

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE COUNCIL
HELD ON THURSDAY, 21 JULY 2022 FROM 7.30 PM TO 9.45 PM**

Members Present

Councillors: Caroline Smith (Mayor), Beth Rowland (Deputy Mayor), Sam Akhtar, Parry Batth, Rachel Bishop-Firth, Laura Blumenthal, Chris Bowring, Shirley Boyt, Prue Bray, Anne Chadwick, Stephen Conway, David Cornish, Gary Cowan, Andy Croy, Phil Cunnington, Peter Dennis, Lindsay Ferris, Michael Firmager, Paul Fishwick, Jim Frewin, Maria Gee, John Halsall, David Hare, Peter Harper, Graham Howe, Chris Johnson, Clive Jones, Norman Jorgensen, Pauline Jorgensen, Sarah Kerr, Abdul Loyes, Tahir Maher, Morag Malvern, Charles Margetts, Rebecca Margetts, Adrian Mather, Andrew Mickleburgh, Gregor Murray, Alistair Neal, Jackie Rance, Ian Shenton, Imogen Shepherd-DuBey, Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey, Mike Smith, Wayne Smith, Bill Soane, Alison Swaddle and Shahid Younis

Members In Attendance Virtually

Councillors: Rachel Burgess.

24. Apologies

An apology for absence was submitted from Stuart Munro.

Rachel Burgess joined the meeting via Microsoft Teams.

25. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the annual meeting of the Council held on 19 May 2022 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor, subject to the final sentence of paragraph 4 of Minute 1 (Statement by Councillor John Halsall) being amended to read:

“All development to date has taken place under the Core Strategy, **authored** by Gary”.

The Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting of the Council held on 22 June 2022 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

26. Declarations of Interest

The following Members made a general personal declaration of interest in relation to items on the Agenda:

- Prue Bray as a Director of Berry Brook Homes and WBC Holdings Ltd.
- Stephen Conway as a Director of Loddon Homes and WBC Holdings Ltd.
- David Hare as a Director of Optalis Ltd.
- Clive Jones as a Director of Loddon Homes and WBC Holdings Ltd.

27. Mayor's Announcements

The Mayor informed Members of a number of events attended, including the Pride event and the welcome picnic for newcomers to the Borough, both held on Elms Field. The Mayor thanked all the organisations and volunteers who provided support and advice to residents across the Borough. The Mayor also reminded Members that the new Carnival Hub was due to open on Monday 25 July. The Mayor looked forward to seeing Members at the opening event.

28. Public Question Time

There were no public questions.

29. Petitions

No petitions were received.

30. Presentation by the Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner and the Chief Constable

The Council received presentations from the Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner, Mathew Barber, and the Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police, John Campbell. Local Policing Commander for Bracknell and Wokingham, Superintendent Helen Kenny, gave details of local data, trends and initiatives.

The presentations covered the following points:

- Strong Local Policing – recruiting more police officers, supporting neighbourhood policing and focussing on the crimes that matter most to the public.
- Fighting serious and organised crime – cracking down on county lines gangs and organised crime groups to protect children from abuse and exploitation.
- Fighting fraud and cyber-crime – investing in the technology and resources the police need to protect residents online.
- Improving the criminal justice system – supporting victims of crime, bringing more criminals to justice and reducing reoffending.
- Tackling illegal encampments – ensuring a fair but firm response to illegal encampments and reducing the effect on communities.
- Wokingham Borough initiatives – Operation Outbreak (tackling knife crime through targeted enforcement and engagement; car cruises (a partnership approach)).

Following the presentation, Members asked the questions set out below:

1. Question from Alistair Neal

Talking to residents in Earley there is a lot of concern, and fear, about the targeted

burglary of gold jewellery. Can you give any reassurance to residents that this crime is decreasing, and that tackling it is a priority for Thames Valley Police?

Answer

The slides show an almost 40% reduction in burglary over the last year or so. This was an aspect of Covid with more people working at home, etc. There have not been any targeted burglaries of gold jewellery in Wokingham of late. The last one was in May. That said, when they do occur they cause concern because the victims feel targeted. There was particular concern in Woodley so our Priority Crime Team held a meeting to discuss those concerns with Woodley and Earley residents. Councillors and business leaders attended. As part of that meeting we shared information on crime levels and recent convictions. More importantly, we talked about better communication channels that we can use to locally to spread information and crime prevention advice.

Locally, we have made a commitment that the Priority Crime Team, which consists of a Detective Inspector, a Detective Sargeant and a Detective Constable, will continue to investigate the more complex burglaries such as these. They often span across different police areas and different police forces, so it is really important that we have the right resources and the skilled detectives to investigate this type of offence. Following protracted investigations by this team this year one burglar was convicted of seven family gold burglaries in the Wokingham area. He has been sentenced to four and a half years in prison. I hope that gives some reassurance locally.

2. Question from Rachel Bishop Firth

Sir Mo Farrah's revelation that he was illegally trafficked to the UK as a child has made us all more aware of this problem. Rightly, the UK authorities have confirmed that no action will be taken against him as a victim of this abuse. I am concerned about people in this area who may be found to have been brought to the UK to work illegally. We know that this has happened in Wokingham in the recent past and I have reported and asked for welfare checks on individuals where I've had concerns myself. Where someone from outside the UK is found to be working illegally in the Wokingham area, what steps do we take to assess whether they are a victim of trafficking, and where needed to protect them and safeguard their rights?

