



# WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

A Meeting of the **EXECUTIVE** will be held in David Hicks 1 - Civic Offices, Shute End, Wokingham RG40 1BN on **THURSDAY 26 JANUARY 2023 AT 7.00 PM**

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

Susan Parsonage  
Chief Executive  
Published on 18 January 2023

Note: Members of the public are welcome to attend the meeting or participate in the meeting virtually, in accordance 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/T3ARrMOjass>

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

Please note that other people may film, record, tweet or blog from this meeting. The use of these images or recordings is not under the Council's control.

<b>Our Vision</b>
<b><i>A great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business</i></b>
<b>Enriching Lives</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Champion excellent education and enable our children and young people to achieve their full potential, regardless of their background.</li> <li>• Support our residents to lead happy, healthy lives and provide access to good leisure facilities to enable healthy choices for everyone.</li> <li>• Engage and empower our communities through arts and culture and create a sense of identity for the Borough which people feel part of.</li> <li>• Support growth in our local economy and help to build business.</li> </ul>
<b>Providing Safe and Strong Communities</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect and safeguard our children, young and vulnerable people.</li> <li>• Offer quality care and support, at the right time, to reduce the need for long term care.</li> <li>• Nurture our communities: enabling them to thrive and families to flourish.</li> <li>• Ensure our Borough and communities remain safe for all.</li> </ul>
<b>Enjoying a Clean and Green Borough</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Play as full a role as possible to achieve a carbon neutral Borough, sustainable for the future.</li> <li>• Protect our Borough, keep it clean and enhance our green areas for people to enjoy.</li> <li>• Reduce our waste, promote re-use, increase recycling and improve biodiversity.</li> <li>• Connect our parks and open spaces with green cycleways.</li> </ul>
<b>Delivering the Right Homes in the Right Places</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer quality, affordable, sustainable homes fit for the future.</li> <li>• Ensure the right infrastructure is in place, early, to support and enable our Borough to grow.</li> <li>• Protect our unique places and preserve our natural environment.</li> <li>• Help with your housing needs and support people, where it is needed most, to live independently in their own homes.</li> </ul>
<b>Keeping the Borough Moving</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain and improve our roads, footpaths and cycleways.</li> <li>• Tackle traffic congestion and minimise delays and disruptions.</li> <li>• Enable safe and sustainable travel around the Borough with good transport infrastructure.</li> <li>• Promote healthy alternative travel options and support our partners in offering affordable, accessible public transport with good transport links.</li> </ul>
<b>Changing the Way We Work for You</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be relentlessly customer focussed.</li> <li>• Work with our partners to provide efficient, effective, joined up services which are focussed around our customers.</li> <li>• Communicate better with customers, owning issues, updating on progress and responding appropriately as well as promoting what is happening in our Borough.</li> <li>• Drive innovative, digital ways of working that will connect our communities, businesses and customers to our services in a way that suits their needs.</li> </ul>
<b>Be the Best We Can Be</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be an organisation that values and invests in all our colleagues and is seen as an employer of choice.</li> <li>• Embed a culture that supports ambition, promotes empowerment and develops new ways of working.</li> <li>• Use our governance and scrutiny structures to support a learning and continuous improvement approach to the way we do business.</li> <li>• Be a commercial council that is innovative, whilst being inclusive, in its approach with a clear focus on being financially resilient.</li> <li>• Maximise opportunities to secure funding and investment for the Borough.</li> <li>• Establish a renewed vision for the Borough with clear aspirations.</li> </ul>

## MEMBERSHIP OF THE EXECUTIVE

Clive Jones	Leader of Council and Business and Economic Development
Stephen Conway	Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Housing
Rachel Bishop-Firth	Equalities, Inclusion and Fighting Poverty
Prue Bray	Children's Services
Lindsay Ferris	Planning and Local Plan
Paul Fishwick	Active Travel, Transport and Highways
David Hare	Health and Wellbeing and Adult Services
Sarah Kerr	Climate Emergency and Resident Services
Ian Shenton	Environment, Sport and Leisure
Imogen Shepherd-DuBey	Finance

ITEM NO.	WARD	SUBJECT	PAGE NO.
69.		<p><b>MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING</b> To confirm the Minutes of the Executive meeting held on 24 November 2022.</p>	7 - 16
70.		<p><b>DECLARATION OF INTERESTS</b> To receive any declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests, other registrable interests and any non-registrable interests relevant to any matters to be considered at the meeting.</p>	
71.		<p><b>STATEMENT FROM THE LEADER</b> To receive a statement from the Leader of the Council.</p>	
72.		<p><b>PUBLIC QUESTION TIME</b> To answer any public questions</p> <p>A period of 30 minutes will be allowed for members of the public to ask questions submitted under notice.</p> <p>The Council welcomes questions from members of the public about the work of the Executive</p> <p>Subject to meeting certain timescales, questions can relate to general issues concerned with the work of the Council or an item which is on the Agenda for this meeting. For full details of the procedure for submitting questions please contact the Democratic Services Section on the numbers given below or go to <a href="http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/publicquestions">www.wokingham.gov.uk/publicquestions</a></p>	
72.1	None Specific	<p>Mel Horton has asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question:</p>	

**Question:**

How many adults with learning disabilities combined with mobility needs are on the waiting list/ have requested accommodation that the council has been unable to fulfil, for Supported Living Accommodation in Wokingham as of 1st Jan 2023?

