestic abuse was undertaken with refreshed e-learning packages and virtual training sessions delivered to increase understanding of the unique ways in which domestic abuse affects individuals and their children.

A new Partnership Board was formed to deliver expected new statutory duties linked to the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and prepare for in depth analysis of how domestic abuse is affecting residents across Wokingham borough. To support our wider response, we also created a new Networking Group to bring together the over 40 agencies working in Wokingham borough who can make a real difference to the lives of the over 2000 residents who reported domestic abuse in this year.

Public Protection Partnership:

In March 2021, the council took the decision to withdraw from the Public Protection Partnership so it can better focus on the real issues affecting residents' quality of life.

Dealing with many environmental health issues such as low-level nuisances and anti-social behaviour including noise and illegal bonfires had been the responsibility of the Public Protection Partnership (PPP) with West Berkshire and Bracknell Forest councils.

But from April 2022, most services previously provided by the PPP will be provided by a new Wokingham Borough Council team that will focus on residents' priorities and improve responsiveness to address local issues. The new enforcement and safety service will include anti-social behaviour, animal wardens, health and safety, food hygiene, and licensing and will be designed to respond swiftly to concerns whenever and wherever they occur.





SECTION 4: DELIVERING ON OUR PRIORITIES



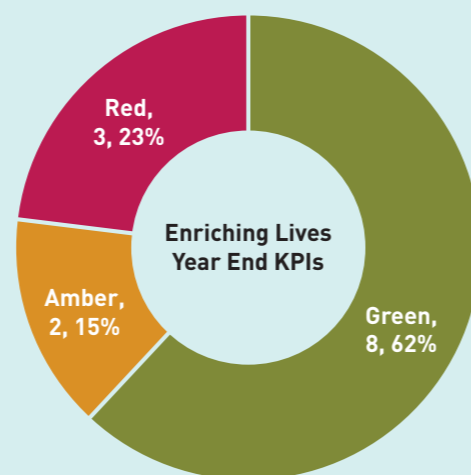
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ENRICHING LIVES

Ten of the 13 KPIs in this area are on or near target. The three that are not are a direct result of national restrictions caused by lockdown: usage of leisure centres, participation in leisure centre activities and number of visits to libraries.



Award for Addington expansion project:

The £4.4million expansion and new sixth form, which is allowing 50 more students with SEND to attend the school, won an Education Business Award in November 2020.

Alder Grove Church of England Primary School in Shinfield West:

The state-of-the-art school was built as part of the Shinfield West development and will grow to become a 420-place free school for pupils aged 4 to 11, with a 26 place nursery class. It opened in September 2020

California Country Park destination play area:

Work started in October 2020 on the new play area that includes new equipment, an inclusive sensory and water play area, a new woodland adventure trail and tree houses.

Dinton Activity Centre:

Work got underway in October 2020 on the £2.4million new centre that is the borough's first net zero carbon building project.

62

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS:

Rebuilt Bulmershe Leisure Centre:

Opened ahead of schedule in April 2020, the £14.5million centre includes a six-lane 25-metre swimming pool, a teaching pool with movable floor, a bigger gym plus a 'live well' (long-term condition) gym, a four-court sports hall, and an additional studio and café.

Carnival Hub:

Work started on the multi-million pound Carnival Hub, the last phase of our Wokingham town centre regeneration, this new centre will become the local destination for culture, sport and leisure and will feature two swimming pools (a six-lane 25m pool and teaching pool with moveable depth floor and splash pad); a larger fitness suite and specialist group cycling studio; two large studios; a four-court sports hall; a health and wellbeing centre; larger café; and space for children's parties. There will also be a large library including space for events and activities, a lending library, fun children's zone and space for exhibitions.





SECTION 4: DELIVERING ON OUR PRIORITIES



ENRICHING LIVES

Improvements to Foundry College:

More space was created at the school in Budes Gardens thanks to the £1.7million project, with work completed to modify buildings, relocate the temporary classrooms and landscape around the school site. Foundry College was created in September 2011, and it provides education and support to pupils who have been permanently excluded or are at risk of permanent exclusion, as well as those with medical needs who cannot attend school regularly. It has 47 students who are educated there full time.

Kickstart scheme launched:

The scheme provides job opportunities for young people who are currently on Universal Credit and are at risk of long-term unemployment. Each job placement is completely new, lasting for six months and helping young people to build their confidence and experience in the workplace; all while earning a regular wage for up to 25 hours per week.

Stabilised the children's social work workforce:

with recruitment of more permanent staff and a significantly reduced reliance on interim workers. Despite a national shortage of social workers, the proportion of interim social workers reduced this year from 37% to 30% and is projected to be 23% by September 2021

Deployed a new Compass Team which is achieving positive outcomes:

Since inception the compass team has successfully worked with 21 young people to reduce their risk of coming into care or placement breakdown. The team continues to work intensively with many more young people to address often complex issues.

Improved services for children and young people with SEND:

An Ofsted and Care Quality Commission revisit in early 2021 found that the Council have made sufficient progress in 5 of 6 areas, with a short Accelerated Progress Plan in place for the final area. The timeliness and quality of Education, Health and Care Plans has improved. It is now one of the strongest performing in the South East and higher than national average performance (86% EHCP's completed within 20 weeks of referral as at Q1 2021/22). The Council has commenced a new SEND Innovation and Improvement Programme that will take on the lead from the SEND Improvement Board.

Expanded Virtual School supporting Children in Care to include children aged 0-25:

The Council now support looked after children as they start school and continue to provide support for learners beyond their formal post 16 further education and into higher education. In addition, a new Assistant Head of the Virtual School has been appointed to support the response to the newly expanded duties to champion the educational outcomes of all children and young people who have, or have had, a social worker. It is anticipated that this will close the gap on outcomes between children with a social worker and their peers.

Local Action Groups:

The Public Health team has facilitated the setting up and ongoing co-chairing of these groups to engage key partners and bring them together to deliver against health and wellbeing priorities

Substance misuse provision:

Recommissioned a specialist substance misuse provision for local residents, including securing additional funding through successful bids

Adult Healthy Weight Management programme and Active Movement Programme:

These two programmes have been recommissioned for schools, with national funding secured for additional local provision

Promoting Equality, Diversity and Inclusion:

We've adopted a four year plan to take forward the wider equality agenda and tackle inequality in the borough this is aligned to the equality framework for local government, supporting progress towards the "achieving" level. The delivery of the action plan will allow the Council to:

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

Tackling social isolation through technology:

The Project 'Joy' app helps tackle social isolation by enabling individuals to access activities and it also enables referrals from a range of voluntary sector partners and adult social care.

Art and culture:

A new ten year strategy was approved in March with the focus of developing the quality and appeal of the cultural 'offer' across the borough. Launched the Wocca app to provide a one-stop real time guide to cultural events happening across the borough with a steady increase in take-up.





SECTION 4: DELIVERING ON OUR PRIORITIES



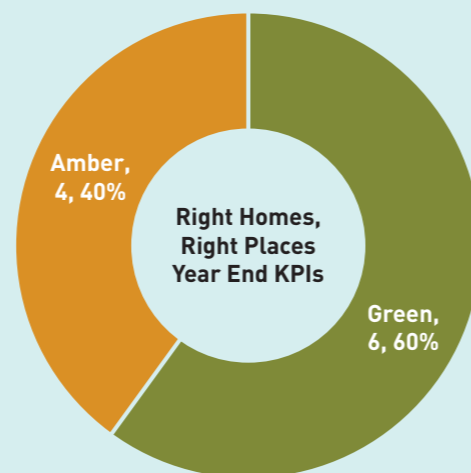
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RIGHT HOMES, RIGHT PLACES

All KPIs in this area were on or close to target. The amber KPIs are associated with the longer term planning: "New Home Survey", "Local Plan Update", "5 Year Housing Supply" and "Housing 1-4-5 Challenge". Even with these 4 amber KPIs the performance has been strong in this area.



The Central and East Berkshire Joint Minerals and Waste Local Plan:

The plan has been progressed with the publication consultation undertaken and subsequent submission of the plan to government for examination

South Wokingham major development:

Planning consent for 1,850 homes and accompanying facilities and infrastructure

Primary school building in Arborfield Green:

Progress on the new Farley Hill Primary. Hundreds of young people will be able to make the most of the new facilities, with space to expand for more than 600 pupils as and when it is needed.

Matthews Green Primary School:

construction progressing be ready for a potential opening in September 2022.

Work started on new community centre for Shinfield:

The community centre (a joint project with the parish council) is part of the Shinfield Parish major development which includes new homes and a district centre in Shinfield Village with a supermarket and other shops, as well as a neighbourhood centre in Spencers Wood. There are also two new primary schools, new playing fields and open spaces.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS:

Progress on the Local Plan Update:

Preparing a new Local Plan for the borough, including a revised strategy for consultation in autumn 2021, following the deliverability issues with the Grazeley garden town proposal which was a central plank of the Draft Local Plan consulted on in 2020:

- High level summary of responses to Draft Local Plan (2020) consultation published.
- Master planning work commissioned following cross party agreement.
- Technical evidence commissioned.
- New Local Development Scheme adopted in July 2021 outlining the revised programme, with commitment regarding the Local Plan Update to undertake a public consultation on a revised strategy in autumn 2021 and publication consultation of the full plan in summer 2022, with examination and adoption by the end of 2023.





SECTION 4: DELIVERING ON OUR PRIORITIES



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RIGHT HOMES, RIGHT PLACES

Wokingham Town Centre Regeneration:

The town centre regeneration continued to buck the national trend by attracting new businesses. 90% of council-owned regeneration units were occupied at the end of 2020/21, equating to approximately £2 million of committed income from Peach Place and Elms Field.

Homes and SEND school planned for Winnersh Farm:

Public engagement began on proposals to build a new SEND school alongside housing at Winnersh Farm

Housing Strategy 2020-24:

The strategy has an emphasis on COVID recovery, and assessing and addressing impacts. So far it has delivered:

- 187 affordable homes in 2020/21
- 61 houses in the 2nd year of the 1-4-5 programme with a further 139 units currently on site and an additional 890 units being progressed
- Completion of Gorrick Square scheme for learning disabled clients, with further specialist schemes currently being developed
- Over £1m funding secured to develop offer for rough sleepers
- Delivered an 18 unit key worker housing scheme in Wokingham

Gorse Ride redevelopment:

The regeneration is taking place in phases, progress in 2020/21:

- Phase One completion of the 10 houses for social rent and sale. These have been key for the relocation of residents living in following phases of the regeneration of the entire site
- Phase Two in preparation for future work, the Council relocated 11 Council tenants during the year and purchased two additional privately owned properties. Leaving 18 left to purchase across the site.

The Courts, Winnersh:

Demolished 75 garages in the Courts area of Winnersh and provided much needed car parking for the area.

Housing compliance:

Initiated after the social housing white paper was published, this project aims to monitor and ensure compliance within the council's housing service. As a result:

- Gas safety is at 100% compliance
- Reports were created highlighting impacts of the Social Housing White Paper. These were presented to the Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel

Housing Ombudsman Complaints Code:

In 2020 the Housing Ombudsman launched the complaints code and linked new powers of determination along with closer relationship working with the Housing Regulator. Every Local Authority and Housing Association were asked to complete the self-assessment of their current complaints policy and procedures with a deadline of completion and publishing by the 31st December 2020.

- Self-assessment completed and published by 31st December 2020. A follow up one was completed recently and also published to ensure transparency.
- Full consultation completed on new proposed complaints policy with Involved Tenants and open to wider tenant base via website
- An Involved Tenant successfully applied and gained a place on the Housing Ombudsman resident panel.
- Staff and Involved Tenants attended Housing Ombudsman webinars on the new complaints code to ensure compliance

Housing First:

A government funded project to buy four self-contained properties for the borough's most entrenched rough sleepers, providing intense one to one support to enable tenants to sustain tenancies and make improvements in all areas of their lives as a result we have:

- Completed on 4 properties to meet their specific needs
- Commissioned support in place and actively supporting 5 residents who have been identified as potential Housing First tenants



SECTION 4: DELIVERING ON OUR PRIORITIES



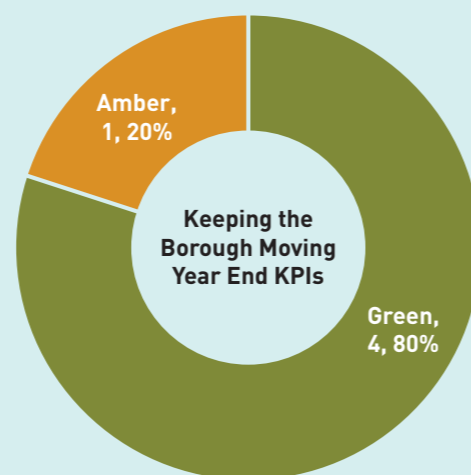
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KEEPING THE BOROUGH MOVING

During the COVID pandemic, the decrease in traffic levels combined with the proactive approach to address structural maintenance and improvements to the road network, detailed in the programmes below had a positive impact on these KPIs.



- Developed an Intelligent Transport Systems strategy including rolling out Smarter traffic signals that combined with CCTV cameras helping to respond to traffic demands throughout the day improving journey times

Greenways project: Ongoing project to create a network of generally traffic free routes connecting the new major developments to each other and to the existing communities and places of interest and employment. Progress through 2020/21 included:

- Completion of California Way
- Construction started on Cantley Park to Woosehill Greenway
- Consultation on Woosehill Meadow Greenway

Major new roads:

The £100million investment in new roads continued to deliver improvement with Observer Way (the Arborfield Cross Relief Road) opened, construction of the Winnersh Relief Road and North Wokingham Distributor Roads and the Eastern Gateway of the South Wokingham Distributor Road continuing.