Answer

In the round, modern slavery and human trafficking have become much more prominent in terms of everyone's awareness over recent times. Certainly, Sir Mo Farah's revelations will only support that awareness. In simple terms, we have to have it reported to us in the first place. Our police officers are trained to identify hidden harm and the potential for modern slavery and trafficking. Also, seeing these people as victims rather than people who have automatically come into the country illegally. Other agencies have an important role in this. The Council and other blue light services will be meeting people all the time. Our organised crime teams are targeting organised modern slavery. In investigations we have a combination of enforcement, protection and prevention. That strategy is part of any senior police commander's tactics. In terms of any issues locally, there have been one or two cases which were referred through the national referral mechanism and safeguarded

locally, but there aren't any significant local themes or trends to comment on.

3. Question from Andy Croy

Thames Valley Police (TVP) has recently relaunched Community Speedwatch in its area. Many volunteers, including councillors, have spent many hours monitoring speeds and recording the speeds of driver driving over the speed threshold. These drivers are then sent a letter by TVP reminding them of the correct speed limit. One of the purported outcomes of the scheme is that excessive or repeat speeders may face follow up action from local policing teams. How many of these follow up actions have occurred relating to drivers in:

- each of the policing areas that cover part of Wokingham Borough?
- Berkshire?
- the TVP area?

And are you happy with this level of response from local policing teams, and if you are not happy, what steps will you be taking to increase local policing responsiveness?

Answer

You have asked for details about numbers and I don't have that information for you tonight. We will make sure that we capture that information. This is a question about Community Speedwatch which has been relaunched and driven by the Commissioner – local communities doing high visibility enforcement and prevention activities which are really welcome for villages and towns which are subject to rat runs and speeding issues. As a force we issued over 180,000 tickets last year so it is something that we take very seriously – speeding enforcement. Obviously, we can't be everywhere at all times. You have heard of some of the issues that policing deals with. We have touched on some of those this evening. The ability to be everywhere to enforce traffic and excess speed can sometimes be limited unless we have consistent patterns of behaviour. So, Community Speedwatch is really welcome and is a great example of the police and communities working together.

In relation to your question, where we have repeat offenders, what are the outcomes and evidence of that feeding into the system for us to take action – I haven't got that to hand at the moment but can get it to you outside the meeting. Locally, across the Bracknell and Wokingham area, we have 17 certified groups and nine active groups. Of those nine, seven are in Wokingham. The nine active groups have generated 1,973 speeding awareness letters. Out of that number, only 13 (0.06%) have reached the three incident in six months cohort which allows us to take additional action. That additional action is carried out by the Roads Policing Team not by the local police area. Details of the 13 cases have only come through recently so we cannot attribute them to particular parishes or schemes within Wokingham. Our contact for Community Speedwatch is willing to get these figures for us so we can pass them on. With that low number of repeat offenders one might argue that the local Community Speedwatch is particularly successful which is encouraging. I would be grateful for any local feedback.

Due to time constraints, it was agreed that the following Member questions would be

answered in writing:

4. Question from Jim Frewin

What plans are in place to improve the public confidence in local policing over the next 12 months?

5. Question from John Kaiser

There seems to be confusion among residents as to who is responsible for setting speed limits on the Borough's roads, can you please confirm whose responsibility it is to set limits and if the responsibility lays with the Council that the TVP will enforce the limits set by the Council?

6. Question from Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey

What is being done to make women and girls safe?

7. Question from Prue Bray

What can you do to better protect victims of harassment, stalking and domestic abuse from further harm after the point at which they report what has happened to them to the police?

8. Question from Clive Jones

Many residents feel that there are not enough policemen and women deployed on our streets in Wokingham Borough. Cuts that have been forced on Thames Valley over the last 6-7 years will have made it more difficult for you to have many officers on our streets. Do you see this situation changing in the coming years and can we expect to see a significant increase in officers on more of our streets in Wokingham Borough?

9. Question from Imogen Shepherd-DuBey

In Wokingham we get a lot of problems after midnight where there are late licences Friday – Sunday. This can be as simple as broken glass and loud behaviour, but often vandalism and we have had several more serious stabbings. These problems are usually when people leave a venue and sometimes, we get other noise and problems, usually near the residential areas. What can we do to get a presence located in the Town in the late evening and early hours, when we need the police to be present to control this anti-social behaviour?

10. Question from Sarah Kerr

The conviction rates for sexual violence and rape are very poor both locally and nationally. How will you be making improvements at the Thames Valley level so that victims can have more confidence in the system and thus be more likely to come forward and report?

11. Question from Paul Fishwick

What action will the Police take against vehicles parking on the footway where there are no waiting restrictions?

12. Question from Gregor Murray

According to Cifas, the latest Telephone-operated Crime Survey for England and Wales, figures reveal there were almost 5.1 million fraud offences in the year ending September 2021, a rise of 36% on pre-pandemic levels and represents almost half of all crime captured by the survey. Affluent and ageing communities, such as ours, are particularly targeted by this type of crimes. What is being done to both combat and prevent Cyber Fraud, Identity Theft, SME Business Fraud and Financial Fraud against the elderly and vulnerable in our community?