72.2 Emmbrook

Keith Malvern has asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question:

**Question**

An outline planning application (211777 valid on the 8th of June 2021) for up to 130 residential units and a 70 bed care home was approved, subject to conditions, at the end of last year. How much money has the Borough Council spent on this proposal before the application was submitted and since then?

72.3 None Specific

Juliet Sherratt has asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

**Question**

Please can you tell me what provision will be made for children on Free School Meals during the school holidays in 2023, after Easter? I am aware that the government is continuing to fund the HAF programme, but will the FSM lunch vouchers be government funded? If not, will the council continue to fund them?

73.

**MEMBER QUESTION TIME**

To answer any member questions

A period of 20 minutes will be allowed for Members to ask questions submitted under Notice

Any questions not dealt with within the allotted time will be dealt with in a written reply

73.1 None Specific

Gary Cowan has asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

**Question**

Does Wokingham Borough Staff have access to Welfare Support Services or to an Employee Assistance Provider (EAP) or any other such service that are not available to elected Councillors?

73.2

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

### **Question**

The only way to control development in the Borough is to create a Local Plan. The Liberal Democrat led coalition put the Local Plan on hold when it took control of the Council last year. In Council late last year you stated a timetable for a new Plan would appear in 2023. Please can you advise when this will appear and when you expect it to be completed?

73.3 Maiden Erlegh

Norman Jorgensen has asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question:

### **Question**

The footbridge over the railway and A329M beside Earley station is an important link between Earley and Woodley. What are the plans to ensure this remains available?

73.4 None Specific

Alison Swaddle has asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question:

### **Question**

How does the Council propose to continue the current level of road maintenance residents expect if there is not to be increased provision in the Budget?

## **74.**

### **MATTERS REFERRED TO THE EXECUTIVE**

74.1	None Specific	Playing Pitch Strategy Approach	17 - 20
74.2	None Specific	Energy Procurement Contract	21 - 38
74.3	None Specific	Revenue Monitoring 2022/23 Q3	39 - 52
74.4	None Specific	Capital Monitoring 2022/23 - Q3	53 - 64
74.5	None Specific	Corporate Peer Challenge - Follow Up Visit	65 - 82
74.6	None Specific	Revised Local Bus Services Improvement Plan	83 - 166
74.7	None Specific	NEC Systems - Contract Renewal	167 - 172
74.8	Remenham, Wargrave and Ruscombe	Temporary Closure Remenham Footpath No 4 Henley Festival	173 - 192
74.9	None Specific	Chief Finance Officer Report 2023-24	193 - 224

## **75.**

### **EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

#### **EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

The Executive may exclude the press and public in order to discuss the exempt information contained in Appendix 2 of Agenda Item 74.2 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 (information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person,

including the authority holding that information) 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.

**CONTACT OFFICER**

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**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF  
THE EXECUTIVE  
HELD ON 24 NOVEMBER 2022 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.00 PM**

**Members Present**

Councillors: Clive Jones (Chair), Rachel Bishop-Firth, Prue Bray, Lindsay Ferris, Paul Fishwick, David Hare, Sarah Kerr and Ian Shenton

**60. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Imogen Shepherd-DuBey and Stephen Conway.

**61. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 27 October 2022 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**62. DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

**63. STATEMENT FROM THE LEADER**

“I was very hopeful that the budget from Jeremy Hunt and Rishi Sunak might have given Wokingham Borough Council more cash to help us through the next few years which are going to be very difficult. Now inflation has risen to 11.1% and looking like it will increase further through next year. So, I was wrong, there was little good news for the Council, and certainly no extra cash, which is desperately needed.

I was hoping that Wokingham would no longer be the lowest funded unitary council in the Country and that we would get our fair share of cash from the government in the first time in years. It didn't happen, there wasn't anything for Wokingham, we are still starved of cash by the Conservative government. So, no extra cash for Wokingham Borough Council and not much for our residents either.

As the tax burden rises to its highest levels since the Second World War with £34 million people set to be paying more tax. Someone earning an average salary of £32,300, faces an extra £1,645 charge for tax, energy costs and fuel costs.