My Journey:

A borough-wide active and sustainable travel behaviour change campaign that aims to help and inspire residents, employees and visitors to walk, scoot, cycle or use public transport. This year it has:

- Won the Bikeability Authority of the Year award
- Moved many of the borough's school-based programme online in response to lockdown
- Made bikes available to key workers

Local cycling and walking infrastructure plan:

Consulted residents and businesses on how we can encourage more walking and cycling throughout the borough.

Active Travel:

We continue to invest in cycling infrastructure with more than £6million spent since 2014. In 2020/21 we:

- Finished the London Road cycle scheme, which completing the borough's elements of the national cycle route 422 linking Newbury, Reading, Wokingham, Bracknell and Ascot on one single cycle route.
- Successfully bid for both the Emergency Active Travel Fund and implemented temporary social distancing measures in the Borough's town centres
- Successfully bid for Tranche 2 of Active Travel Fund and identified suitable schemes for initial consultation. Securing £650,000 from the ATF this year

09

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS:

Community Transport Programme:

This has successfully implemented a new structure for the Community Transport delivery model and supporting policies to minimise cost and ensure quality in the provision of needs-based transport for children and vulnerable adults. As a result the Council has:

- Established a new Community Transport Unit
- Strengthening stakeholder engagement and relationship in SEND and co-production of the Home to School Transport Policy
- Improved outcomes for Children and Young people with SEND

Structural Maintenance Programme:

Invested £8million in improving the borough's roads - double the investment compared to previous years. We used the reduction in road use during lockdowns to undertake improvement works completed on borough's key commuting routes

Congestion Project:

A £20million project to reduce congestion in the borough. So far it has:

- Completed construction of Thames Valley Park Park & Ride and secured planning permission for both Winnersh and Coppid Beech Park & Rides. Reducing congestion on the borough's key transport routes, improving key public transport infrastructure and helping to reduce the borough's carbon emissions
- Upgraded streetworks technology



SECTION 4: DELIVERING ON OUR PRIORITIES



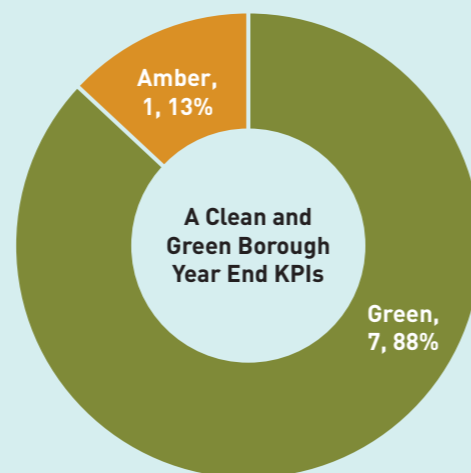
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A CLEAN AND GREEN BOROUGH

Performance in this space was overwhelmingly positive as we put significant effort into tackling the climate change emergency. One KPI, "Percentage of household waste reused, recycled and composted" was held back by a change to recycling wet cardboard, but we promptly introduced waterproof recycling bags to tackle this.



Adopt a Street programme:

This supports local communities to keep their areas clean and tidy through regular volunteer litter picking. During the year the number of streets participating in the scheme increased from 189 to 317.

Emerging Electric Vehicle Strategy:

The Electric Vehicles Strategy aims to develop a borough wide strategy to specify the infrastructure for Electric Vehicle charging point to encourage the uptake. As a result:

- New electric vehicle charging points have been installed
- Residents' have been consulted to assess off-street parking needs

Local Flood Risk Management Strategy:

This sets out how we will fulfil statutory obligations under the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 and provides a framework to actively manage and reduce flood risk across the borough and deliver sustainable regeneration and growth. This year it has led to:

- The adoption of the Land Drainage Byelaws.
- Development of Surface Water Management Plans for Shinfield and Lower Earley.
- Development of a live asset database of critical flood assets in the borough.
- Development of numerous S19 Flood Investigation Reports

- Production of the Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDs) Strategy
- Smart drainage trials in a number of locations across the borough.
- Successful bid for Defra flood defence funding for a surface water drainage scheme in Church Lane, Shinfield, to reduce flood risk to the road and to properties.
- Delivery of numerous capital drainage schemes to reduce surface water flood risk to properties in high-risk areas.

Fly-Tipping Strategy:

This details how we will deter illegal dumping of waste by investigating rubbish that is fly-tipped and taking enforcement action wherever possible. As a result, 863 fly-tips were investigated during the year resulting in 83 fixed penalty notices being issued.

Waste and recycling:

Rolled out waterproof recycling bags to replace black boxes in order to keep paper and card dry and therefore allow it to be recycled. Continued to expand use of food waste recycling with more than 500 tonnes recycled each month.

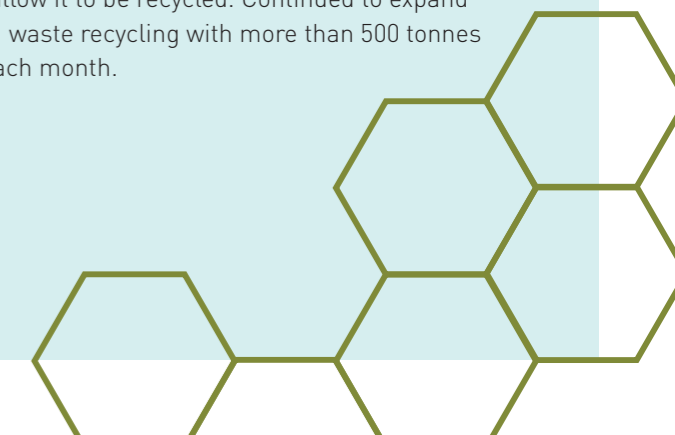
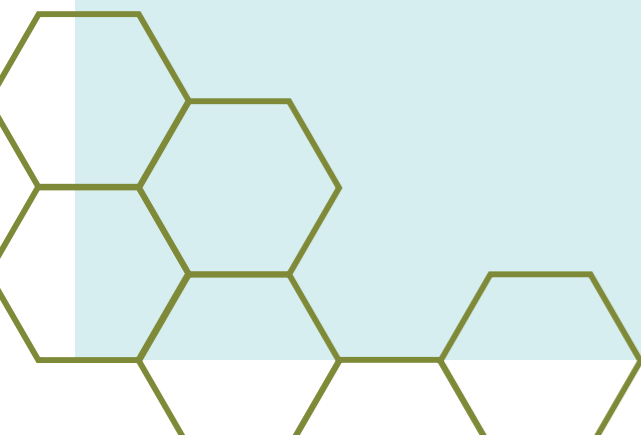
KEY ACHIEVEMENTS:

Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP):

This sets out targets and actions for the borough to become net-zero carbon by 2030 and focuses on increasing awareness and educating residents about the importance of changing behaviours and adopting more sustainable lifestyles. In 2020/21 we:

- Started building Dinton Activity Centre as the first net-zero carbon building in the borough
- Approved our annual climate emergency action plan report
- Attracted more than £2 Million of external funding to support the CEAP projects

- Retrofitted 700 homes to improve energy performance through the Help to Heat Green Homes Grant schemes helping residents reduce energy bills, improve efficiency and decrease carbon emissions
- Retrofitted ten schools with improvements such as LED lighting, insulation measures, controls upgrades, heating upgrades
- Achieved a 56% reduction of the council's carbon footprint through home working
- Started the 250k tree planting project and successful bid for £300,000 grant from the Woodland Trust's Emergency Tree Fund.
- Submitted a planning application for solar farm, which would see solar panels installed on council-owned farmland adjacent to Barkham Ride (High Barn Farm and part of Brook Farm), would generate enough energy to power thousands of homes and businesses across the borough for years to come.





SECTION 4: DELIVERING ON OUR PRIORITIES



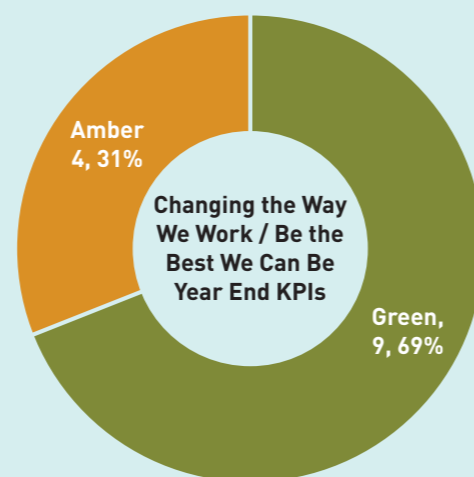
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CHANGING THE WAY WE WORK FOR YOU AND BEING THE BEST WE CAN BE

We are evolving how we work, moving to become a data-led organisation that focuses on what matters most to our residents, businesses and customers. The KPIs in the area show strong results.



Online Blue Badge Application:

We've improved our online offer to enable friends or family to apply on behalf of someone and made it easier to upload evidence, photos and pay. We've continued to provide a prompt service, delivering badges within five working days of a successful application. As a result, in August 80% of applications were made online, an increase of 30%.

Registrars Booking:

This booking system and improvements in processes has resulted in:

An online booking system to register a birth, arrange a citizenship ceremony and book a marriage notice appointment

- All death registrations can now be completed without the need for a face to face appointment using a phone call and online registration
- Approximately 50% of birth bookings are now made online
- 344 virtual citizenship ceremonies were held since the beginning of the first lockdown.

IT Improvements:

Investment in IT software and infrastructure to improve security, productivity, resilience and reliability has included:

- Continuously developed our website resulting in 37,000 customer transactions online and 961,404 individual visits.
- Seamless transition from office to home working for over 1,000+ staff
- Redevelopment of Customer Relationship Management system based on customer journey feedback resulting in 25% increase in uptake of online services that are delivered using this technology
- Improved infrastructure with better connectivity, utilising modern technology and technical capability
- Upgrades and adoption of Microsoft 365 cloud-based solution to support remote working for over 1,000 workers
- Programme of education, information and change across the Council to improve cyber security awareness & practice resulting in a 96% increase in password security in annual cyber security audit

08

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS:

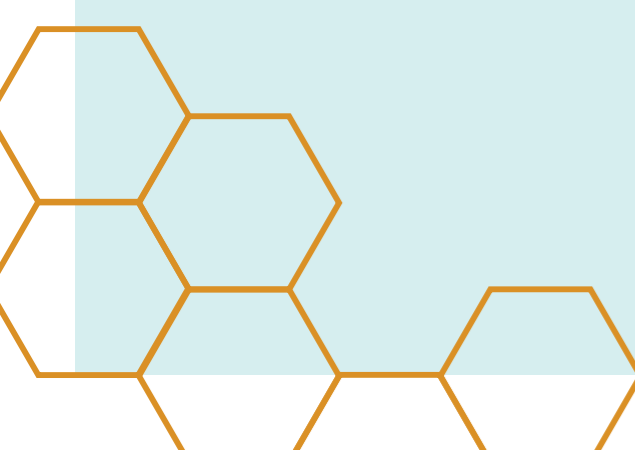
Customer Experience Development:

We have deployed a customer feedback tool to gather views, including on our website and everyone who calls our main number on a mobile telephone being given the opportunity to feed back on the quality of their service.

This allows us to target where improvements are needed and plan what is possible over short, medium and long term. Many improvements can be actioned immediately in real time, as soon as the feedback is available.

Improvements have included:

- Almost 120 broken internet links have been identified across the Council website and fixed
- When new recycling bags were delivered, some road names were missed from the website, this was quickly identified and fixed





SECTION 4: DELIVERING ON OUR PRIORITIES



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CHANGING THE WAY WE WORK FOR YOU AND BEING THE BEST WE CAN BE

People Strategy:

A package of colleague focused goals and plans which set out we will utilise the collective skill and talent of the Council's workforce. In 2020/21 it:

- Supported the COVID response by setting up redeployment processes to ensure the delivery teams were staffed. COVID response work included new internal health and safety measures for Council premises & school building and delivery of new wellbeing and remote working learning content to support employees
- Launch and delivery of new learning materials to support employees: management development of extended leadership team, new induction programme, performance management and wellbeing programme such as Mental health First Aiders
- Participated in the government's Kickstart scheme to support return to work
- Reviewed the current HR operating model
- Continued delivery of Apprenticeship programme
- Launch of new recruitment Application Tracking System in December 2020 to improve recruitment
- Improved employee engagement by launching open communication sessions with senior team such as 'the Big Chat'

The Graduate Academy:

In 2020/21, we recruited six National Management Trainee's via the Local Government Association's National Graduate Development Programme to our Graduate Academy, a 500% increase on the previous year.

This is not only the largest cohort in the Council's history, it is also the largest intake within Berkshire.

This Academy is set to grow and demonstrates the Council's determination and commitment to support and develop talent.

Continued Commercialisation:

During 2020/21 commercialisation projects included:

- The Grantfinder Scheme to enable officers to identify, bid and secure external funding
- The Premier Supplier Scheme enabling suppliers to be paid earlier for an agreed rebate on invoice charges.
- The ongoing success of the Community Investment Group, which has over £85 million invested in its portfolio that returns at over 5% per year gross

Digital Library Offer:

Providing more options to access services is a key element in continuing the increased usage of the library services. During 2020/21:

More than 300,000 items were accessed digitally, which is an increase of 135% on the previous year.

More than 11,000 pupils took part in the online Authors into Schools project.