13. Question from Laura Blumenthal

We've recently had the report in the news about over 1000 girls in Telford being raped and sexually abused over decades, with it not being taken seriously by the authorities, including the police, for fear over being labelled racist as the perpetrators were mainly Pakistani Muslim men. Many of the children were victim blamed and some were murdered. Please can you assure us that this would not happen to the vulnerable children in our Borough?

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Matthew Barber, John Campbell and Helen Kenny be thanked for attending the meeting to give the presentations and answer Member questions;
- 2) the presentation slides be circulated to Members;
- 3) written answers be provided for the Member questions which could not be put at the meeting due to time constraints.

31. Annual Pay Policy Statement 2022-23

Council considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 49 to 60, which gave details of the Pay Policy Statement for 2022/23.

The report stated that, under Sections 38 to 43 of the Localism Act 2011, the Council was required to approve and publish a Pay Policy Statement each year. The Pay Policy Statement enabled residents to understand the Council's pay policy for senior staff and how it related to the salaries of the lowest paid staff. This provided transparency and enabled residents to assess whether salaries represented value for money.

It was proposed by Rachel Bishop-Firth and seconded by Pauline Jorgensen that the Annual Pay Policy Statement, 2022/23, as recommended by the Personnel Board, be approved.

RESOLVED: That the Annual Pay Policy Statement for 2022/23, as recommended by the Personnel Board, be approved.

32. Audit Committee Annual Report 2021-22

Council considered the Annual Report of the Audit Committee, set out at Agenda pages 61 to 64.

Maria Gee, current Vice-Chair of the Audit Committee, introduced the report which gave details of the remit of the Committee and the issues it had covered during 2021/22, including internal and external audit, risk management, statement of accounts, corporate governance, treasury management and the Council's corporate complaints process.

The report stated that, in September 2021, the Audit Committee undertook a self-assessment against CIPFA's best practice guidance. The Committee found substantial levels of compliance against best practice but found five areas for further development, including the appointment of an independent member of the Committee.

It was proposed by Maria Gee and seconded by Peter Harper that the Audit Committee Annual Report, 2021/22 be noted.

RESOLVED: That the Audit Committee Annual Report, 2021/22 be noted.

33. Standards Committee Annual Report 201-22

Council considered the 2021/22 Annual Report from the Standards Committee, set out at Agenda pages 65 to 72.

Morag Malvern, current Chair of the Standards Committee introduced the report which reminded Members of the role of the Committee in promoting and maintaining the highest standards of conduct (the Nolan Principles) by elected Members representing the Borough, Town and Parish Councils.

The report gave details of the number and range of issues covered during the year and the steps taken by the Committee to provide training and support for Members across the Borough. During the year, the Committee considered and recommended adoption of the updated Model Code of Conduct produced by the Local Government Association. The Model Code was subsequently adopted by the Council with some local variations.

It was proposed by Morag Malvern and seconded by Graham Howe that the Standards Committee Annual Report for 2021/22 be noted.

RESOLVED: That the Standards Committee Annual Report, 2021/22 be noted.

34. Wokingham Borough Wellbeing Board Annual Report 2021-22

Council considered the Wokingham Borough Wellbeing Board Annual Report for

2021/22, set out at Agenda pages 73 to 108.

David Hare, current Chair of the Wokingham Borough Wellbeing Board introduced the report which gave details of the role of the Board in bringing together health, social care and community partners to work on reducing health inequalities locally and improve the overall health and wellbeing of the Borough's residents.

The report gave details of the priorities established by the Board and the specific achievements delivered over the past year in areas such as children in care, community safety, domestic abuse, mental health, long Covid, physical activity and the Wokingham Integrated Partnership.

It was proposed by David Hare and seconded by Charles Margetts that the Wokingham Borough Wellbeing Board Annual Report, 2021/22 be noted.

RESOLVED: That the Wokingham Borough Wellbeing Board Annual Report, 2021/22 be noted.

35. Changes to the Constitution

Council considered a report, set out on Agenda pages 109 to 112, which proposed changes to the Constitution, considered and recommended by the Constitution Review Working Group.

It was proposed by Imogen Shepherd-Dubey and seconded by Prue Bray, that the recommendations set out within the report be approved.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

RESOLVED That:

- 1) additional wording be added Chapter 4.2, as set out in paragraph 1 of the report;
- 2) paragraph 4.4.11 (Rules of Debate Audit Committee), paragraph 8.4.8 (Rules of debate Licensing and Appeals Committee) and paragraph 9.1.9 Rules of procedure (Standards Committee) be removed and subsequent sections renumbered, as set out in paragraph 1 of the report;
- 3) additional wording be added to Rule 4.4.19, as set out in paragraph 2 of the report.

36. Additional Council Meeting

Council considered a proposal to establish an additional Council meeting in October in order to enable the transaction of more Council business.

It was proposed by Clive Jones and seconded by Stephen Conway that the timetable of meetings be amended to schedule an additional Council meeting on Thursday 20 October at 7.30pm.