On top of these increases, increases in the cost of the average mortgage has risen by £500 per month or £6,000 a year. This is disastrous budget from Truss, Kwarteng and Redwood, meaning many households in Wokingham will now have £7,500 to spend in the local economy. This will have a serious negative impact on Wokingham's retailers, cafes, pubs and restaurants. Making it very difficult for some of them to survive. Restaurant closures are currently up 60%, and now disappearing at a faster rate than they were during Covid. These are caused by rising costs, weak demand and Brexit induced staff shortages. If any do not survive in Wokingham, it will be the fault of the Government and their disastrous handling of the Country's economy. I would like to encourage our local businesses to try to organise office parties and events in our local venues wherever they can.”

## **64. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

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

### **64.1 Colin Watts has asked the Executive Member for Planning and Local Plan the following question:**

#### **Question**

Wokingham Borough Council recently published the 250 page LPU: Report on Initial Consultation Outcomes document. Page 20 of this document states that "A local MP supported the identification of a new garden village at Hall Farm / Loddon Valley, particularly its links to the Thames Valley Science Park." Most people I have spoken to assumed that Sir John Redwood was the MP referred to, but he has confirmed that he did not make this statement. For the sake of transparency and accountability, please advise which MP made this statement and can the Initial Consultation Outcomes document be amended to state the name of the MP?

#### **Answer**

Whilst I understand the reason for your question, I do not consider it appropriate for me to identify individuals who have responded to consultations.

#### **Supplementary Question**

Whilst it may be understandable that responses to the LPU consultation from individual members of the public should be confidential a response from the elected representative is a different proposition. Without naming the MP, isn't there a real danger that the public will be misled? Given the fact that the MP in question is highly likely to be a resident in the north of the borough and is therefore not as neutral as regards where new housing should be built in the borough.

#### **Answer**

There's an etiquette associated with this and the reason we are reluctant to indicate who it is, is that if the MP wished it to be known widely, that MP could indicate on their own. The alternative of course is that you could write to the MPs or you could put in a Freedom of Information request to the Council.

### **64.2 Wayne Cannon has asked the Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure the following question:**

#### **Question**

Lower Earley has around 31.000 people as residents. The only recognised football club in Lower Earley is Laurel Park [by recognised I mean offers football at all age group from under7s to under 18s for girls and boys]

The club supports its local community. Why are we now forced to use training facilities away from our area in places such as Woodley Wokingham to name a few and offer training at times that no one else wants ie 2100 - 2200 hours [when kids should be at home]

The local residents should be supporting the club and in offering the best for their community. Clubs that are far smaller in areas with much less people have better



options than we currently do and this needs to improve for the future of the club and all involved.

### **Answer**

Mr Cannon was not present at the meeting and so it was agreed that a written response would be provided and is included below:

I agree with you that the training facilities in Lower Earley are inadequate for the needs of the community, but what we build must be in the optimum location available. The council is reviewing the 3G pitch proposal at Maiden Erlegh School and we are currently gathering information around the viability of the project in the prevailing financial circumstances. The council does recognise the work in the community that Laurel Park Football Club has done, and we appreciate their contribution. We will continue to work with them.

### **64.3 Rich Jarvis has asked the Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure the following question:**

#### **Question**

I would like to open that I am very much fully behind the introduction of the proposed 3G pitch at Maiden Erlegh and believe it will bring many benefits to the community. I've lived in Earley for most of my adult and family life and have seen the positive impact sport has had on our neighbouring communities, such as Woodford park (new 3G pitch).

I am currently a police officer where I've served 20 years and also recognise the positive impact sport and sporting facilities have on children's and teenagers lives.

I am very concerned on the negativity this project is getting from so called local residents. I for one am local to it (7 min walk away).

Just looking back to the recent pandemic, one thing that helped all of us and everyone's mental health was sport and activities. Children living in Earley need a voice and feel that if they were allowed to, most would vote hugely in favour of this project.

My question is how would you promote the 3G pitch within the community and get it to work in harmony with the school?

#### **Answer**

There is some ambiguity in your question, and so this answer addresses one meaning.

The operating model of the Maiden Erlegh 3G would see the school enjoying a large share of the daytime use. Wokingham Borough Council have other shared school/community use sites and the schools' needs are at the front of all usage decisions. The school would benefit from usage from 9am to 5pm during the school term. The 3G would also see use by the two selected key partner clubs who have a large member base living in the Earley and Lower Earley areas. These local clubs would use most of the training and matchday slots available to them. There is also potential for use by selected partners such as holiday clubs in school holidays to give other children outside of the school and partner clubs, the chance to enjoy the site.

### **64.4 Andy Bailey has asked the Executive Member for Planning and Local Plan the following question:**

## **Question**

Given the state of the economy and the dire economical outlook, does Wokingham Borough Council intend to 'borrow forwards' to enable infrastructure to be built in good time to support developments arising from the revised Local Plan?

## **Answer**

Thank you for your question. You are right that the economic outlook for the country is a 'little gloomy' at the moment, and in common with national Government, local government will need to handle its financial resources very carefully going forwards. However, it is important that new infrastructure gets delivered in parallel with new development.