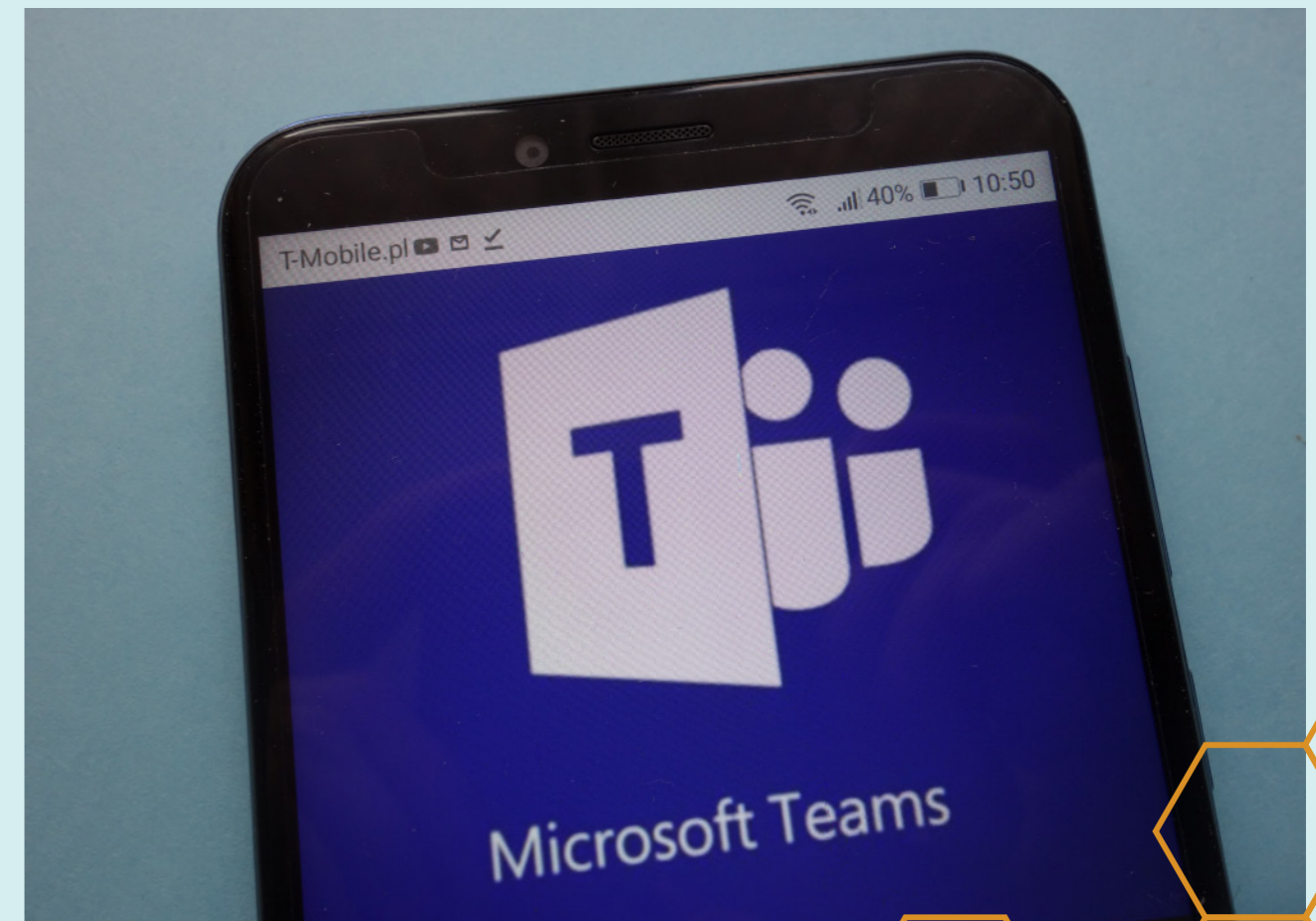
Communication and engagement:

Direct communication and engagement with residents was improved by the introduction of e-newsletters (Wokingham Borough Connect). As a result, by the end of 2020/21, Wokingham Borough Connect had

- 65,000 subscribers signed-up to receive at least one newsletter
- 150,000 subscriptions (due to subscribers signing up to multiple newsletters)
- An average open rate above 50%

Public protection services:

Decision to take the majority of these service back in-house (from the current Public Protection Partnership). Moving services such as tackling anti-social in-house will allow us to focus on local residents' concerns.







ANNUAL REVIEW OF CORPORATE PLAN

For the second year running, Wokingham Borough Council has faced the challenge of Covid-19 throughout 2021/22.

The year began with the emergence of the Delta Variant, with about 30 cases identified in the borough by the end of May 2021 and is ending with a high rate of Omicron cases, in particular in schools.

Despite these ongoing challenges, the council has continued to deliver high quality services and projects for the community, some of which are set out in this appendix that provides a short overview of some of the council's achievements so far in 2021/22.

A full Annual Review of the Corporate Plan 2021/22, including KPIs, will be produced later this year.





COVID FOR ANNUAL REVIEW OF CORPORATE PLAN



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MOBILE RAPID TESTING UNITS:

In March 2021, the borough council was one of the first to roll out Mobile Testing Units in March 2021, using data to identify and target places with local take-up rates. We also continued to run lateral flow testing sites for key workers, opening these up to the wider community a few months after. At the time of writing, nearly 35,000 tests had been processed on site by the team and 47,000 home testing kits given to the public.

SURGE TESTING:

In June 2021, we ran a surge testing programme, following the rapid spread of the Delta variant in the borough. This led to more than 20,000 tests complete and nearly 15,000 residential properties visited to help raise awareness. 8,000 test kits were also delivered to schools, nurseries, pre-schools and businesses.

VACCINE ROLL-OUT

Although the vaccine programme is the responsibility of health partners, the borough council has supported this effort. From helping with signage, car parking and providing staff for local vaccine centres, to hosting the NHS Health on the Move Covid-19 vaccine bus and signposting to important information on our social media channels.

SURGE VACCINATION

In June 2021, we worked NHS partners to run the surge vaccine programme over a two-week period at Bulmershe Leisure Centre. Many WBC staff took part in this effort and a staggering 4,000 people were vaccinated at the centre as a result.

CONTINUING TO HELP COMMUNITY AND BUSINESSES

The council's Covid Support Officers have continued to promote best practice, carrying out mobile and foot patrols in town centres and other areas, signposting members of the public to nearby Covid-19 testing facilities and providing other important guidance. The council has also helped organisations access Covid-19 grants from Central Government. Millions has been paid out to local businesses that have been impacted by ongoing restrictions.

KEEPING CHILDREN AND VULNERABLE ADULTS SAFE

The Adult Social Care Covid-19 Taskforce has provided vital support to our care homes and their residents across the borough, ensuring they stay as safe as possible. This has included daily calls to share information and assist with any issues and concerns; support with risk assessments, problem solving and testing; the dedicated team has acted swiftly to put support in place when needed.

The Children's Covid-19 Taskforce have provided continual support schools and pre-schools/nurseries during the pandemic. They are in daily contact with headteachers by phone, email, and virtual meetings; providing advice, guidance, and important information to share with parents and guardians.





CHARITY AND COMMUNITY HUB:

The Wokingham Charity and Community Hub is the new home for 10 charities and organisations. The Hub, which opened in January and is based in Wokingham is open for drop-ins for the public to seek advice. The charities now calling the hub home are:

- Involve (which is managing the hub)
- Cranstoun Wokingham
- Home Start Wokingham District
- Health Watch Wokingham Borough
- The Link Visiting Scheme
- Mind in Berkshire
- CLASP
- Promise Inclusion (Pinc)
- Wokingham Volunteer Centre
- Wokingham Foodbank (moving in over the next few weeks)
- Citizen's Advice Wokingham are already located at Waterford House on the second floor and are also part of the hub

DOMESTIC ABUSE:

The council's new Domestic Abuse Strategy (2021-2024) was approved in December 2021. The strategy will deliver on the council's response to the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and sets out the council and local partner organisations approaches to providing support for domestic abuse victims and their children, holding perpetrators to account and working towards long-term wellbeing.

HARDSHIP ALLIANCE AND DRAFT ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY:

The council has combined with four local charities (First Days, Citizens Advice Wokingham, AgeUK Berkshire and Wokingham United Charities) to form the Hardship Alliance with core objectives of prevention, supporting people in poverty, strengthening communities in their resilience to poverty and improving life opportunities for people living in poverty. The alliance has produced a draft Anti-Poverty Strategy and taken it out to public consultation to seek wider views before it is finalised.

INVESTMENT IN PREVENTION SERVICES:

The council has agreed to boost its adult social care prevention programme working with the voluntary, community and faith sector (VCFS) by an additional £280,000 to £2.1million for the in 2022/23 (compared with £1.8million in 2021/22). The council's Adult Social Care Strategy and its Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy outline the importance of prevention services in supporting its residents to improve their health and wellbeing and aiming to prevent, reduce and delay the need for formal care and support.

SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SUCCESS:

Wokingham Borough ranked number one in the southeast and number two in the country on the Adult Social Cares Outcomes Framework under measure '1E: the proportion of adults with learning disability in paid employment' for 2020-21.





ESTABLISHED WOKINGHAM BOROUGH YOUTH COUNCIL:

launched in July 2021, the Youth Council is made up of students from across the borough, with each secondary school invited to put forward two representatives. The members have debated and feedback to the council on issues such as climate emergency and diversity and have also come forward to act as champions for issues of particular concern to them.

DINTON ACTIVITY CENTRE:

The £2.4 million activity centre opened in Sept 2021 to provide an accessible base for all to enjoy the park. It was the borough's first net zero carbon building, featuring eco-friendly materials and functions, supporting the Council's commitment to be carbon neutral by 2030.

CARNIVAL HUB:

Building work reached the milestone of topping out (the point at which the building work reaches the highest point) this year and the art and leisure centre is on track to open this summer. The new facility includes swimming pools, a spa, fitness studios, a café, a dual-purpose hall for sports and 400 seat cultural performances and a new large library

BRIDGES RESOURCE CENTRE:

The short break centre for children with complex needs and disabilities was awarded outstanding by Ofsted in an inspection in July 2021. Bridges Resource Centre in Woodley gives high quality short breaks to children who have complex needs, learning and/or physical disabilities between the ages of 8 to 18.

NEW DESTINATION PLAY AREAS:

The destination play area at California Country Park opened in April. The play area includes a range of inclusive and interactive equipment – including a spinning disc, swings, musical chime walkway and a trampoline that are suitable for wheelchair users. Another destination play area will open at Cantley Park in Wokingham later in the year.

HOLIDAY ACTIVITIES AND FOOD (HAF) PROGRAMME:

The programme provided children across the borough with a summer of fun. Funded by the Department for Education and the council, the HAF programme offered weekly activities to children across the borough who were eligible for benefits-based free school meals. More than 650 children attended the five -week programme, with activities for primary, secondary and those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), delivered in partnership with local organisations, and with over 10,000 free healthy meals provided.

UNICEF CHILD FRIENDLY CITIES AND COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE

The borough council is now part of a global campaign to uphold and protect children's rights in everything it does. We have recently announced that we'll be working with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) after successfully applying to join its Child Friendly Cities and Communities initiative. This aims to give all children a meaningful say in decisions that shape their lives, whether on services like libraries or more specialist interventions for children in our care. We're one of eight local authorities in the UK to be accepted and it will take between three and five years before we're fully accredited.





LOCAL PLAN UPDATE:

More than 2,000 responses were received during the recent Revised Growth Strategy consultation

Wokingham Town Centre Regeneration: Continued to buck the national trend by attracting good quality businesses and national awards.

GORSE RIDE REDEVELOPMENT:

The first phase of the regeneration was completed in the summer of 2021 and consists of 46 new properties, three of which were sold to help offset the cost of development, and the remainder split between shared ownership and social rent. The second phase of the regeneration will see 178 existing dated properties replaced with 249 new energy efficient homes, 74% of which will be affordable. Work is already well underway with the majority of residents affected by the initial work already rehoused and the site being cleared and prepared for main construction this summer.

SHINFIELD COMMUNITY CENTRE:

The centre was built in partnership with the University of Reading and Shinfield Parish Council and funded through developer contributions as part of the Shinfield West development. It opened to the public in November 2021.

GREENWAYS:

The first section of the Greenways Route B, which runs through Cantley Park, was completed in May 2021 and it is now being enjoyed by our residents and park users. The council has recently consulted on a new greenway route through Woosehill Meadows from Reading Road to Heron road as part of the larger Greenways Route B.

DELIVERING NEW HOMES:

Continued annual housing delivery of more than 1000 new homes and more than 200 new affordable homes in the past year, as continued build out of the existing Local Plan.

DECENT HOMES STANDARD:

For the second year running all of Wokingham Borough Council's social housing stock met the decent homes standard for condition and repair. The standard, which is set by central government and applies to all local councils, was put in place to ensure council homes met decent levels for things such as general repairs, heating and thermal comfort as well as having reasonably modern facilities such as kitchens and bathrooms.

Planning permission for Shinfield Studios granted in October 2021. The 85,000 sq m complex would be built on part of the Thames Valley Science Park to the south of the M4, which is earmarked for employment use in the council's local plan, plus additional land to the north and south of Cutbush Lane.

It would be used to produce major international films and television programmes and would have 18 film stages and eight workshops to support set production plus office facilities and other supporting infrastructure.

Planning consent for the South Wokingham major development in May 2021. Planning applications approved:

- South Wokingham distributor road main section – from the Eastern Gateway to Finchampstead Road
- Western Gateway – improved junction of Finchampstead Road and Molly Millars Lane
- up to 1,434 new homes, a primary school, a community facility, and nature parks
- up to 215 new homes to the east of the development, adjacent to Bigwood
- St Anne's SANG – a nature park of 7.83 hectares which will connect to Buckhurst Meadows





£6million spent on road improvements: More than 130 roads across Wokingham Borough were improvements in the last year.