Upon being put to the vote it was:

RESOLVED That the timetable of meetings be amended to schedule an additional Council meeting on Thursday 20 October 2022 at 7.30pm.

37. Member Question Time

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

37.1 Michael Firmager asked the Executive Member for Planning and Local Plan the following question:

Given that coalition Members have criticised the lack of development in Hurst, Twyford and the Northern Parishes, will the Executive Member for Planning explain how many houses the Council plans to build there?

Answer

As many people will be aware, the emerging Local Plan will set the strategy for managing development, including areas of land for future development, new infrastructure and areas of protected green space. The last administration approved the Revised Growth Strategy Consultation last year. The consultation proposed several areas of land for new housing across Wokingham Borough, including land in the northern parishes of Charvil, Hurst, Ruscombe, Sonning, and Twyford. The proposed areas of land across these parishes would together deliver around 460 new homes. Sites with existing planning permission and other minor developments would be in addition to this.

The comments received in response to the consultation are being reviewed and analysed. These will be carefully considered alongside technical information before we decide how to move forward. Clearly it would be wrong of me to pre-determine the Local Plan process and so I cannot comment on future decisions. It should be noted, however, that large parts of the northern parishes form part of the Metropolitan Green Belt surrounding London. Any changes to Green Belt boundaries through the preparation of the Local Plan would need to demonstrate 'exceptional circumstances' to necessitate a change, as set out in national planning policy.

Supplementary Question

The Executive Member mentions the Local Plan Update. My understanding is that the Local Plan Update needs to be in place next year. Are you on track?

Supplementary Answer

We are working to meet our obligations as well as we can. We had just under 3,000 submissions following the last Local Plan Update consultation and the officers have only just completed assessing them. Once we have gone through that we will be dealing with those particular issues.

37.2 Phil Cunnington asked the Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing the following question:

Does the coalition support the principle of a dementia care home in Toutley?

Answer

I would just remind you that we are a Partnership not coalition but yes, the partnership, supports the need for a new Dementia care home as a key priority. Proposals are going to Executive for approval on the 28th of July to take this forward and outline planning permission was granted at planning committee on the 13th of July, so this is all progressing well.

Supplementary Question

With the movement of people, potentially from Suffolk Lodge, to any new facility, does that mean that the principle is to retain Suffolk Lodge in order to give additional dementia care resources in the area?

Supplementary Answer

As I think you know, Suffolk Lodge is an old home which is much loved but not appropriate for people who are in care at the moment. So we will move people from Suffolk Lodge to the new home. But it will take time. People being moved from one care home to another can shorten their lives and so on. We will be understanding of this and will, therefore, not move them all in one day, but spread out over several months.

37.3 Charles Margetts asked the Executive Member for Planning and Local Plan the following question:

Can the lead Member for Planning let me know what discussions are underway over the possible development of Rooks Nest Farm?

Answer

Rooks Nest was one of the proposed allocations for housing included in the Revised Growth Strategy Consultation approved by the last administration. As you will be aware, the land is owned by the council. The new administration has asked officers to look at options for the future use of the land, as alternatives to the consultation proposals for housing.

Supplementary Question

I welcome that, as someone who was never in favour of the proposal in the first place. You mentioned that you were planning to ask officers to look for alternatives to the housing scheme. I noted a post on Facebook by Councillor Cornish the other day which said much the same thing, where he was actually asking for responses. I wonder if you would extend that consultation to the general public and the wider population rather than just a select Facebook group.

Supplementary Answer

I personally have nothing to do with Facebook, so I don't know what you are talking about. We are setting up the cross-party working group that was in operation in 2020

and 2021. I have already written to the leaders of the groups and the independents. I have had responses back and the plan is to set up the working group in the very near future, hopefully by the end of July. We will then be going through the various sites across the whole Borough.

37.4 Laura Blumenthal asked the Executive Member for Housing the following question:

I met with residents of Grovelands Avenue in Winnersh who are concerned about how the Council's temporary accommodation there will impact on them. The new site is currently being built and their number one request is that there should be no access from the site to the road west of it. The main access is north of the site. Please can you guarantee that their request will be delivered?

Answer

Thank you for question regarding Grovelands Park and the new improved modular temporary accommodation currently being installed. These homes will add to the Council owned and leased portfolio of temporary accommodation to house the homeless in the Borough. The Borough has seen an increase in placing homeless families outside the Borough which has a detrimental impact on those with jobs and children, we hope these new, good quality and well insulated temporary homes will reduce the need to placing households outside the Borough.

I can confirm pedestrian access into plot 48 Grovelands will continue via the west of the site when the new modular homes are ready for use, this was shown on the plans for which planning consent was given to the project on the 10th February 2021. This means access will be from the west. Others living in the modular homes on plots 39-47 will access their homes through the north of the site.

The housing team will ensure the site is well managed and maintained to minimise the impact on others living on the Grovelands site.

Supplementary Question

Is it possible for the Council to give residents a named contact so, if they have any concerns or questions, they know who to go to? They have told me that, at present, they feel that there is no one they can speak to.

Supplementary Answer

That person is me. A Council officer they can speak to is Simon Price.