As we move forward, we will therefore continue to work with developers to ensure new development is brought forward in parallel with well-planned and well-timed new infrastructure. In some circumstances developers will be expected to provide this directly, in accordance with legal agreements and the conditions of their permission.

Where we collect the Community Infrastructure Levy, we will also look to spend levy funds in a timely manner.

In terms of our own capital programme, we will need to be financially prudent in terms of the extent of borrowing we as a council undertake to fund future infrastructure. That doesn't mean we will stop funding infrastructure, or delivering it in a timely way, but it does mean that we will look very carefully at every decision we take in this respect, something which I've no doubt, all our local taxpayers would want us to do, mindful of the times we find ourselves in.

## **Supplementary Question:**

Given that the proposals for Hall Farm appear to be predicated on 2x 15 year plan periods, to deliver 4,500 units and that it is not possible to forecast flood risk due to Climate Change so far in advance. How would the Council protect council tax payers from stranded borrowing costs if due to flood events, it would not be possible to complete the projects and recover other projected CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) payments from developers?

## **Supplementary Answer:**

I have on two occasions raised my concern with the flood issue and that now we have a requirement that there needs to be a flood resilience aspect associated with the overall period of a development. On that front, we are seeking legal advice as to whether we can go beyond or stay at 15 years.

## **65. MEMBER QUESTION TIME**

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

### **65.1 Gary Cowan has asked the Executive Member for Planning and Local Plan the following question:**

## **Question**

Can the Exec Member for Planning explain the relationship to conditions placed on planning applications at their inception and their eventual sign off. Is there a scheme or time frame to ensure their compliance?

## **Answer**

Planning conditions are imposed to ensure that development mitigates its impact. They should be kept to a minimum and only imposed where they are necessary and meet the tests contained within the NPPF. There are two main type of conditions, those that require specific discharge of information to be submitted, and those that require adherence in perpetuity.

Through the planning process, details relating to the relevant conditions are submitted and assessed by the relevant technical officers within the council or by statutory external consultees such as the Environment Agency.

The application of these conditions would usually be reviewed as part of the development process itself.

If the development is found to not be in accordance with the approved details, the local planning authority's Planning Enforcement function or in some circumstances, another body (for example, the Highways Authority or Environment Agency) will consider whether formal action is necessary or expedient to ensure compliance.

The local planning authority should respond to requests to discharge conditions without delay and must give notice to the applicant of its decision within a period of eight weeks or any longer period agreed in writing.

## **Supplementary Question**

I served on the all-party tree and diversity task and finish group which lasted about six months last year. The Committee asked the Planning Department about the Planning conditions on the replacement of dead trees after five years and the answer was that we do not do it. As experts suggested, 20-25% of new trees die within five years, and that would suggest they are not replaced at the numbers lost, running to many thousands. Also, the Reading Football Club Training Ground Planning application approved seven years ago had 58 Planning conditions placed on it and I asked last year how many had been signed off and the answer I received was none. Since then I have received a spreadsheet showing a progress report on all of the 58 Planning conditions in various stages of progress. In summary, not checking new trees in a five year period, after six years, no follow up then, is this an acceptable way in dealing with Planning conditions?

## **Supplementary Answer**

I understand that you have had a response from the Director on the specifics of the individual Planning application that you mentioned, which I cannot comment on. On the points you've raised, particularly, about dead trees and the like, I have had discussions with officers to say that I am exceedingly concerned that a high number of trees have been planted and nothing has happened in terms of tendering them and watering them. As a result, many have died. I have been advised that the Council has gone to developers to advise that they need to replant. There is only a period of up to five years where we can do this but I have been pushing very hard with the officers to make sure that the trees that are planted can survive. Also tonight, we have the draft Tree Strategy, which will be consulted upon. I would suggest that residents and yourself, put in an extra message to say that if we have trees that have been planted by a developer, we need to have a means of ensuring that as many of those trees as possible survive.

## 66. MATTERS REFERRED TO THE EXECUTIVE

The Chair reported that a referral had been made to the Executive by the Council at their meeting on 17 November 2022. The Executive were asked to consider the petition on Car Parking Charges which was the subject of a debate at the Council meeting.

The Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport & Highways reported that the last time off street car parking fees rose in Wokingham was nearly five years ago, despite rising costs in providing the service the previous administration didn't keep pace with those costs.

Last year, the previous Conservative administration did propose to cover the growing shortfall with a car parking recovery plan that was published in the Corporate and Community Overview and Scrutiny report on 24th November 2021 with an estimated additional income of £500,000.

If they had gone ahead with that it would have made a significant reduction in the financial shortfall that we now face. But unfortunately, the previous administration did not, and we are now picking up the consequences. They chose to use reserves where they took £2.2m.

At the meeting of the Executive on 28th July 2022, we were provided with a report indicating a budget shortfall of £600,000 to £800,000 for this year.

What options are available to balance the car parking service budget?