Wokingham Borough Council's annual road maintenance programme for 2020-21 is now complete, with more than £6million invested across the area. Work has been targeted to take place during lockdown periods since last April to make the most of quieter roads and reduce disruption for residents.

Investing in technology to reduce congestion – smart cameras and traffic lights : 80 video cameras were installed around the borough to help monitor traffic levels to help predict the exact impact of new housing on its road network.

The council was also awarded £250,000 for smart traffic lights and crossings across the area - these lights respond to traffic flows and so change phasing depending of time of day. Smart traffic light schemes are earmarked for ten locations across the borough.

SOUTH WOKINGHAM DISTRIBUTOR ROAD:

The Eastern Gateway, part of Wokingham Borough Council's South Wokingham Distributor Road, was opened in January 2022. The new road, which includes an off-road cycle path to encourage active travel, is among the new infrastructure for the authority's major development of 2,500 new homes at South Wokingham, which was agreed under its current Local Plan.

PARK AND RIDES:

Construction underway on the new park and ride at Coppid Beech and improvements to the Winnersh park and ride.

Barkham Bridge improvements: The project replaced the old narrow bridge with a two-lane bridge over the brook on Barkham Road. Before the changes between Barkham Street and Langley Common Road, a bottleneck existed at the old bridge but this has been removed and journeys are now smoother.

Wokingham Major Highways Project shortlisted for partnership Initiative of the Year at the British Construction Industry Awards. The council is nominated alongside contractor Balfour Beatty and SCAPE civil engineering.

Winnersh Relief Road opened: The new road opened in May 2021 in order to relieve congestion at the Winnersh Crossroads. It was part of the 2010 Core Strategy and funded by developer contributions

Beat the Streets scheme to encourage active travel among children and young people: Wokingham's Beat the Street saw more than 6,200 participants racking up 151,531 active travel miles. Beat the Street is a real-life game that challenges people to ditch the car and to walk, cycle or wheel to school to improve congestion and air quality.





Barkham Solar Farm planning application approved in Sept 2021

The plan will see 67,340 solar panels installed on farmland to the north and south of Barkham Ride generating enough renewable energy to power thousands of local houses as well as reducing carbon emissions. The approved proposals include the planting of nearly 11,000 new trees on the site, wider landscaping to improve biodiversity and the creation of a new Greenway to better link Arborfield, Barkham and Finchampstead to the existing network of public rights of way to the north.

CEAP community engagement agreed – deliberative process bringing together residents and community groups from all backgrounds to share their thoughts on the best ways to tackle the climate emergency locally. Process approved in October 2021.

Garden Forest scheme: The scheme invites residents to apply for a tree, or trees, for their own garden. Over the next five years, we are looking to plant 250,000 trees across the borough to increase carbon sequestration rates. Carbon sequestration is a process whereby the trees will draw excess CO2 from the atmosphere and store it.

The Arborfield Cross Relief Road scooped an industry award for an innovative “green” bridge that helps animals move safely through the surrounding countryside. Observer Way, a 2.3km bypass with an off-road cycleway and paths which opened in November 2020, also includes a bridleway crossing with special features to provide a safe route for wildlife living nearby.

Solar panels installed at Shinfield St Mary’s Primary School 116 new solar panels installed on the school roof, allowing it to massively increase the amount of sustainable energy generated on site.

Our Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) rated one of the best in the country

Independent national organisation, Climate Emergency UK, have benchmarked of local council’s Climate Action Plans across the UK & Northern Ireland. And Wokingham Borough’s is rated 8th best Single Tier Authority in the UK for our Climate Emergency Action Plan. The CEAP scored very highly across all the key focus areas, and got full marks on some of the key ones such as Education, Ecological Emergency and Governance.



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TITLE	Anti-Poverty Strategy - Position Statement
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Monday, 7 March 2022
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers
LEAD MEMBER	Leader of the Council - John Halsall

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

This report presents an update on the Anti-Poverty Strategy as well as giving an overview of many of the initiatives that have supported the residents in poverty across the borough. It is an essential aspect of the work undertaken to make Wokingham borough inclusive and a great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive:

- 1) recognise progress in development of the Anti-Poverty Strategy;
- 2) acknowledge the extensive work completed since Covid-19 to support those in poverty across the borough, much of which has been done by, or in partnership with the voluntary and community sector; and
- 3) agree the provision of £500k from the Local Council Tax Support Schemes Grant with immediate effect to support further development and delivery of the initiatives being developed as part of the strategy. Any future funding that is required to deliver the strategy will be taken back to a future meeting of the Executive.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an update on development of the Anti-Poverty Strategy, whilst giving an overview of the work and initiatives to address or support people in poverty across the Borough while the strategy is being developed and consulted upon.

The strategy recognises that, although Wokingham is an affluent borough overall, there are many people in poverty and that the Covid-19 pandemic has increased this in both the short and longer term.

The Anti-Poverty Strategy cannot be delivered without working effectively with the strong Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) who have been fundamental in the co-design and the co-delivery of both the strategy and the initial response to support those in poverty.

In order to deliver the strategy and implement short term actions ahead of approval of the Anti-Poverty Strategy after the May elections, the Executive are asked to approve the funding request of £500k as set out in the body of the report. This is to come from the Local Council Tax Support Schemes Grant for 2021-22 and to be used through to 2025 and supplemented by additional funding which will be attracted, and to support key initiatives in the short term such as the One Front Door, funding for which ends on 31st March 2022.

Following analysis of consultation responses and further development with the Hardship Alliance, the revised strategy will be presented to the Executive for approval after the May elections in order to continue with delivery across the partnership.

BACKGROUND

Although Wokingham Borough is consistently one of the least deprived areas of the country, poverty exists everywhere and its prevalence and impact has increased during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Wokingham Borough Council has always worked to reduce the number of residents living in poverty and minimise the effect on those who are. Community engagement and development to build individual, family and community resilience and capacity has long been part of the council's work, as have schemes to support people into employment, provide affordable or social housing and lessen financial burdens (such as through the Council Tax Reduction Scheme).

However, the impact of the pandemic has led to a need for a stronger focus on this area and the council has responded with its own initiatives, collaboration with community partners and the development of a longer-term strategy.

Strategic Approach

Over the past six months, the council has been developing an Anti-Poverty Strategy, in conjunction with our partners across the Voluntary and Community Sector, who are fundamental to its design and delivery. They have been engaged in discussions to inform development of the strategy since September 2021 and in December 2021 a Hardship Alliance was created to lead this work, engaging four key partners in the VCS who will form a link to the wider sector.

The draft of the Anti-Poverty Strategy has been consulted on throughout January and February 2022, following early engagement in November to support development of initial proposals. There have also been four events in venues around the Borough to get direct views from residents.

Initial feedback from the consultation to date suggests that people recognise the need to address poverty and consider this strategy timely with growing concerns around food and fuel prices. People are also concerned that there needs to be support for those who view themselves as being just above the breadline since they are facing growing challenges. People also feel that it is much more difficult to ask for support in an affluent borough such as Wokingham, which supports a media campaign to reduce the stigma associated with poverty. There is strong support for the targeted approach being developed as part of the strategy rather than a more generic offer that will not meet people's needs and there is an urge to build in some radical thinking and innovative solutions.

The final Anti-Poverty Strategy will be updated following the consultation to build in responses, but the overall intention will prevent more people falling into poverty whilst supporting those who are already in poverty: working towards the community vision for Wokingham Borough to be a great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business.

The draft aim of the Anti-Poverty Strategy is to provide equality of opportunity to all of our residents regardless of their financial circumstances. It recognises that this is a longer-term aspiration and in the life span of this 4-year strategy the intention is to:

- Lessen the short-term effects of poverty

- Prevent further people falling into poverty
- Better support our residents who are living in poverty
- Enable residents to better address the barriers to overcoming poverty

To enable a focus on this complex and challenging subject and to ensure residents in the most need are targeted, receive a personalised response and gain the best results possible, a resident segmentation approach was developed. This has identified three groups of residents that are to be the focus of this strategy:

Persistent Hardship – These people are on low incomes claiming universal credit or other benefits and are the focus of most of the existing government support.

Just About Managing – These are people who were just getting by on their own means without qualifying for support, although frequently they have little or no money left at the end of the month; there is no financial resilience.

Asset Rich, Cash Poor – These are people who own their own home with limited savings and their financial assets are not easily accessible.

The draft Anti-Poverty Strategy has three objectives which form the basis of the partnership approach to addressing poverty within the borough. The objectives are to:

1. Support people in poverty
2. Strengthen communities in their resilience to poverty
3. Improve life opportunities for residents who are living in poverty

Through focussing work on these objectives, we intend to support people in their short-term challenges whilst enabling them in the longer term to live sustainably within their own means. It is not just about addressing the symptoms of poverty, but working with people to identify and tackle the root causes: this delivers sustainable outcomes for our residents. Work within this strategy is not just focused on those in benefits, but the wider population with low income or limited means after their core bills have been paid.

Development of this strategy is timely with people seeing inflation increasing significantly faster than wages or benefits, rising utility bills which could see these doubling for people who aren't on fixed tariffs and particularly impacting those with pre-payment meters. Alongside this food prices are showing a large increase, which is disproportionately affecting many of the lower priced and staple items such as rice, pasta and bread meaning that core food costs are growing at a disproportionately high rate.

Through this strategy, as well as working with our partners, there are key things that we recognise as a council that we can do to support people. How we respond as a Council is a core part of this strategy and will be further informed through the consultation and focus groups underway.

Responding to poverty

Early in development of the strategy, it was recognised that there is a need to further promote the huge amount of work that has taken place since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic to support those in poverty. This work has been carried out by the Council and the strong Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) partners who have direct links into the people and communities that are struggling.

Some of the main initiatives that have supported residents over the last two years are summarised below. Many of these have been the focus of an extensive and ongoing communication campaign: recognising that awareness raising, signposting and de-stigmatising are fundamental to supporting people across the Borough.

Immediate response

One Front Door

At the start of the pandemic, the Council worked with voluntary sector partners to establish the Wokingham Borough Community Response that provided emergency help across the borough. From this successful collaboration came the One Front Door, which is led by Citizen Advice Wokingham, supported by other voluntary and community groups and funded by WBC.

The One Front Door provides a comprehensive support, including to those facing poverty, through:

- Help with rising energy costs: Help paying utility bills, access to fuel vouchers, energy efficiency packs, Advice on changing suppliers and more
- Support with accessing food and other essentials: Foodbank referrals, household item grants, urgent food and toiletries, urgent prescription collection, and more
- Other assistance: Practical help and advice on welfare checks, benefits and debt, employment, housing, and more

The council recognised the value of this initiative early on in the pandemic and agreed to extend provision to 31st March 2022.

Other initiatives

Launched the Hardship Alliance

The council has brought together four local charities: First Days, Citizens Advice Wokingham, AgeUK Berkshire and Wokingham United Charities to form the Hardship Alliance. The alliance has the core objectives of prevention, supporting people in poverty, strengthening communities in their resilience to poverty and improving life opportunities for people living in poverty. It has co-created the draft Anti-Poverty Strategy and will lead on the delivery of the final approved strategy.

Household Support Grant

Launched in November 2021, the fund was awarded to all local authorities to help the most vulnerable households cover essential costs in the coming months. The council made the strategic decision to distribute the majority (more than £300,000) of the £525,573 allocation from Central Government directly to the Hardship Alliance, ensuring it reaches the people who need it most to support fuel poverty, and helps them cover other essential costs in the coming months. This is a different and more direct approach than most other councils took: enabling localised and direct support from the voluntary sector partners targeted at those most in need. The rest of the funding is being used on food vouchers for families with children eligible for free school meals, to help during school holiday periods.

Charity and Community Hub

The Wokingham Charity and Community Hub opened in January this year to provide a home to ten local voluntary organisations and a base for residents to drop-in for advice, help and support.

The charities now calling the hub home are:

- Involve (which is managing the hub)
- Cranstoun Wokingham
- Home Start Wokingham District
- Health Watch Wokingham Borough
- The Link Visiting Scheme
- Mind in Berkshire
- CLASP
- Promise Inclusion (Pinc)
- Wokingham Volunteer Centre
- Wokingham Foodbank (moving in over the next few weeks)
- Citizens Advice Wokingham are already located at Waterford House on the second floor and are also part of the hub

Local Support Hub (online) launched

Building on the Covid-19 webpages that provide accurate information about the pandemic, the council launched its Local Support Hub pages as a single source of information and advice on issues such as welfare benefits, debt, housing, relationship problems, mental health, unemployment, and more. This will be developed in the coming months to better enable residents to access support and advice as they need it.

Holiday Activities and Food (HAF)

More than 650 children attended the five-week HAF programme during the school summer holidays, with activities for primary, secondary and those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), delivered in partnership with local organisations, and more than 10,000 free healthy meals provided. Funded by the Department for Education and the council, the HAF programme offered weekly activities to children across the borough who were eligible for benefits-based free school meals. The programme has also taken place during half terms and the Christmas break.

Warmer Winter project

Our Community Engagement team supported local charities, First Days and SHARE, to provide blankets to residents who needed some help to keep warm over the winter. Residents have been encouraged to collect blankets from key locations across the borough. We also accepted donations of new or nearly new good quality blankets.

Support for SHARE

The council provides support for the SHARE scheme that offers fresh produce and surplus supermarket stock to the community that would otherwise have been wasted. The independent community group runs regular drop-ins for people to pick up produce

in Shinfield, Woodley, Finchampstead, Winnersh and Wokingham. The council manages and runs some of the sessions as well as helping with food collections.