38. Minutes of Committee Meetings and Ward Matters

38.1 Chris Bowring asked the Executive Member for Planning and Local Plan the following question:

The Pinewood Centre, in my ward of Wokingham Without, is a much valued facility. I received an assurance from your predecessor, Wayne Smith, last February that

WBC would not be building any housing on that site which it owns. Can you reaffirm that commitment?

Answer

I have raised the issue of the Pinewood Centre with officers at WBC and we are going through the due process of the Local Plan.

38.2 Rachel Bishop-Firth asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question:

I would like to ask a ward question about the Tan House railway crossing. Some years ago the level crossing was replaced by a steep temporary structure. This means that to get over the two railway lines people have to navigate both a steep temporary bridge and a second crumbling concrete bridge. The Emmbrook Councillors have been campaigning for a number of years for this to be replaced by an accessible bridge. We are glad to hear that Network Rail are looking to replace this dual bridge structure with a bridge over both railway lines. At present, however, the plan is to replace with a bridge with steps. This means that the crossing still won't be usable by anyone with a pram or wheelchair and it cannot be part of our cycling network. What steps are we taking to ask Network Rail to replace this bridge with one that can be used by young parents, cyclists and those who need a wheelchair?

Answer

I was alerted by officers about the Tan House bridges earlier this month because Network Rail are planning to replace the two bridges – the concrete bridge and the temporary structure, by the end of March 2024. However, only with steps which is absolutely no use whatsoever to us. On 11th July I wrote to John Halsall, not Councillor John Halsall, but John Halsall the Managing Director of Network Rail, Southern Region. In my letter I stated that I wanted to contact him at the earliest opportunity to raise our concerns about the apparent lack of priority given to the needs of the mobility impaired and our Active Travel agenda with regard to that project.

To install steps on a bridge in that particular location is a huge missed opportunity for the next 50 years. I also copied in some key people, one of them being Grant Shapps (Secretary of State for Transport), Sir John Redwood (Wokingham MP), Chris Boardman (Active Travel Guru) and Peter Duggan (Department of Transport). I received a response on Monday from John Halsall, Regional Director Network Rail. It was rather disappointing as they appear to be avoiding DDA compliance and the active travel requirements. So, the question to Network Rail is quite simple. We are trying to get them to deliver the right bridge that will be in place at that location for 50+ years. They must take account of the mobility impaired and the emerging LCWIP.

38.3 Abdul Loyes asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question:

The path in Sandford Park Woodley, running along its south east end, is very

uneven, caused by two raised drain covers and at least two large tree roots. It is impossible for pushchairs and wheelchairs and is a trip hazard. Could the Executive Member confirm when it will be made safe and usable for all residents?

Answer

I will look into that for you. If you could email me the location that would be most useful.

38.4 Charles Margetts asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

I received an email two nights ago from a parent Governor of Bohunt School, who lives in my ward, expressing concern that the announcement made in March that WBC was going to deliver a 6th form, extra Year 7 places and SEND provision at Bohunt School, by September 2023, is not going to be met because of slow progress. I am not expecting Councillor Bray to answer that as she has not had sight of the question and that is not fair. But, what I would ask is: Could she reassure me of the Council's commitment to proceed with this scheme? Also, would she provide a monthly or regular update to local Members on progress as it advances. Finally, as a Member for Finchampstead, I am keen to support this process and if she wishes to involve local Members, I would be happy to play a constructive part.

Answer

As it happens, we had a meeting about this very subject this afternoon. I told the Council officers and representatives of Bohunt School that we will continue to make progress and that I will be keeping local Members informed on a regular basis. I will also extend that courtesy to Graham Howe as my opposite number. So, you can expect an update in the next few days.

38.5 Phil Cunnington asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question:

There is a small car park on Ashridge Road, opposite the entrance to Keephatch School, surrounded by small local shops. There is a Sainsburys Local next door. Unfortunately, almost without exception at school run times and at other times during the day, large vehicles, often pick-ups or 4 by 4s, mount the kerb and park either side of the entrance on the actual pavements. I wonder if there is any way that we can consider some cost-effective way of providing some non-human bollards to protect the pavements and provide safety for parents and children walking on that very busy route to and from both Keephatch and All Saints schools.

Answer

I will look into that and get back to you.

38.6 Laura Blumenthal asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question:

The Council's current cycling consultation proposes removing parking spaces opposite Howth Drive. Please can you guarantee that these parking spaces will not be removed if Reading Borough Council does not give permission for parking spaces to be built on the grass verges behind the houses?

Answer

I have received an email from Reading Borough Council. They have said that we can use Port Close for parking.

38.7 Pauline Jorgensen asked the Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure the following question:

A local resident who lives near the Laurel Park car park has been locking the gates for the car park at the request of Earley Town Council for many years. I believe that Earley Town Council is now handing the car park back to the Borough Council. The resident has been doing this for a long time to prevent anti-social behaviour. I wonder if WBC would recognise the fact that the resident no longer wishes to perform that activity and would do something about it and, if so, what you intend to do?

Answer

If you can email the details to me I will certainly have a look at the situation.

38.8 Shahid Younis asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question:

The current cycling consultation proposes the removal of bay parking spaces between Bulmershe Leisure Centre and Church Road. The bay parking is often packed and overflowing on the weekends. Please can you share any analysis that has been done on the parking needs and where you propose all these cars will park in the future?