- Taking funding from the reserves?  
Taking funding from the reserves, is not an option open to us as the reserves are now too low and we cannot allow this authority to be placed in the hands of central government like Slough and Thurrock and a growing list of authorities as the consequences would be devastating.
- Closing the Park and Rides?  
Let's go through them one by one.  
**MereOak** operated jointly with Reading BC is open and running at about 25% pre-pandemic levels. The 600 bus service operates from here and also services villages south of the M4 such as Three Mile Cross, Spencers Wood, Swallowfield, Riseley and **Shinfield** with additional financial support from Wokingham Borough Council. Without the park and ride those bus services would be at severe risk without further significant additional financial support from Wokingham Borough Council.

Local bus services allow children who are eligible for travel assistance to get to school and vulnerable adults can travel to social activities. Alternative provisions would need to be put in place to enable the Council to fulfill its statutory duties for adults and children. The concessionary bus pass allows elderly and disabled residents to travel on the local bus service, without these services there is a risk of social isolation. For residents travelling for medical appointments increased pressure for travel assistance would fall on community transport services and the NHS.

**Thames Valley Park & Ride** is closed as a public park and ride but is currently being used by the hospital as a Park & Ride for staff, operating between Thames

Valley Park – Royal Berkshire Hospital and the Mere oak Park & Ride site. Income from the hospital will allow the site to breakeven under the current arrangement. Discussions are taking place to grow this use further next year.

**Winnersh Triangle** is closed as its under construction, but still has ongoing revenue costs. The project has a £1.3m overspend that is a consequence of the unforeseen issues caused by the Thames Water main at Winnersh Park and Ride.

It has come to light that this was known about in the autumn of 2021 but unfortunately the previous Conservative administration failed to deal with it and make provision in the budget. It falls to us to remedy this and has put even more pressure on this year's budget.

Even closed, there are still costs for ongoing security, maintenance, insurance and business rates. We are looking at options to do something with this site, but it will not cover anything near the required shortfall.

- Revenue highway services  
This is not about the resurfacing schemes as those are capital funded but these services cover routine safety functions including emergency works to keep out network safe for use by the travelling public. Wokingham Borough Council is a highway authority and as such has a statutory duty under the Highways Act section 41 to maintain the highways maintainable at the public expense for which it has responsibility for. However, those users can claim damages for physical injury or damage caused by a failure to comply with the duty.

Therefore, the highway authority must demonstrate that it has adequate provisions in place, including financial as a defense under section 58 of the Act. Taking any funding from this extremely important safety function poses significant risk of claims, which can lead to large payouts and expensive court costs. We have a duty to protect the public using our highways assets and this is an area that cannot have any funding removed.

- What about other services and savings?  
Officers and Executive members have been looking through all the budgets in an attempt to close a £2m shortfall this year and a £4m funding gap next year. These financial adjustments are shown in the draft MTFP that is going through Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The cupboard is empty of any other funding.
- What about Income generation?  
Income to run the car parking service is obtained from car parking charges. I presented to the meeting of the Executive on 29th September a proposal to increase car parking charges that would generate an estimated £540,000 of additional income and substantially cover the shortfall in the budget for the service.

The Conservative group called-in the decision, and this was heard on the 25th October at the Overview & Scrutiny Management Committee, where it was resolved that the Executive decision, relating to Off Street Car Park Charges, be confirmed.

The Conservative group submitted a petition requesting that the Council freeze the car parking charges, which was debated at Full Council on 17th November. This has been referred to the Executive this evening to consider.

The Executive Member set out the recommendations laid out in the report and confirmed that all possible alternative avenues had been explored. Many of the alternatives explored required additional funding, money that the Council simply did not have. Reluctantly, the Council had agreed to increase car parking charges after five years of no increases being made.

The process for making and advertising of the draft Traffic Regulation Order has been delayed by the call-in, the petition to Council and the referral to this meeting. A draft timetable was now proposed as follows: the earliest date for advertisement of the Traffic Regulation Order, which is a Notice of Proposal, would be a target date of the 8th December. Due to the Christmas/New Year festive break the period for objections would be extended to Sunday 22nd January 2023.

It was originally hoped to introduce these new charges in this financial year (January/February 2023) but with the delays mentioned above, costing around £45,000 per month in lost additional income they will now not be started until sometime in the new financial year.

The Executive Member recommend that the Executive agree to i) that no further action was needed in respect of the referral, and officers proceed with the making and advertising of the draft Traffic Regulation Order.

The Chair thanked the Executive Member and officers for all their hard work on this and for their determination to explore all possible alternative avenues. He reported that he had visited Woodley Town centre retailers over the weekend, with Councillor Lindsay Ferris. As well as some retailers in Wokingham Town centre in the previous week.

They had explained the councils need to balance the budget both this year and next year. There was from many retailers an acceptance that the Council had been left in a difficult position and that the whole country was in a difficult financial position.