Helping residents reduce their energy bills

As fuel prices increase, the council is making sure support is available to help residents make their properties more energy efficient, reduce the cost of running their home and cut their carbon emissions as well. The Help to Heat scheme has already helped more than 1,300 residents install free, or low cost, insulation to their homes. And we hope to support many more as the scheme remains open to new applications.

We've also launched the new Green Homes Grant (GHG LAD2) which provides free grants to help residents on low incomes and living in low energy efficient properties make a wide range of improvements to their homes. This includes installing solid wall insulation, solar panels, or even air source heat pumps and improved glazing

Kickstart Scheme

The council was approved to join the Government's Kickstart scheme in January 2021 with the aim of getting 16-24-year-olds who were struggling to find work, into employment during the Covid-19 pandemic. Each job placement was new, lasted for 6 months and helped young people to build their confidence and experience in the workplace while earning a regular wage.

Employment support

To improve the way it supports people into employment, the council set up an outreach team and dedicated contact phone and email lines for those looking for work. The team can support residents with a range of activities to help them find the right job for them and help them to develop skills to feel confident applying for jobs and going to work. Face-to-face appointments can also be made in key locations across local communities, including The Rainbow Centre in Winnersh and the Oakwood Centre in Woodley.

Support for A Christmas Presence shop in Wokingham town centre

The council provided support (including a free shop in the Elms Field development) for A Christmas Presence. The shop was a collaboration between the council, First Days Children's Charity, Wokingham Foodbank and Share Wokingham to provide gifts and festive food items for households that are financially struggling.

Stay Warm and Well leaflet

The leaflet provided information on help available with fuel costs and other expenses during the winter. It was distributed to targeted resident groups in November 2021 alongside a letter promoting the Household Support Fund.

BUSINESS CASE

The Executive are asked to acknowledge the extensive work that has been implemented, with VCS partners, across the Borough to support people in poverty and recognise the need for ongoing promotion and marketing of these initiatives.

The final Anti-Poverty Strategy will come to Executive on 26th May for consideration and implementation. In order to enable delivery of the strategy, the Executive are asked to approve the grant funding of £500k, funded from an earmarked reserve (from the Local Council Tax Support Schemes Grant for 2021-22). It will be used to support initiatives such as the One Front Door and its successor as well as posts across the Council and VCS partners. Delivery of the required work to address poverty in the Borough will cost significantly more than this, so a fundamental aspect of the approach is creating the drive and capacity to bring in external funding to support VCS partners in their key initiatives. Without the funding requested, the strategy will not be able to be successfully delivered and there is a significant risk that the Council's commitment to addressing poverty will be questioned by the VCS partners and wider community.

Anti-poverty is a significant issue and in addition to the grant funding set out above and any potential future request to the Executive for additional funding, we will be working with partners, businesses and other interested parties to contribute towards delivery of the strategy.

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)	£500k	No - £500k grant no additional required	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)		Yes – to be carried forward from above	
Following Financial Year (Year 3)		Yes – to be carried forward from above	

Other Financial Information

This funding is a key part of the delivery of the strategy and would impact on the approach taken and outcomes possible if the required funding is not approved.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

Consultation has taken place with the public, VCS partners, Town and Parish Councils, interested people and various stakeholder groups. O&S Management Committee have been engaged and a Cross-Party Working Group has provided oversight of the development processes.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Implications for the PSED are at the forefront of the strategy and an EqIA will be completed alongside finalisation of the strategy post consultation and in conjunction with development of the Year 1 Action Plan.

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

This report will have no implications on carbon neutrality.

List of Background Papers
None

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TITLE	Wokingham Borough Secondary School Places (11 to 16) Strategy
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Monday, 7 March 2022
WARD	None specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Children's Services - Helen Watson
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Children's Services - Graham Howe

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

To ensure that there are sufficient secondary school places to meet the Borough's needs until 2027/28

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive:

- 1) adopts the Wokingham Secondary School (11 to 16) Places Strategy 2022.
- 2) adopts the strategy and approves a multi-year programme of secondary expansion at Piggott, St Crispins and Emmbrook Schools, with other schools to be identified, with authority delegated to the Director of Children's Services and the Executive member for Children's Services to finalise agreements and the programme of works.
- 3) delegates any necessary authority to the Director of Children's Services and the Director of Resources, acting in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the lead member for children's services, to approve the procurement of the construction works and services as relevant to the secondary expansion strategy, with post 16 strategy and works programmes to be the subject of a later report to the council's Executive.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Council has a statutory duty to ensure that there are sufficient secondary school places in the borough. Basic need grant from the DfE, CIL and S106 funding are available to enable the Council to invest in both maintained and Academy / Free Schools to ensure there are sufficient places.

Currently the number of Year 7 places required is expected to rise, due to the number of children coming through from the primary sector. However, Key Stage 2 rolls are greater than Key Stage 1 rolls and it is projected that demand for Year 7 places will fall from 2023/24 onwards, until the Year 7 intake has dropped back to 2021 levels by 2027/28. Additional places will be required in the short term because it is expected (based on 2021 outcomes) that there will be a need for additional places to ensure a gender

balanced allocation. Just under 500 additional year 7 places are expected to be required between 2022 and 2027/28.

It is planned to create additional capacity by expanding existing schools. At this point a new school is not being put forward as the number of places required is expected to drop back in time to current levels. Schools have already advised the Council that they do not have surplus capacity to enable additional pupils to be admitted, using the current premises. Nine out of ten schools are Academies or Free Schools and as such cannot be directed to expand by the Council in the way that maintained schools can. Any expansion must be made on a partnership basis, with the approval of the Trusts running each school.

In devising the action plan a number of factors had to be taken into account. This included the willingness of Trusts to expand their schools, the suitability of sites, the popularity of the school, and the school location relative to major residential growth areas. The action plan and strategy have been developed in consultation with the headteachers of the borough's secondary schools.

The original intention was to invest only for additional temporary premises to meet growth needs. However, schools made it clear that they could not take on additional children unless existing accommodation deficiencies were also addressed. Accordingly a more ambitious programme is now proposed. Delivery will be dependent upon agreement by the Trusts to investment programmes that can be delivered within the Council's resources.

It is proposed that three schools are grown to be able (in the long term) to offer in the order of 200 (11 to 18) places each. These are the Piggott Secondary School, St Crispins School, and the Emmbrook Schools, with additional places possibly being required at other schools.

These proposals are in line with public responses to the 11 to 16 Secondary Strategy consultation in Autumn 2021.

BACKGROUND

The Council has statutory duties to ensure there are sufficient school (11 to 16) and post 16 places. It receives capital grant funding (known as Basic Need funding) from the DfE to facilitate any growth required in provision for children of statutory school age (to age 16). Although the place sufficiency duty only applies to Wokingham resident children the Council has no power to restrict admission to Wokingham schools to Wokingham residents, so must ensure that sufficient capacity is available for non-Wokingham residents who are reasonably expected to be entitled to places at schools in the borough.

Basic Need funding is to enable investment in both maintained and Academy / Free Schools to ensure there are sufficient secondary school places for statutory school age children. Both statutory school age and post 16 places can be funded from other funding held by the Council, including CIL and S106 monies.

The number of children who will require Year 7 places is projected to increase until 2023/24, due to high numbers of children in Wokingham Key Stage 2 primary and junior school classes who will require secondary school places from September 2022 onwards. Although Key Stage 2 numbers are high, the number of children in Key Stage 1 primary and infant school classes is falling. Currently (October 2021) there are 2,347 and 2,349 Year 5 and Year 6 pupils (Key Stage 2) compared to 2,108 and 2,174 Reception and Year 1 pupils (Key Stage 1). Consequently, after an initial period of growth (peaking over the period 2023 to 2025) the number of children entering secondary school is projected to fall back to the 2021 level by 2028 (see the following table).

	2021 /22	2022 /23	2023 /24	2024 /25	2025 /26	2026 /27	2027 /28	2028 /29
Year 7 places	2,176	2,176	2,176	2,176	2,176	2,176	2,176	2,176
Year 7 projection	2,159	2,242	2,298	2,265	2,219	2,166	2,268	2,167
Year 7 additional capacity requirement	90	75						
Total Need	2,249	2,242	2,298	2,265	2,219	2,166	2,268	2,167
Year 7 Need Versus Places	-73	-141	-122	-89	-43	10	-92	9
11 to 16 places	10,865	10,865	10,865	10,865	10,865	10,865	10,865	10,865
11 to 16 projection	10,124	10,542	10,938	11,169	11,372	11,382	11,404	11,267
11 to 16 additional capacity requirement	390	225	150	75	0	0	0	0
Total Need	10,514	10,767	11,088	11,244	11,372	11,382	11,404	11,267

11 to 16 Need Versus Places	351	98	-223	-379	-507	-517	-539	-402
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In addition to the rising number of children coming through from primary schools, it is expected, from the 2021 admissions round outcomes, that there will be a need for additional capacity to ensure a gender balanced allocation at least in 2022/23. This will be achieved through additional places at co-educational schools. In 2021 additional places were agreed at a number of co-educational schools to ensure all girls without a preferred school allocation could be offered a place. To comply with education law, the additional places had to be offered in accordance with each school's ranked applicant list. Additional allocations were therefore made to children of both genders. By September 2021 the total number of allocations and the number of places available before additional places were agreed were, effectively, in balance.

The analysis is done on the basis that the need to take specific measures to ensure a gender balanced allocation will have ended from 2023/24.

In total (taking account of both rising numbers and Year 7 places that cannot be filled) the analysis indicates that between 2022/23 and 2027/28 just under 500 additional Year 7 places will be required.

BUSINESS CASE

The options for creating additional places are (a) agreeing additional offers with schools in their current buildings, (b) building additional capacity at current schools or (c) opening a new school. However, secondary schools have advised the Council that they cannot offer over their Published Admission Number (PAN) in 2022, without additional capacity. This rules out option (a), offers to schools using existing capacity. Option C (a new school) is not a preferred option because the projected increase is what is known as a "bulge", with place needs rising before falling back towards current levels. This would be an expensive option and challenging to deliver in an appropriate timescale. This leaves Option B, the creation of additional capacity at existing schools.

Therefore, officers have been working with schools to both explore options for the creation of additional places and to write the new secondary places strategy and action plan. The purpose of this report is to endorse both the strategy and the action plan.

The proposals will help address two issues that were raised by residents, namely the lack of sufficient places in schools within walking distance of homes on the south-east edge of Wokingham Town and of the southern edge of Twyford.

Nine of the ten Wokingham secondary schools are now Academies / Free Schools. Places can only be created at these schools with the express agreement of the school's governing Trust. They can only be directed to take additional children in very limited circumstances, and only by the Secretary of State for Education. They set their own admissions arrangements, including the number of places available for allocation. In doing this their primary responsibility is to the education of children on their roll. As important and independent institutions with key responsibilities for the education of the Borough's children they are the Council's most important partners when agreeing action plans to ensure there are sufficient places.

The action plan takes account of a number of factors. As noted above, it is based on discussions with schools that are willing to enter into agreements with the council to offer additional places. The proposed programme takes account of a range of factors including:

- The ability and willingness of Trusts to support school expansion: Some sites are already at the limits of development, and some Trusts take the view that their schools are already at an optimum size.
- The popularity of a school. A school that is oversubscribed will fill from its local area and is likely to retain these children, reducing roll churn (which is detrimental to school standards). A school that may not be able to offer all additional places as preference offers may still be useful, if it is sufficiently accessible (with good walking, cycling and public transport routes to the school from the homes of children offered the school because they cannot be offered a preferred school).
- The accessibility of the school from areas of greatest immediate need.
- The future need for school places locally. Schools in close proximity to ongoing major housing developments are likely to see sustained future demand.
- Each school's state of readiness for expansion. For example, there is a presumption against expanding schools with an Ofsted rating below the level of "Good".
- The need to ensure that projects offer good value for money.

Initial discussions with schools focused on the provision of high-quality temporary accommodation to meet the needs created by growth. However, schools and their Trusts made it clear that in order to be able to offer a good or better education to these additional children, pre-existing accommodation deficits would need to be rectified and appropriate accommodation provided for the full number of children expected to be on roll. This has necessarily led to an increase in the extent of the envisaged works and the budget required.

Having taken these factors into account the Council intends to pursue options for significant expansion (in effect, for the long term, creating a potential for each school to offer up to an additional form of entry, offering 1,500 places, with an admission number of 240) at:

- The Piggott School
- St Crispins School
- The Emmbrook School

An additional 60 places are projected to be required, to be delivered at other schools in the programme to 2027/28.

Revenue Costs

The Revenue costs of school expansion would be met from the DSG Growth Fund.

Capital Spend Profile

The schemes are still in development, but the current spend profile (as set out in the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan 2022/23) is:

Commitment and spend profile	Spend profile	MTFP
21/22 FY	£150K	MTFP 2021/22
22/23 FY	£2.1M	MTFP 2022/23
23/24 FY	£4.5M	MTFP 2022/23
24/25 FY	£6.5M	MTFP 2022/23
25/26 FY	£4.5M	Future MTFP
26/27 FY	£5M	Future MTFP
27/28 FY	£4.25M	Future MTFP
Total	£27M	

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)	£100K	Yes	Capital
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£2.1M	Yes	Capital
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£4.5M	Yes	Capital

Other Financial Information

There is adequate provision in the 2022/23 Growth Fund to support these proposals.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

Statutory process with a formal Notice in a local newspaper, on line information and involvement of local stakeholders, likely to be conducted by schools, to support long term growth plans.

Initial statement of needs has been the subject of extensive consultation, with schools and the public.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Equalities Impact Assessment to be completed

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

This investment programme would support the council's climate emergency programme, by enabling additional children to travel to school by sustainable modes of travel, and by increasing the proportion of the school building stock that has a low carbon footprint through enhanced insulation and low carbon source heating systems.