Answer

There is some background data behind this. I don't have that available here so I will get back to you on that.

39. Statements by the Leader of the Council and Executive Members

Clive Jones – Leader of the Council and Business and Economic Development

I and my colleagues were absolutely delighted to take over responsibility for running the administration of the Borough Council at the Annual Council on 19th May. We have formed the Wokingham Borough Partnership with Labour and Independent colleagues. We are working together in a spirit of cooperation that, I have to say, is working very well at the moment.

We have been happy to share the Chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees with other parties, something never done before on this Council, though done at a lot of other councils. I am pleased that Independent Councillor Jim Frewin is the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee. We suggested Conservative Councillor Alison Swaddle as the Chair of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee but the Leader of the Opposition turned this down. She also turned down having a Conservative Vice-Chair of the Management Committee. A contrast to this has been the willingness of the Borough's three Conservative MPs who have actively engaged with us to present plans to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to try to get housing numbers down in Wokingham. We also had a commitment from Michael Gove, the Secretary of State, to meet with us. This, of course, was before he was sacked by Boris Johnson. We hope that Michael Gove's successor, Greg Clark, will come to Wokingham – we have asked him to visit us.

The MPs have met with us in person and both Theresa May and James Sunderland have agreed to work together to lobby the Government in order to get some clarity around the Government's proposals for reforming Adult Social Care. At the moment, the proposals will create serious financial instability in many Councils across the south of England. There needs to be some clarity about how the massive increase in costs for Adult Social Care will be funded. It cannot be left to local councils to fund the reforms.

Currently, there is Government funding for free school meals during school holidays for children who would normally receive them during term time. There is no guarantee that this funding will be extended after this year's summer holidays. We are all aware that there is a serious cost of living crisis which is hitting us all. The administration and our colleagues are committed to helping the most vulnerable in our community, wherever we can. I can confirm that the Council will support free school meals during the school holidays from the end of the summer holiday through to May 2023. This confirmation will be a great support and comfort for the families receiving free school meals. This support will help them to budget and prioritise their spending at a time when they are being hit from all directions – increases in fuel costs up to £2 per litre; massive increases in gas and electricity prices; increases in National Insurance; huge increases in food prices. Generally, everything is going up in shops with inflation at 10%, much of this caused by devaluation of the £ by 20% since Brexit. Hopefully, there will be further Government support for free school meals during school holidays but if there isn't, we will do what we can to help. This confirmation will help many of the 2,000 families in the Borough who rely on free school meals.

Paul Fishwick – Executive Members for Active Travel, Highways and Transport

I wish to highlight that, at an Executive Member Decision held on 13 July, I approved with Councillor Imogen-Shepherd- Dubey, a decision to modify the contract terms to allow the 128 and 129 bus service, serving Winnersh, Hurst, Twyford, Sonning and Woodley to Wokingham and Reading, plus other services affecting Wokingham town, to continue to operate. This will allow the Council time to go out to tender. However, the funding for these services was not budgeted for by the previous administration and £82,440 of S106 funding will be required to fund these services to 31 March 2023.

I have also written to the Local Policing Commander (on 24 June) in relation to the lack of mobile speed enforcement across the Borough, which hasn't taken place for over three years. Our experience over the past three years has been that Thames Valley Police are reluctant to prioritise speed limit enforcement activity through anything other than Community Speedwatch. Whilst we and many of our communities are supportive of this scheme, we do feel that it is important that the efforts of residents are backed up by a reasonable level of police enforcement activity.

Rachel Bishop-Firth – Executive Member for Equalities, Inclusion and Fighting Poverty

I am delighted that Clive Jones was able to confirm support for those families most affected by the cost of living crisis. We hope that by committing to support those who rely on benefits-related free school meals during the school holidays we will take a weight off the minds of the Wokingham parents who are facing the biggest challenges from the current cost of living crisis.

Distribution of the Household Support Fund is well under way in support of our voluntary sector partners. Over 1,000 households have applied so far and this means that we have reached about 80% of the free school meals pupils already. A high number of those contacting our partners have taken advantage of offers of additional support. So, for example, 76% of those approaching First Days have asked for further support.

We are aware that some of those using vouchers to access cash have had problems. This is because several, mainly smaller, providers with Paypoint terminals, do not have enough cash on site to make payments. The Council and our Hardship Alliance partners are working proactively to find solutions. This includes contacting people who have requested cash vouchers to see if they would like to switch to food vouchers instead and signposting residents towards pay points that can support the amount of cash needed. We want to assure residents that we are doing everything we can to get this much needed support to them. We are now encouraging more people to come forward for support if they need it. We appreciate the support of Members in the Chamber tonight in getting the message out to residents in your wards, particularly pensioners and those families that are just about managing. I will share the leaflet in order to support that.

We would like to thank the officers for arranging the fantastic welcome event for new arrivals in the Borough last Saturday, which the Mayor referred to earlier and the voluntary/community sector organisations which came along to support it.

Finally, the Residents Equality Forum is working hard to ensure that voices from all parts of our community are heard as we become a more inclusive Borough.