Some businesses were already facing issues such as strong competition from other retailers, competition from online retailers and general changes in shopping habits. Increases in rents and energy costs were also having a significant impact on retailer's profitability.

One manger of a significant business said that Wokingham Borough Council needed to explain why these changes were necessary. It was therefore necessary to improve communications to ensure that everyone understood why the increases were necessary.

**RESOLVED** that the Executive agreed that no further action be taken in respect of the referral made by the Council in respect of the petition relating to Car Parking Charges.

**REASONS FOR DECISION:** The Council must act urgently to address its in year forecast overspend and set a balanced budget for next year. Options to reduce expenditure are constrained by the fact that approximately 80% of Council services are statutory. The 2023/24 budget presented to Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee shows a funding gap of just over £4m. This figure already takes into account cost reductions and income generating options across all Council Services, including the

assumed increase in car parking charges in 2022/23. Avoiding the opportunity to generate additional income from car parking will increase the calculated budget gap for next year to in the region of £4.6m. The Council will be required to approve a balanced budget for 2023/24 when it meets in February 2023.”

#### ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED:

1. Taking funding from the reserves: Reserves were low, making this option unviable. Depleting reserves would create a significant risk of the council being placed in the hands of central government. In the way that Slough and Thurrock had been, leading to devastating consequences.
2. Closing Park and Rides: Without park and rides, bus services would be at severe risk without further significant financial support from the council. Local bus services allow children to get to school and vulnerable adults can travel to social activities. The concessionary bus pass allows elderly and disabled residents to travel on local bus services. Without bus services, there is a risk of social isolation. For residents travelling to medical appointments, increased pressure for travel assistance would fall on community transport and to the NHS.
3. Reducing Revenue Highway Services: These are services that cover routine safety functions, including emergency work to keep networks safe for the use by the public. The Council is a Highway authority and as such has a statutory duty to maintain the highways. Further, users can claim damages for physical injury or as a result of failure to comply with statutory duties. Taking any funding from this area, poses significant risk of claims.
4. Officers and Members had considered every area of expenditure and all budgets to close the £2m shortfall in budgets.

#### 67. **DRAFT TREE STRATEGY PUBLIC CONSULTATION**

The Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure reported that the Executive had approved the draft Tree Strategy in July 2021, having gathered input from a wide range of sources. The draft strategy was now due to be consulted upon over the coming weeks.

Executive members welcomed the draft strategy and thanked officers and the Executive Member for all their hard work. It was noted that the linking of this strategy with the Local Plan would ensure that as many trees as possible were protected. The importance of veteran trees was also noted in terms of biodiversity, natural and cultural heritage. It would also be key to engage with private organisations.

**RESOLVED** that the Executive approved an eight week public consultation on the draft Tree Strategy.

**REASONS FOR DECISION:** To give residents of the borough an opportunity to contribute to the development of the strategy and the actions the Council intends to take to improve tree management and maintenance and guide the authority's approach to trees and woodlands across the borough.

#### 68. **BUCKINGHAMSHIRE, OXFORDSHIRE, AND BERKSHIRE WEST INTEGRATED CARE PARTNERSHIP JOINT COMMITTEE**

**RESOLVED** that the Executive:

- i) noted the establishment of a new joint committee – the Integrated Care Partnership covering the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West area – and in principle, the working draft terms of reference for this partnership (See Annex 1 of the report)
- ii) approved the appointment of the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services to this partnership and the Leader of the Council as substitute.

REASONS FOR DECISION: The Health and Care Act 2022 established Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) as legal entities and created new NHS bodies called Integrated Care Boards (ICBs). Within this legislation all ICSs are required to establish new partnership forums called Integrated Care Partnerships (ICPs). These bring together ICBs and local authorities with responsibility for Social Care and Public Health in order to integrate the services they plan, purchase, and provide for local residents.



<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Playing Pitch Strategy Approach</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	The Executive on Thursday, 26 January 2023
<b>WARD</b>	(All Wards);
<b>LEAD OFFICER</b>	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers
<b>LEAD MEMBER</b>	Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure - Ian Shenton

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

To seek approval to cease further work at Maiden Erlegh at this stage and reassess the needs of the Earley and Lower Earley area within the strategic review of playing pitches, which will inform optimal pitch locations incorporating a 3G pitch development plan going forward across the Borough.

**RECOMMENDATION**

That the Executive approves the following:

To cease any further work at this stage at Maiden Erlegh School and await the outcome of the strategic review of playing pitches incorporating a 3G pitch development plan which will inform optimal pitch locations going forward across the Borough.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Following Executive approval in July 2022 for the proposed 3G pitch at Maiden Erlegh School, supporting the need for additional 3G sites across the Borough, consultation identified several difficulties with the site, while confirming the demand for such facilities. Simultaneously, costs escalated, and the council's financial situation worsened, so that 3G provision in the Earley and Lower Earley area needed to be reassessed. However, it is believed that reassessment will be more effective as part of a new Borough-wide Playing Pitch Strategy.