List of Background Papers

None

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Wokingham Borough Secondary (11 to 16) School Places Strategy



**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

Content

Content	1
Scope.....	1
Strategy Development Process.....	1
Public engagement and response analysis	2
Future need modelling.....	2
Insights and Trends: Borough Wide.....	2
Local Area analysis	5
Place Needs 2021-29.....	6
Local Plan Update (LPU) & longer term needs	7
Addressing need.....	7
Next Steps	8

Scope

This strategy is intended to:

- Plan to address sufficiency of statutory school places (Years 7 – 11, ages 11-16)
- Model the effects of changing demographics and growth, now and future years, and forecasting impact on place sufficiency
- Setting out options for meeting demand pressures

The Post-16 phase will be the subject of a separate strategy.

Strategy Development Process

The strategy is based on analysis of Wokingham held data, including roll and housing growth data, national population projections, nationally collected schools' data, and engagement with the public and school.

School rolls reflect births to borough residents, migration (including housing led growth) into and out of the borough, cross border movement (children in one borough attending a school in another), the relative popularity of schools and the number of children educated at home or in the independent sector. School roll modelling uses a limited data set but can be validated or amended in the light of contextual information.

The purpose of the strategy is to ensure that the Borough's statutory duty to ensure there are sufficient places is met, and that where possible the places are easily accessible to children and young people. Plans support the provision of places in good or excellent schools, to promote continued educational improvement.

The strategy has been written with the assistance of parent and schools.

Public engagement and response analysis

The initial data analysis was shared with the public in 2022. There were 800 responses, and key messages included:

- Support for additional places in Twyford (at Piggott) and Wokingham Town / Evendons area
- Support for Earley and Shinfield growth
- Concerns around analysis of the implications of the growth in homes for education infrastructure needs.

Future need modelling

The core roll projection is roll led and uses recent cohort (children born in one academic year) transfer and progression data to project future roll numbers. Cross border movement is captured from the recent proportion of the Year 7 intake not formerly on the roll of a Wokingham primary school. This model indirectly captures the impact of local house building, other migration and cross border movement. Where underlying factors are expected to change (e.g., when housing development ends in an area) contextual information (ONS population projections, future housebuilding rates, cross border movement) has also informed the analysis.

Longer term projections (to the end of the decade and beyond) are population projection led and are reliant on the 2018 base Office for National Statistics Wokingham population projection, supplemented by Wokingham held housing data. This indicates declining need in the early 2030s.

The second key element in the analysis is the number of places available. As academies, most Wokingham secondary schools are not required to maintain the national Net Capacity measure and the Funding Agreements (which record places) have not been updated as building projects have been completed. Moreover, while schools must set admission numbers for Year 7, they are not bound to this number for older age groups.

The key message from this is that future need and capacity analysis is necessary, but the cumulative impacts of various models and estimates make it hard to establish a reliable single definitive view of future demand/requirements.

Wokingham: North and South

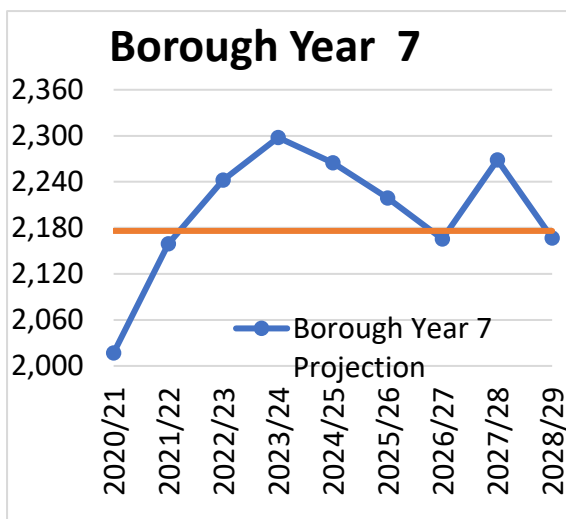
In accordance with DfE requirements, place planning is based on two areas:

The North: Maiden Erlegh, Bulmershe, Waingels, Piggott schools (therefore Earley, Woodley, and parishes to north of A329M)

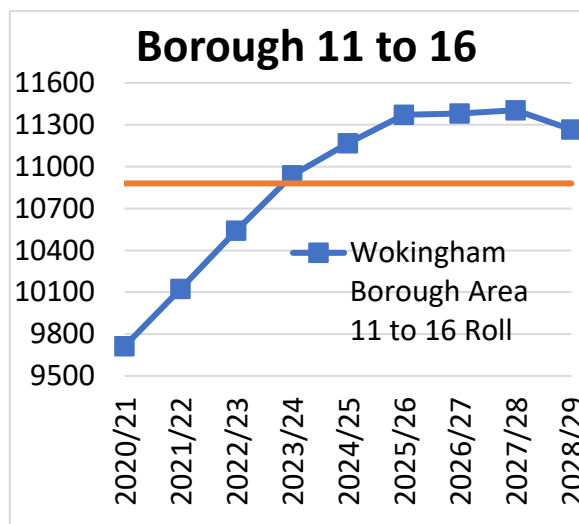
The South: Oakbank, Bohunt, St. Crispins, Holt, Emmbrook, Forest Schools (therefore parishes to the south of A329M, and M4, plus Hurst (shared with the north)).

Insights and Trends: Borough Wide

The Borough projections show that the current growth in Year 7 numbers will cease in 2023/24 (peaking at 2,300 Year 7 children or circa 150 places above 2021/22 Year 7 numbers) dropping back to current levels by 2028/29. Overall numbers will reach a plateau of just over 11,300 places before dropping back later in the decade.



Graph1: Borough Year 7 projection



Graph 2: Borough 11 to 16 capacity

Current pressures

Outside of the Year 7 issue, the key concerns are that cohort sizes are increasing in size as they age (reflecting migration into the borough), there are too few places for girls in a number of year groups, and a risk of an absolute shortfall in places for 21-22 Year 7 cohort. The table below shows the low number of available places in both Year 7 and Year 9.

	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11
Potential places	2176	2176	2176	2176	2176
October 021 roll	2148	2046	2082	1975	1875
Variance	28	130	94	201	301
% of places	1%	6%	4%	9%	14%

Table 1: Years 7 – 11 places and rolls, October 2021

Contextual factors

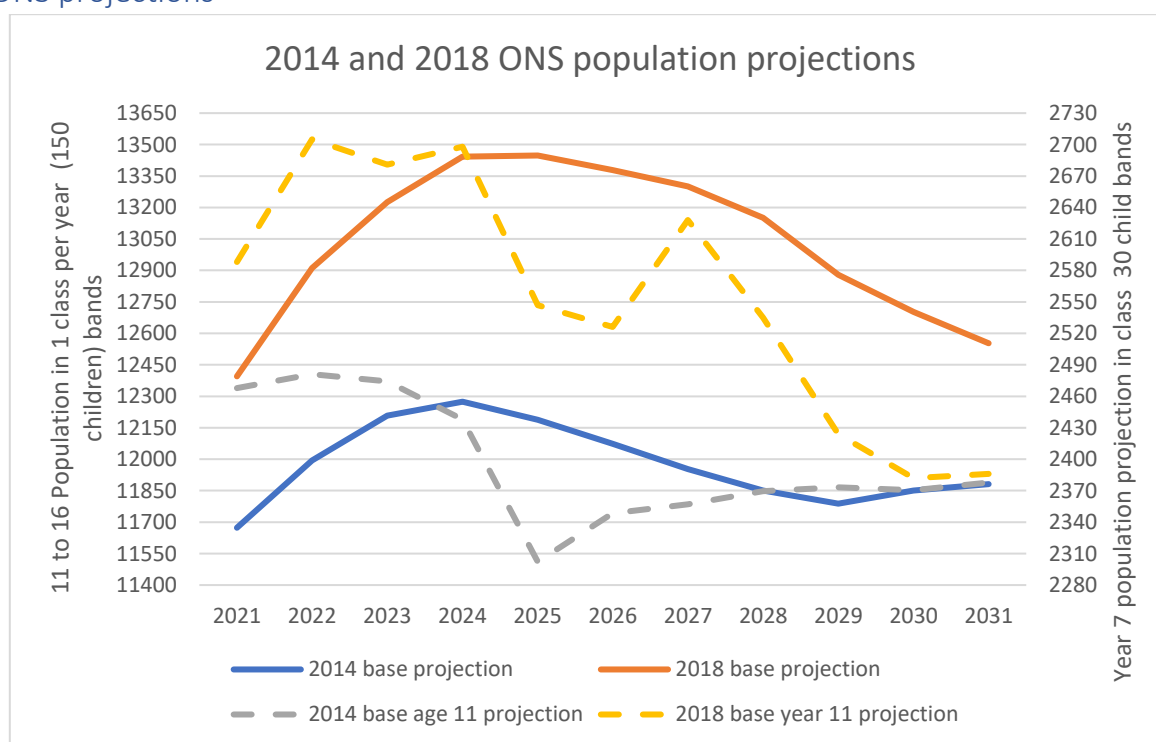
The table below sets out a summary of a number of contextual factors, with ONS population projections and local factors set out separately. These are important, but there was no indication that these factors pointed to a need to revise the analysis derived from the roll projection.

Contextual Factor	Implications
Wokingham Births	Rising numbers until 2012/13, requiring additional Reception places. Secondary roll projections are expected to peak (largely based on birth-rate trends) in 2023-4

Contextual Factor	Implications
Migration	Significant national migration in the period 2015-20, with 700+ children under 10 moving into the Borough in 2020, 300 more than in 2015 The impacts of the new points-based immigration system are not yet known, (reflecting the presumably temporary impact of Covid) but international migration is evident in mid-year intakes into Borough schools.
Housing-led migration	Impacts of Housing developments as set out in the Wokingham Local Plan, with high rates of housebuilding in the south of the borough expected to be maintained into the future throughout the strategy period.
Cross-border movement	Historically balanced (15% coming from out of Borough, 16% Wokingham children educated out of Borough), but shifting slightly. Mainly between Reading and Bracknell.

Table 2: Contextual factors that are relevant to roll projections

ONS projections



Graph 3 ONS 2014 and 2018 Wokingham Borough Base Projections

The most recent population projection is 2018 based (these figures are not directly comparable to roll figures as the projection year runs 1st July to end June and the school year runs 1st September to end August and they include children educated at home and in independent schools). The population for the whole 11 to 16 school age group is projected to peak in the years 2024 to 2025 (at just under 13,500 children), dropping back to slightly above the 2021 level by 2031. The age group

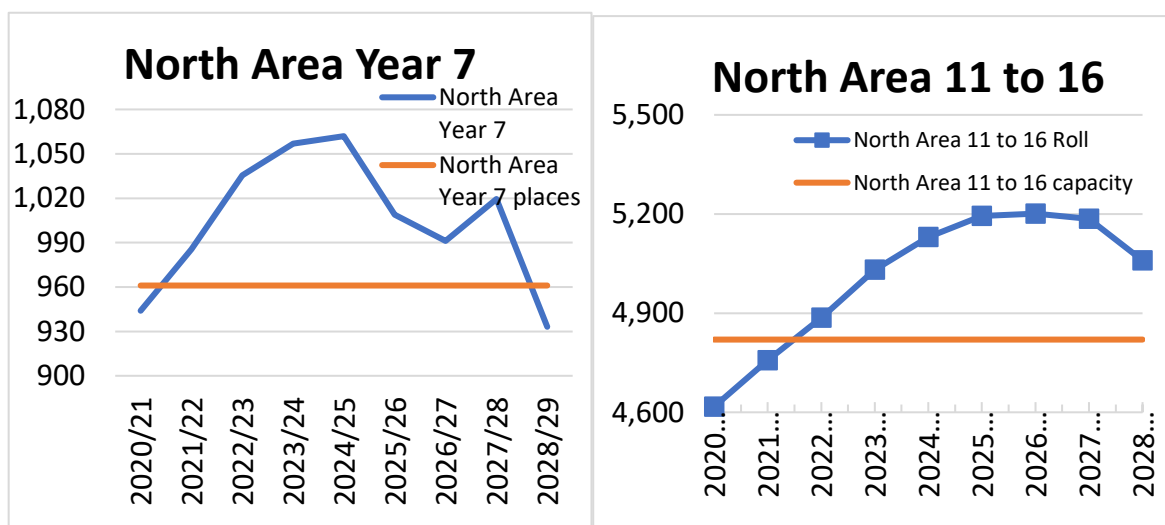
corresponding to Year 7 is projected to start at 2,600 children, to reach a peak over the period 2022 to 2024 (circa 2,700 children), dropping back to 2,400 children by the end of the decade.

The pattern of change is comparable though, with that shown in the Wokingham roll projections, although these indicate a less sharp decline in Year 7 numbers and no plateau in 11 to 16 rolls, which would be consistent with the likely impacts of recent high rates of home construction.

Local Area analysis

North Area trends

The north area projections show a close affinity to the borough population projection, with clear peaks and declining roll numbers later in the period. The local need for Year 7 places significantly exceeds local capacity, with a projected 90 place “gap”.



Graph 4: North area Year 7 projection

Graph 5: North area 11 to 16 projection

North area specific challenges included that in south Twyford rising demand has meant that families were unable to secure Year 7 places in 2021 at the only school within walking distance (the Piggott School) and that demand is also increasing in the Earley and Woodley areas (noting that some respondents have expressed concern about the Earley area).