40. Statement from Council Owned Companies

Clive Jones – Director of Loddon Homes and WBC Holdings Ltd.

There have been a number of changes to the Boards of WBC Holdings, Loddon Homes, Berry Brook Homes and Optalis. Conservative nominated Directors have been replaced with Lib Dems. I would like to thank all those Directors who have served in recent years.

There have been meetings of the Boards of Loddon Homes and WBC Holdings. The first Board meeting of Loddon Homes was very productive. The Non-Executive Directors made several comments about the changes in Directors over the past few years, mainly when there had been changes in the Conservative Group leadership. We will be working closely with them in the coming months to agree a strategy for the coming years and we will be going back to having more regular reports from Council-owned companies.

41. Motions

41.1 Motion 480 submitted by Rachel Burgess

The Council considered the following Motion, proposed by Shirley Boyt (due to Rachel Burgess being unable to attend the meeting in person) and seconded by Rachel Bishop-Firth.

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

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic there were already too many families in Wokingham struggling to make ends meet, and now many more families have been thrown into crisis, without the ability to pay their rent, heat their homes or feed their children. The Local Welfare Provision Scheme exists to provide immediate financial support to households facing an emergency situation.

However the number of people helped by this scheme in Wokingham Borough has fallen by 76% since 2016-17, with just 21 people helped in 2020-21. In 2019-20 just £3,000 was spent providing support through this scheme. Over the three years to 2020-21 only 23% of the allocated budget was actually spent, on average.

Wokingham Borough Council will:

- Review the effectiveness of Wokingham's Local Welfare Provision Scheme;
- Consult with residents and the voluntary sector to ascertain how those who need crisis assistance can be better supported;
- Ensure residents in need of support can easily access the scheme and work to remove barriers to application;
- Ensure effective signposting of the scheme in conjunction with the voluntary sector;
- Ensure frontline staff are trained so that they are fully aware of the scheme and are able to advise residents on how to apply;
- Consider prioritising the delivery of cash-first support, which is more empowering

- and respectful to those on lower incomes;
- Aim to provide support within 24-48 hours of a successful application;
- Consider relaxing the qualifying criteria and disclosure requirements for the scheme, ensuring that residents' dignity is respected throughout.

Shirley Boyt stated that the number of people assisted by the Local Welfare Provision Scheme (LWPS) had fallen by 89% since 2017. The scheme only helped 10 people in 2021/22, yet there were a growing number of families in the Borough facing poverty. The cost of living crisis was adding to that number of families on a daily basis. The potential of the LWPS was not being realised. The scheme needed to be reviewed and embedded within the Tackling Poverty Strategy. Feedback indicated that many residents were not aware of the scheme or did not know how to access it. An effective LWPS could provide an effective safety net for residents in the longer term

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

RESOLVED That:

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

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic there were already too many families in Wokingham struggling to make ends meet, and now many more families have been thrown into crisis, without the ability to pay their rent, heat their homes or feed their children. The Local Welfare Provision Scheme exists to provide immediate financial support to households facing an emergency situation.

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- Ensure frontline staff are trained so that they are fully aware of the scheme and are able to advise residents on how to apply;
- Consider prioritising the delivery of cash-first support, which is more empowering and respectful to those on lower incomes;
- Aim to provide support within 24-48 hours of a successful application;
- Consider relaxing the qualifying criteria and disclosure requirements for the scheme, ensuring that residents' dignity is respected throughout.

41.2 Motion 482 submitted by Adrian Mather

Council considered the following Motion, submitted by Adrian Mather and seconded by Andrew Mickelburgh:

There needs to be a fundamental change in how we generate and consume energy in all aspects of our lives. Both electricity generation and distribution are undergoing rapid evolution, in both shape and scale.

The distribution grid, must now cope with power flows in both directions. In scale, electrification of heat and transport will require a quadrupling of electricity capacity. Local, community-based energy schemes can make a significant contribution to addressing both issues and encourage a sense of local empowerment to tackle climate change.

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

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

Council Agrees to:

Resolve to support the Bill.

- Authorise the Leader to contact our MPs to discuss their support for the Bill and how they can enable its passage into law;
- Authorise the Chief Executive to write to the Minister of State for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy, supporting the aims of the Bill and asking for these aims to be taken into account in the forthcoming Energy White Paper.

Adrian Mather stated that passing the Local Electricity Bill would enable community energy groups to provide energy for the local community. This would bring multiple benefits and support the Council's carbon reduction aims.

Gregor Murray stated that, whilst he supported the aims of the Motions, he would be voting against it as it duplicated the work he had delivered in his Executive Member

role.

Sarah Kerr stated that, whilst noting the earlier work on this subject, the Motion had been submitted following procedural advice. The passing of the Motion by Council would strengthen the actions that could be taken. Moreover, as the Council had a new administration, it was sensible for the new leader to reinforce the earlier contact with the Government.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

RESOLVED That:

There needs to be a fundamental change in how we generate and consume energy in all aspects of our lives. Both electricity generation and distribution are undergoing rapid evolution, in both shape and scale.

The distribution grid, must now cope with power flows in both directions. In scale, electrification of heat and transport will require a quadrupling of electricity capacity. Local, community-based energy schemes can make a significant contribution to addressing both issues and encourage a sense of local empowerment to tackle climate change.