Therefore, it is requested that the existing proposal be ceased at this stage, and that the needs of the Earley and Lower Earley area be incorporated in the Playing Pitch Strategy. We will continue working with the Football Foundation for any alternative site that may well emerge following the strategic review/development plan.

## **BACKGROUND**

Following the outcome of the Football Foundation Local Football plan, which identified the need for additional 3G sites across the Borough, agreement was given at the July 2022 Executive for a new proposed 3G pitch to be progressed at Maiden Erlegh School, subject to public consultation.

The aim of the Football Foundation Local Football plan was to set out a clear demand need in 3G pitch provision, as the Wokingham locality has over 540 football teams creating a need for additional training venues including 3G provision. The initial focus was aimed at satisfying demand in the Earley and Lower Earley area.

With some pre-application work already done, the full public consultation took place in September 2022 and identified several difficulties with the site. Additionally, revised financials from the Football Foundation show an increase of more than 10% in the cost of construction, against the backdrop of the council's worsening financial situation. As a result, there is a need to reassess the current proposal for 3G provision in the Earley and Lower Earley area as the recognised demand remains unfulfilled.

## **BUSINESS CASE**

Arising from the need to reassess the current proposal, it has been identified that a Borough-wide strategic development plan (Playing Pitch Strategy) incorporating 3G pitch provision should be prepared. Rather than a piecemeal approach, this will create a clear plan that can be utilised for future development proposals, incorporating the following key areas:

- Revised Playing Pitch Strategy (Due Summer 2023). This will inform optimal pitch locations going forward across the Borough.
- Further Stakeholder engagement. This will include working with the Equality forum and Youth council to ensure a wider support and engagement focus.
- Review of existing sites in line with proposed future strategic development plan (Playing Pitch Strategy) incorporating 3G Pitches across the borough.
- Review of funding opportunities and any additional financial support for future provisions.
- A full and detailed financial plan identifying funding sources and probable cost implications for the council of each proposed new 3G pitch.
- Key timelines and outcomes each new 3G pitch will deliver against including wider community outcomes.

Once the Playing Pitch Strategy is completed a full evaluation will take place gauging all 3G pitch provision needs. This will include demand and costs associated with each proposed new 3G pitch project that may emerge from the wider Playing Pitch Strategy.

A key element of this plan (Playing Pitch Strategy) will be communication with football teams and the wider sporting community, where appropriate, to provide updates on developments and take on board any emerging needs within the groups.

A key officer working group is in place to input and shape future plans, as required.

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

***The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and 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)	(£800k)	Yes - £500k grant (subject to football foundation approval), £300k borrowing	Capital
<b>Financials as per July 22 Executive Paper.</b>	Net Nil		Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	Net Nil	Yes	Revenue
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	Net Nil	Yes	Revenue

### **Other Financial Information**

The above financial calculations are those presented to Executive in July 2022, which stated that the estimated annual surplus would be utilised to provide a Sinking Fund for pitch replacement. The costs of implementation are likely to have increased over time.

### **Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation**

A clear comms will need to be developed with key stakeholders and residents and attention to the public consultation that took place in September.

### **Public Sector Equality Duty**

n/a

***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***

n/a.

### **Reasons for considering the report in Part 2**

n/a

### **List of Background Papers**

**Contact** Susan Bentley

**Telephone**

**Service** Delivery and Infrastructure

**Email** susan.bentley@wokingham.gov.uk

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<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Energy Contract Procurement</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	The Executive on 26 January 2023
<b>WARD</b>	None Specific
<b>LEAD OFFICER</b>	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers
<b>LEAD MEMBER</b>	Executive Member for Climate Emergency & Resident Services - Sarah Kerr

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

The purpose of this report is to seek in principal approval for migration of the Councils energy buying strategy from the current framework provider (CCS – Crown Commercial Service) to the Laser framework.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

That the Executive;

1. Approves in principal the procurement strategy set out in the Procurement Business case for the migration of the Councils energy buying strategy from the current framework provider (CCS – Crown Commercial Service) to the Laser framework;
2. Recommends the Procurement Business Case to Council for approval;
3. Notes that an updated Procurement Business Case will be reported back to Executive and Council, with proposed contract terms and timescales for implementation.
4. Delegates authority to the Director of Resources and Assets, in consultation with the Executive Members for Finance and Contracts, to engage with framework suppliers and negotiate on future contract provision, in line with the approved procurement strategy

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This Council Report outlines the procurement strategy for the proposed migration of the Councils energy buying strategy from the current framework provider (CCS – Crown Commercial Service) to the Laser framework.

The rationale to move framework suppliers is to ensure best value (energy price) for the Council. Energy prices have been rising significantly for the last eighteen months and whilst WBC have appropriate financial provision for this financial year, there is a risk to energy budget from rising costs, for the next financial year and beyond. The Energy Team have been carrying out market analysis assessments on energy pricing and the Council could reasonably be faced with an additional 50 – 60% on today's energy prices. This has prompted conversation on how we can procure smarter.