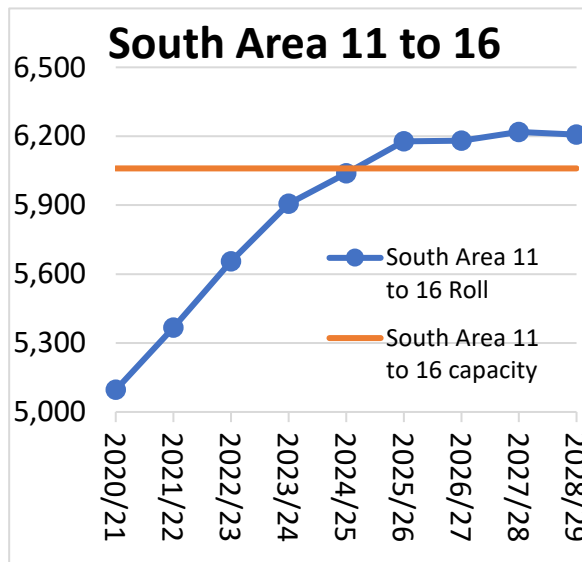
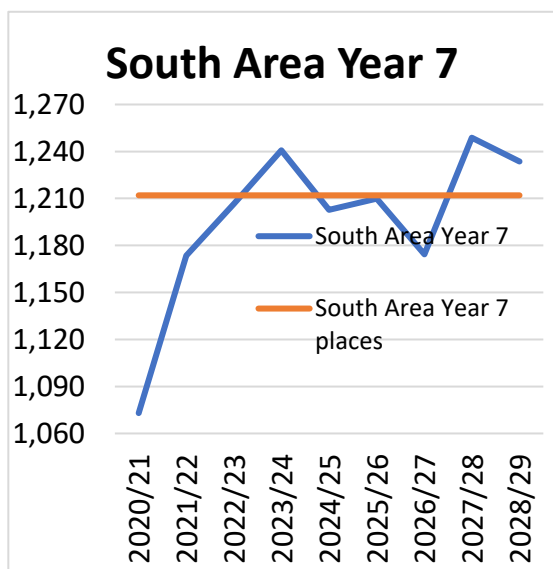
South area trends

The need for Year 7 places in the South area is projected to increase sharply until 2023/24. Thereafter demand fluctuates around the current number of available Year 7 places (with a range of + / - 40 places). Looking at 11 to 16 need and place availability in this area, projected need is expected to increase towards capacity by 2028/29.

In looking at the areas it is noted that the sustained (if fluctuating) high demand for Year 7 places in the area is understood to reflect the number of new homes being built in the area. The current expectations are:

- Development will be seen into the next decade in and around the Wokingham Town and Winnersh area (particularly in the South Wokingham SDL in Wokingham Without Parish), Shinfield and Arborfield Green areas (particularly in Finchampstead Parish).
- Development around other rural communities is expected to be at a much-reduced level.

This area includes the borough’s two co-educational schools. The Holt School (for girls) has been oversubscribed in recent years, while the Forest School (for boys) has attracted fewer preferences. The need to ensure that the council could meet its duty to provide sufficient places and ensure a gender balanced allocation in 2021/22 led to additional capacity being agreed in co-educational schools. It is expected that additional capacity will be required in 2022/23 too.



Graph 6: North Area Year 7

Graph 7: North Area 11 to 16

Place Needs 2021-29

The table below shows the changing number of places required for both Year 7 and Years 11 to 16 up until 2028/29. The 11 to 16 element includes the implicit impact of the potential necessity to agree additional places to ensure gender balanced allocations.

	2021 /22	2022 /23	2023 /24	2024 /25	2025 /26	2026 /27	2027 /28	2028 /29
Year 7 places	2,176	2,176	2,176	2,176	2,176	2,176	2,176	2,176
Year 7 projection	2,159	2,242	2,298	2,265	2,219	2,166	2,268	2,167
Year 7 additional capacity requirement	90	75						
Total Need	2,249	2,242	2,298	2,265	2,219	2,166	2,268	2,167
Year 7 Need Versus Places	-73	-141	-122	-89	-43	10	-92	9
11 to 16 places	10,865	10,865	10,865	10,865	10,865	10,865	10,865	10,865
11 to 16 projections	10,124	10,542	10,938	11,169	11,372	11,382	11,404	11,267

11 to 16 additional capacity requirements	390	225	150	75	0	0	0	0
Total Need	10,514	10,767	11,088	11,244	11,372	11,382	11,404	11,267
11 to 16 Need Versus Places	351	98	-223	-379	-507	-517	-539	-402

Table 3 additional capacity need to 2028/29

Local Plan Update (LPU) & longer-term needs

The ONS 2018 base population projection, shows the 11 to 16 child population declining from the late 2020s, before stabilising in the mid-2030s. However, recent annual housebuilding numbers point to the population increasing at a higher rate than projected, and it is prudent to plan to address this additional need should it arise. New housing will be largely in the south of the borough, as northern areas are either largely built out or protected by Green Belt status. This will inevitably mean that there will be a potential mismatch between school provision and the Wokingham population. Currently Shinfield Parish has primary schools admitting 210 pupils and a secondary school admitting only 112 pupils. The largest LPU site under consideration, the Hall Farm site between Sindlesham and Shinfield, is expected to include a designated secondary school site, and this could mitigate the risks of there being too few places or too few readily accessible places.

Addressing need

Three key approaches

Three approaches to the creation of additional capacity have been identified:

1. Utilising surplus places in older age groups

Wokingham Schools report there is limited ability to offer additional capacity in schools from 2022 onwards, and none without undertakings to provide significant investment for future years. This reflects a number of factors, the most significant of which (for 2022 allocations) is that capacity for growth was used to make provision to ensure girls were offered places in 2021/22. It is though, potentially a partial solution to meet 2022 pressures.

2. Expanding existing schools (most deliverable option for next 5 years)

Expansion is dependent on agreement with school Trusts. A number of schools have increased their rolls in recent years and not all Trusts wish to grow further. Expansion is also dependent on securing planning consent for schemes.

Resource limitations mean that the extent of the building works required to secure a satisfactory expansion and the time required to execute schemes may limit the Council's ability to offer additional places at some schools. If additional works (over and above those required to create classrooms for the additional pupils) are required it may be necessary to focus works on a limited number of schools, to ensure the programme can be delivered within available resources.

3. Opening new schools

This would require significant site and capital investment. Sites within established residential areas are likely to be unsuitable; most likely a new site would be acquired through the master planning

process for a new residential community. Linking to housing development could enable a new school (probably in the 2030s), subject to need. This might still be required, though, at an earlier date, if insufficient capacity can be agreed through school partnerships.

Of these options, only two and three are credible. Option 2 is preferred because it is deliverable, is likely to be less costly than option 3, and given that both Year 7 and 11 to 16 rolls are expected to be reducing towards the end of the projection period, is less likely to leave the borough with a long-term legacy of surplus capacity.

Actions Relating to Y7 sufficiency

The council has engaged with all secondary schools to understand their ability and willingness to provide additional places. Five schools responded positively, and out of these it is currently proposed to proceed with proposals at three schools. These proposals are intended to provide immediate capacity and to address some long-standing issues at schools. The selection takes account of a number of factors, including:

- the degree of certainty that additional capacity would serve the borough,
- the ability of schools to meet needs in their local community or in adjoining areas,
- the future value of any investment and
- the degree of certainty that suitable proposals can be agreed and delivered for September 2022.

School specific plans

- **St Crispin's School:** which has planning consent for a sixth form extension, sits on the edge of the South Wokingham SDL area and where additional places are expected to benefit families living to the south-west of the school site.
- **The Emmbrook School:** which has a central location, near to areas of ongoing housing development and is accessible from Earley, Woodley and Wokingham Town.
- **The Piggott School:** which helps address need in the north of the borough and ensures that south Twyford families can walk to school.

Additional capacity may be required within the next decade, but it is anticipated this will be delivered in conjunction with other schemes.

Next Steps

- Confirm resources required for 2023-7 to support permanent expansions and build into MTFP
- Work collaboratively with the expanding schools to meet the Sept 2023 deadline
- Proceed to stage 2 of Secondary Strategy (post-16 provision)

TITLE	Delivering the Gorse Ride Regeneration Project - Procurement of Construction Works and Services
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Monday, 7 March 2022
WARD	Finchampstead South;
LEAD OFFICER	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Finance and Housing - John Kaiser

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

To seek agreement for the procurement of the construction services and works for the regeneration of social housing at Gorse Ride, to provide more affordable homes and support a strong community.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive recommends Council to:

- 1) approve the procurement business case of the construction works and services as relevant to Gorse Ride Regeneration project;
- 2) give delegated authority to the Director of Resources and Assets and Director of Place and Growth to approve the awarding and execution of the construction works and services as relevant to Gorse Ride Regeneration within the funding envelope and the over-arching business case as presented to the Executive on 17th February 2022.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Gorse Ride regeneration project is a flagship scheme in the Council's response to the housing crisis, providing more and better affordable housing. The project recognises the value a thriving community can make to a successful housing regeneration project, by working collaboratively with the residents to ensure that the sense of community is preserved through a proactive engagement process.

The provision of well-planned and delivered affordable housing has never been more important. Data on a national and local level shows that homelessness is on the increase, with an escalating demand for temporary accommodation not only impacting the Council's future temporary accommodation budgets but having a major effect on those residents whose lives are disrupted by not having a stable and secure home. Meanwhile increasing house prices in Wokingham Borough continue to make home ownership unaffordable for many. The project is generally well supported by residents who along with the Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel are updated on progress on a regular basis.

In May 2018, the Council's Executive approved the Gorse Ride regeneration project to replace the existing 178 poor quality, primarily Council owned, socially rented homes, with 243 new high quality, well designed and energy efficient homes, set in landscaped green space. If the recommendations within this report are adopted a total 249 new homes will be provided, of which 136 will be social rented homes, 49 shared ownership and 64 private sale homes. This equates to 51 more affordable housing properties than currently provided on the development.

In a report presented to Executive on 17th February 2022 it is recommended that the regenerated properties in Gorse Ride are transferred to the HRA, rather than to the Council's housing company, Loddon Homes, as proposed in the 2018 report, which will allow access to the HRA borrowing capacity without the need for additional affordable housing contributions.

Subject to approval of the report presented to the Executive on 17th February 2022, this report to the Executive seeks agreement to approve the procurement business case of the construction works and services as relevant to Gorse Ride Regeneration and give delegated authority to the Director of Resources and Assets and Director of Place and Growth to approve the awarding and execution of the construction works and services as relevant to Gorse Ride Regeneration within the funding envelope and the overarching business case as presented to the Executive on 17th February 2022.

BACKGROUND

The Gorse Ride is a community regeneration scheme that will help meet local affordable housing need and maintain a strong community in Gorse Ride. It supports the Wokingham Borough Corporate Delivery Plan (2020 – 2024) priority ‘Right Homes, Right Places’. The scheme also supports the Council’s Housing Strategy (2020 – 2024) outcome to deliver regeneration programmes of older, poor quality housing stock. The scheme makes a major contribution to the four key priorities within the Housing Strategy to:

- 1.) Address and understand our housing needs
- 2.) Support our vulnerable residents through a range of housing options
- 3.) Improve the quality, sustainability and management of the Borough’s homes
- 4.) Enrich people’s lives

The project team is working collaboratively with the Gorse Ride residents to keep the community together to ensure that the project adds to the quality of life and community cohesion of the residents living there. By engaging with the local community throughout the planning and design process it is expected that the new homes will better meet the needs of residents now and in the future. The project is generally well supported by residents and the Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel, made up of social housing tenants and councillors, are regularly updated on progress.

Gorse Ride is a residential area in Finchampstead comprising a total of 178 properties, of which 133 are Council owned, socially rented homes and 45 are privately owned properties. The homes were built in the 1970s, with the purpose of providing accommodation for a limited period of time, which was reflected in the build quality. Over the years there have been a number of issues relating to the non-traditional construction, including poor thermal insulation, some structural defects and above and below ground drainage issues. These have all led to poor living conditions and high maintenance liabilities compared with other homes in the Council’s ownership.

The proposed regeneration will transform Gorse Ride through the provision of new, high quality, social rented and shared ownership homes, private market replacement homes and well-designed open spaces.

Previous Executive reports giving approval for the regeneration of Gorse Ride

In March 2017, the Executive agreed the intent to regenerate the Gorse Ride estate and in May 2018 the Executive approved a number of recommendations to progress with the redevelopment of the scheme. This included:

1. Approval for the funding model based on a construction cost estimate of £69,500,000 and site assembly cost estimate of £18,700,000, with a total scheme cost of £88,200,000. The report also confirming the allocation of £28,015,683 of affordable housing s106 receipts as well as £1,300,000 from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for statutory compensation payments to tenants. Loddon Homes, was proposed as the appointed landlord, were to meet the remaining funding through borrowing, Homes England grants, sale of a proportion of properties on the open market and rental income.

2. Approval of taking a community regeneration approach to the redevelopment with the intention of developing the site whilst keeping the well-established community together through tenant decanting and acquisition of privately owned properties.
3. Recommendations for the indicative number of new homes and the proposed tenure mix, proposing a total of 243 homes. Comprising of 136 social rented homes, 12 affordable rented homes, 19 shared ownership homes and 76 homes for private sale.
4. The selection of Wokingham Housing Limited (WHL) as the development partner and Loddon Homes Limited as the end landlord for the new homes.

To allow better co-ordination of the decant process which enables residents to move to new homes within the development and keep the community together the construction has been divided into four phases. Phase 1, Phase 2a, Phase 2b, and Phase 2c

Phase 1 - is adjacent to Phase 2 and is now complete and has been transferred to Loddon Homes. Phase 1 properties are being used to decant residents from Phase 2a as part of site assembly/decant process to allow development in that Phase to proceed over the next two years. Phase 1 of Gorse Ride is outside the scope of this report.