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Council Agrees to:

Resolve to support the Bill.

- Authorise the Leader to contact our MPs to discuss their support for the Bill and how they can enable its passage into law;
- Authorise the Chief Executive to write to the Minister of State for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy, supporting the aims of the Bill and asking for these aims to be taken into account in the forthcoming Energy White Paper.

41.3 Motion 483 submitted by Sarah Kerr

Sarah Kerr stated that, under Rule 4.2.13.9, she wished to withdraw the Motion.

Upon being put to the vote it was:

RESOLVED: That Motion 483 be withdrawn.

41.4 Motion 484 submitted by Charles Margetts

Council considered the following Motion proposed by Charles Margetts and seconded by Paul Fishwick.

Wokingham Borough Council believes in promoting alternatives to car travel wherever possible. The Council notes the successes of previous administrations in creating sustainable and active travel alternatives, such as greenways and footpaths, as well as working with bus companies to provide bus services across the Borough.

The rail service between from Earley to London Waterloo, including Winnersh, Winnersh Triangle and Wokingham, is ridiculously slow. The journey usually takes one hour and ten minutes to cover a distance of 36 miles to London. Some years ago, a scheme was proposed for trains on this line to not stop at intermediate stations between Twickenham and Waterloo, reducing journey times down by 15 minutes.

This Council calls on South Western Railway to implement measures to speed up journey times and make their service more competitive.

It was proposed by Charles Margetts and seconded by Paul Fishwick, that the Motion be amended as follows:

Wokingham Borough Council believes in promoting alternatives to car travel wherever possible. ~~The Council notes the successes of previous administrations in creating sustainable and active travel alternatives, such as greenways and footpaths, as well as working with bus companies to provide bus services across the Borough.~~
The Council has supported sustainable transport in the past and will continue to do so in future.

The rail service between from Earley to London Waterloo, including Winnersh, Winnersh Triangle and Wokingham, is ridiculously slow. The journey usually takes one hour and ten minutes to cover a distance of 36 miles to London. Some years ago, a scheme was proposed for trains on this line to not stop at intermediate stations between Twickenham and Waterloo, reducing journey times down by 15 minutes.

This Council calls on South Western Railway to implement measures to ~~speed up~~ **improve** journey times **from the Wokingham Borough stations to London Waterloo** and ~~to make their~~ **these** services more competitive.

Charles Margetts stated that the current journey time from Wokingham to London

Waterloo was 1 hour 11 minutes. In 1975 the same journey took 45 minutes on the fast train. It was important to speed up the journey time for a number of reasons. A quicker journey would reduce the number of travellers currently driving to other stations to catch a quicker train. It would open the potential for significant economic benefits to the area. It would encourage more visitors to our leisure and retail facilities. Most importantly, it would reduce pollution from excess car journeys as passengers tried to find quicker routes.

Upon being put to the vote, the proposed amendments were approved.

Council then voted on the substantive Motion.

Upon being put to the vote, it was

RESOLVED That:

Wokingham Borough Council believes in promoting alternatives to car travel wherever possible. The Council has supported sustainable transport in the past and will continue to do so in future.

The rail service between from Earley to London Waterloo, including Winnersh, Winnersh Triangle and Wokingham, is ridiculously slow. The journey usually takes one hour and ten minutes to cover a distance of 36 miles to London. Some years ago, a scheme was proposed for trains on this line to not stop at intermediate stations between Twickenham and Waterloo, reducing journey times down by 15 minutes.

This Council calls on South Western Railway to implement measures to improve journey times from the Wokingham Borough stations to London Waterloo and to make these services more competitive.

41.5 Motion 485 submitted by Gary Cowan

Council considered the following Motion, proposed by Gary Cowan and seconded by David Cornish.

Wokingham Borough Council:

- is concerned about the number of cases reported to the RSPCA each year, regarding pets given as prizes via fairgrounds, social media and other channels in England - and notes the issue predominantly concerns goldfish
- is concerned for the welfare of those animals that are being given as prizes
- recognises that many cases of pets being as prizes may go unreported each year
- supports a move to ban the giving of live animals as prizes, in any form, on Wokingham Borough Council land.

The Council agrees to:

- ban outright the giving of live animals as prizes in any form, on Wokingham

Borough Council land.

- write to the UK Government, urging an outright ban on the giving of live animals as prizes on both public and private land.

Gary Cowan stated that the Motion was self-explanatory. Giving animals as prizes was abhorrent and not acceptable in the 21st century.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

RESOLVED That:

Wokingham Borough Council:

- is concerned about the number of cases reported to the RSPCA each year, regarding pets given as prizes via fairgrounds, social media and other channels in England - and notes the issue predominantly concerns goldfish
- is concerned for the welfare of those animals that are being given as prizes
- recognises that many cases of pets being as prizes may go unreported each year
- supports a move to ban the giving of live animals as prizes, in any form, on Wokingham Borough Council land.

The Council agrees to:

- ban outright the giving of live animals as prizes in any form, on Wokingham Borough Council land.
- write to the UK Government, urging an outright ban on the giving of live animals as prizes on both public and private land.