This report is only concerned with the approval of the procurement strategy for the construction works and consultant services associated for the delivery of Phases 2a, 2b and 2c.

Progress since the Executive report in May 2018

Significant progress has been made with progressing the delivery of the Gorse Ride regeneration project since May 2018. This includes:

- The completion of Phase 1 of the Gorse Ride redevelopment. (Note this part of the development will remain within Loddon Homes as the landlord)
- Successful on-going engagement with the Gorse Ride community including the establishment of a Steering Group. The community has been fully involved with the regeneration process being consulted on overall design and process with regular communications distributed. Most of the residents in the Phase 2a of development have now been successfully moved into new homes
- Granting of full planning consent in February 2021
- In July 2021, the demolition contract for the first phase was awarded.

Events that have impacted on the delivery and finances of the Gorse Ride regeneration project since the May 2018 Executive report

Since May 2018 a number of significant events have taken place that have impacted on the financial modelling and project times lines for the development.

- The Council restructured its housing companies in 2019 by bringing Wokingham Housing Limited and its development services inhouse.
- The construction costs quoted in May 2018 were an estimate based on an outline early-stage design. Since then, significant detailed design and planning work has been undertaken with additional design costs for the project being identified for items such as the mitigation for flooding issues and upgrading environmental sustainability measures.

- Inflation of material costs and shortage of labour and skills triggered by the Covid pandemic have seen escalating construction costs (often in excess of twenty percent) which have increased the anticipated costs for the project.
- Changes to the Homes England funding criteria in December 2020 significantly reduced the amount of grant funding available for social housing on regeneration projects. This has resulted in an estimated decrease of £10 million for the project.

Gorse Ride is a development project of considerable size and as with all projects of this nature it is expected that there will be an element of review at different stages of the project. With planning permission agreed and the decant process coming to an end for the first stage of development, officers have undertaken a review of the project in its entirety to mitigate the events outlined above and to guard against future risks.

BUSINESS CASE

In accordance with the Procurement and Contracts Rules and Procedures (PCRP) (see section 3.1.1): a formal business case is required for any procurement with a total value above £50,000. The level of approval required for the Business Case depends on the type of procurement and total ascertainable value of the contract, as indicated in the table below:

Type of Procurement	Level 1 Assistant Director & Director Approval	Level 2 Executive Approval	Level 3 Full Council Approval
Goods and Services	£50k – £500k	> £500k	Annual Value >£5m or TAV >£25m (if capital >£15m)
Schedule 3 services	£50k – £663k	> £663k	
Works	£50k – £4,733k	> £4,733k	

A detailed procurement business case, for the delivery of the works and services as relevant and necessary for the scheme, is attached in **Part 2**. As this covers a number of procurement activities yet to be initiated by the Council, this information held is commercial sensitivity and cannot be published yet.

The project is being delivered across multiple phases to align with the phased decant strategy. For each phase, there are broadly 3 areas of procurement activity:

- Site Enabling works / site investigations – the value of this element is anticipated to be less than £4.7m per phase and therefore will not require Full Council approval.
- Professional Services / Consultancy – the value of this element is anticipated to be less than £500k per phase and therefore will not require Full Council approval.
- Construction works – the value of this element is anticipated to be in excess of £15m for each phase and therefore will require Full Council approval in absence of delegated authority.

Options appraisal

For the purpose of the procurement business case, focus is given on the Construction works, as the other elements are below the threshold requiring Council approval and as such, these will be dealt with in accordance with the requirements of section 13 of the Constitution (Procurement and Contracts Rules and Procedures).

Due to the anticipated value of the construction works to be delivered in phase 2a, the contractor must be procured through an approved UK Public Procurement route, either:

- Public procurement – competitive tendering process, advertised internationally with the opportunity made available to all members of the Government Procurement Agreement (GPA), which the UK signed after leaving the European Union.
- Public procurement – call-off from competitively procured third party framework agreement.

Competitive procurement process of that scale, compliant with the requirements of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015, would usually take 8-10 months, subject to sufficient resources available across the Council to undertake the relevant research and develop the tender documents.

Third party's framework agreements are procured through robust compliant procedures external to the Council organisations, pre-vetting / pre-qualifying suitable contractors and this way generating a list with qualified, capable, and financially stable contractors, enabling other contracting authorities to access those contractors and sign a contract with the one, who can demonstrate the ability to meet the buyer's requirements. Appointment from an approved framework can either be through a mini-competition process (competition between all contractors on the framework agreement) or by a direct award (award to one of the contractors on the framework agreement, selected by the contracting authority), depending on the framework procedures and the preferred adoption route by the contracting Authority.

Proposed procurement strategy

The strategy adopted to date is to procure the contracts relevant to each construction phase separately and to deliver the scheme in phases, rather than as a whole project, to enable maximum flexibility and efficiency, as well as to use the experience of delivering the previous phase. The benefits of this approach are:

- Reduces risk to WBC of implications of poor performance of appointed Contractor.
- Reduces cost commitment from the outset as only signing up on a phase-by-phase basis.
- Reduces risk of time and costs to WBC in the event the contractor was to cease trading during the scheme.
- Encourages successful contractor to maintain high standards of build quality on site with the potential to continue with the follow-on phases.
- Encourages contractor to maintain cost competitiveness, again with the potential of the follow-on phases.
- Allows experience gained from the first phase to be used to fine-tune the other phases, encourage innovation, and cost savings.

- Allows the successful contractor to continue to work as a team with the WBC team and the residents/wider community, and form trust, which will ensure an excellent outcome is achieved.
- Allows the successful contractor to form relationships and trust with the local residents and residents' groups. This is very important on a project with this type with overall duration of approximately 5 year build for all phases. The contractor will be working in and around a community where some residents will be living next to a building site for a considerable time.

To avoid any further delay, and without compromising the compliancy with the relevant procurement legislation, we recommend the use of an approved construction framework to procure the main contractor over the use of a traditional tender route. This has the benefit of improved appointment timescales which assist with overall project programme:

- As all frameworks have undergone the required robust Public Procurement regs processes there is an element of cost certainty, when it comes to generic items (prelims, contractor profit etc.) – this reduces the Council's risk exposure as these items will be in pre-determined value ranges.
- The framework contractors have been assessed on rigorous criteria, which include value for money, quality, performance and ongoing KPI's on other schemes, social responsibility, community engagement, sustainability, etc. All in accordance with the Procurement Regulations.
- Utilise the direct award mechanism for framework "call-off" process, enabling early engagement with a single contractor to progress the project within the required timescales. This also ensures the scheme design as it currently stands is scrutinised to ensure buildability and should drive costs savings by design tweaks to lessen time on site thus saving Prelims etc.

The appointment will be made in accordance with the framework conditions and with a 2-stage JCT Design & Build contract, as recommended by the Employer's Agent and Designer, as the most appropriate method.

Framework Review

There are a number of nationally recognised construction procurement frameworks that are available to use by Local Authorities, a review has been made of 5 potential frameworks.

- Crown Commercial Services: Construction Works and Associated Services Framework
- Homes England DDP3
- Pagabo
- Scape
- Southern Construction Framework

Following a review of the scope and the terms of these framework agreements, it is recommended that the Crown Commercial Services: Construction Works and Associated Services Framework be used for Phase 2a due to the following considerations:

- Crown Commercial Services: Construction Works and Associated Services Framework (CCS) is owned and operated by Central Government and sponsored by the Cabinet Office. The framework is founded on an Alliance structure to promote collaborative behaviour between Clients, Suppliers and Framework Managers.
- The framework supports the implementation of key government policies and strategies, including building information modelling (BIM), life cycle costing, prompt payment, project bank accounts, early contractor involvement and social value.
- The framework delivers a wide range of major and minor building and civil engineering projects for central government and the wider public sector. The flexible contract structure is designed to provide solutions for varying customer requirements.
- In 2019 CCS undertook a full OJEU European procurement exercise (pre-Brexit) to establish a Framework to deliver public sector building and civil engineering projects ranging in value from £0 to £80m+. The framework is arranged in to 11 Lots of varying levels of complexity, this includes general construction and specialist market areas: housing, high-rise, maritime, airfields, demolition/decommissioning and construction management.
- Individual lots are divided into regional sub-lots appropriate to the market sector and value range. All commonly used procurement routes, tendering methodologies, payment arrangements and standard forms of contract are available through the framework. There are standard common government “boiler plate” clauses included for things such as GDPR and intellectual property rights. The framework runs for a period of 7 years. There are 135 appointed suppliers across the 11 Lots.
- By accessing the Framework, public bodies can contract directly with a selected contractor/supplier rather than having to run lengthy and expensive procurement exercises each time a Building or Civil project is undertaken.
- During 2019/20 the CCS framework helped 18,000 Public and 3rd Sector customers achieve commercial benefits totaling over £1 billion of public money by using the framework.
- The CCS framework is free to use by Local Authorities and does not charge a fee, all other frameworks that are listed above and assessed were found to be commercially run companies that charge a wide range of fees dependant on the project value.

The CCS framework also allows the client to choose the Contract that is used for the execution of the works, something that some of the others do not. WBC on other construction projects has preferred to use the Joint Contracts Tribunal (JCT) suite of construction contracts as they have found to be robust, and the Council has excellent knowledge in operating them; this is very important when managing a project of this scale and value.

Analysis of the Business Strategy

The proposed procurement strategy is beneficial to the Council as it improves the delivery process, provides greater flexibility and minimises the timescales to appoint a contractor.

It also provides resilience and the ability to react to fluctuations within the construction market as recently experienced due to external factors such as Brexit, COVID 19 and fluctuations within the energy market prices.

Risks

If delegated approval is granted, risks will be managed and mitigated by

- Continuing to engage with the residents and other key stakeholders to ensure a collective buy-in to all key decisions made
- Increasing ability to continue to make progress seamlessly across work streams and phases, to tie in with the progress of decanting process
- Providing ability to retain key relationships throughout the progress of the works
- Ensuring adherence to the strategy as approved throughout the delivery process by a robust governance arrangement

Recommendation

The Executive is therefore recommended to approve the procurement business case of the construction works and services as relevant to Gorse Ride Regeneration and to give delegated authority to the Director of Resources and Assets and Director of Place and Growth to approve the awarding and execution of the construction works and services as relevant to Gorse Ride Regeneration within the funding envelope and the overarching business case as presented to the Executive on 17th February 2022.

Expected Outcomes and Project Times Scales

The recommendations will ensure that the Gorse Ride redevelopment project can proceed at pace in the knowledge that the procurement strategy is approved. The project will provide a total of 249 new homes of which 136 will be social rented homes, 49 shared ownership homes and 64 private sale homes equating to 51 additional affordable homes in the Borough. The current poor-quality housing will be replaced with new, well designed, energy efficient, quality homes. The community, who in the main have elected to return to the development, have been involved in the design process and kept fully updated on progress.

Subject to the Executive agreeing the recommendations, the next steps will be to

- Conclude the procurement of the Works contract for Phase 2a
- Agree the Pre-Construction Services Agreement (PCSA) with the appointed construction company for the later phases of the site
- Finalise construction contracts for subsequent phases
- Apply for a new CPO which will take up to twelve months as detailed in the report which will be presented to the Executive on the 31st March 2022
- New build construction works anticipated to commence around Summer 2022 for the first phase

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)	£2,500,000	Yes, subject to the approval of Executive of recommendations in this report	See menu of funding steams in the Executive report dated 17 th February 2022
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£29,300,000	Yes, subject to the approval of Executive of recommendations in this report	See menu of funding steams in the Executive report dated 17 th February 2022
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£32,500,000	Yes, subject to the approval of Executive of recommendations in this report	See menu of funding steams in the Executive report dated 17 th February 2022

Other Financial Information

See the report dated 17.02.2022 for current scheme costs.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

On-going engagement is being undertaken with the local community through the Community Regeneration Senior Specialist with the Community Steering Group and they are duly involved in the overall delivery process and any key decisions made.

Public Sector Equality Duty

An Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA) of the scheme was undertaken in April 2018. The Council has considered each protected characteristic to identify whether the regeneration of the site or delivery of the scheme could have a detrimental impact of such protected characteristics. The EQIA identified a number of impacts on the protected characteristic and actions to be undertaken to address any negative impacts identified. The EQIA is a live document and was updated in January 2021. It will continue to be updated as the scheme progresses and is implemented to ensure that identified actions are undertaken to mitigate any impacts.

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

The regeneration of Gorse Ride is anticipated to reduce energy demand by 17% through energy efficient fabric and building services. The proposed dwellings have high levels of airtightness and thermal mass, and reductions in thermal bridging potential. In response to climate change and rising temperatures, the properties have been designed to have passive solar shading through the balcony design. Mechanical Ventilation with Heat Recovery has also been incorporated into the design to ensure that the properties

are well ventilated without losing heat and eliminating the condensation within a building.

An estimated 22.6% of the development's total energy demand will be supplied via a decentralised heating network serving the apartment blocks. Total energy consumption is anticipated to be reduced by 17% through energy efficient design, with 8.3% of the development's anticipated in-use demand being provided by low carbon technologies.

In response to Wokingham's Climate Emergency Action Plan individual properties have electricity only and are heated by internal Air Source Heat Pump, integrated into a hot water cylinder. EV charging points will be distributed around the development to encourage the use of electric cars.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2

The report in Part 2 covers a number of procurement activities yet to be initiated by the Council, this information held is commercial sensitivity and cannot be published yet. As such therefore the information in Part 2 is exempt under paragraphs 1 and 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

List of Background Papers

Part 2 – Procurement Business Case
Executive Report dated 17th February 2022

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By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

Document is Restricted

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