The levels of service offered by the Laser Framework should exceed the current CCS offering and offer significant levels of additional flexibility / adaptiveness and responsiveness in tariff pricing / trading arrangements.

In terms of carbon reduction / sustainability, Laser will be able to offer REGO (Renewable Energy Guarantees of Origin) contracts, which are provided by determined, accredited, proven Green Energy sources. This is seen as a way to increase our green energy procurement principles, allowing for up to 25% more Green energy purchase than we have currently, under CCS.

It will enable cost avoidance over the MTFP inflation position and help with our response to the Climate Emergency.

The Executive is asked to agree in principal to the proposed procurement strategy for the migration of the Councils energy buying strategy from the current framework provider (CCS – Crown Commercial Service) to the Laser framework and recommend to Full Council that the procurement strategy be adopted. Executive approval of the procurement strategy is required as the value of the contract exceeds £5million per annum. Delegated authority would be given to the Director of Resources and Assets, in consultation with the Executive Members for Finance and Contracts, to engage with framework suppliers and negotiate on future contract provision, in line with the approved procurement strategy.

This procurement strategy is line with the Council's procurement regulations.

## BACKGROUND

The Council needs to be part of a sizeable 'buying basket' in order to access best value in terms and drive cost avoidance on energy pricing. The 'top two' framework suppliers in the marketplace, that are of sufficient size to meet the Council's needs, are generally acknowledged as Crown Commercial Services (CCS) and Laser. Between them they cover/serve circa 95% of Local Authorities across the UK.

The Council could potentially consider West Mercia Energy but it is considered unlikely that this provider will be of sufficient size to cater for WBC's requirements (therefore not considered as an established procurement option for WBC).

The Council has historically utilised the CCS Framework for energy provision.

Laser Energy is an energy company, established by Kent County Council, offering significant volumes of energy to markets across Europe.

Most people now understand that energy costs are rising significantly and, in a market, where, as a general rule of thumb, if one energy supplier puts their energy costs up, others do too, there is an increasing move by some suppliers to gain 'market share' by either trading differently or being able to respond to maximum demand / variable or grid trading opportunities, through

- A) Energy tariffs are changing according to times of use too and this may enable WBC to trade with energy partners in a better way. The Laser framework enables the above, whereas CCS currently doesn't.
- B) In addition, Laser enables opportunities to work with energy supply partners who assist better in terms of ESCO (Energy Services Company) arrangements.

It is because of the above that Laser should be seen as a more flexible option for energy procurement and a better option for WBC moving forward.

## BUSINESS CASE

It has become increasingly clear over the last two years that the frameworks suppliers are less able to respond to fluctuations/volatility in energy market rates. Many Councils are taking action to ensure that they are as protected as they can be, from market volatility. With many of them moving to a system that is better able to instantaneously 'trade' energy. Many have switched to Frameworks the likes of Laser mentioned below. This has left CCS with a reduced 'energy basket' of Councils of circa 20% at the time of this report being written. In light of this the Council has two options in respect of its energy supplies:

### **Option 1: Stay with Crown Commercial Services (CCS).**

The CCS Framework typically purchases 100% of its energy in advance.

The benefits of this are security of current provision and known price margins. There are some risks with remaining with CCS, in that many other Local Authorities may be

moving away from this provider which could reduce economies of scale and overall purchasing power. In the last year of market turmoil their buying strategy can be considered slightly less advantageous in comparison to the Laser Framework. The offer from CCS can also be considered inflexible in a volatile market and this is therefore likely to mean their costs could rise further in comparison in the future.

REGO (Renewable Energy Guarantees of Origin) contracts are available from CCS but this is still limited to an advanced buying scenario and such contracts are likely to be in high demand as the net zero agenda progresses across the UK. Therefore, it is likely we will not be able to procure as much energy from these sources – limiting the council's overall ability to meet its climate change vision.

## **Option 2: Switch to Laser.**

Laser buys in a different way in a market of volatility which is expected to be more advantageous in future years. The Laser Framework, whilst still purchasing the bulk of its energy in advance, also offers some opportunity for direct spot buying, and therefore more able to react to changing market conditions, limiting increased costs at times of spike pricing. The Laser Framework typically purchases circa 70% of its energy through advance bulk buying and 30% through 'spot buying.' In addition, Laser has a wide range of options (for the future) for 'time of use' tariffs and variable pricing.

In year one we expect the proposed change to Laser will result in avoidance of additional costs to the sum of c£300,000, £80k of which is General Fund expenditure. Without this change, further growth will be required to be factored into the MTFP budget setting process.

The Laser framework also has 'bolt on' options that would better serve our non-CCS portfolio. The Energy Team are keen to investigate this opportunity further, for advantages to the Council. Examples include smart billing, a team bureau services (to further analyse costs) and usage/cost alerts which will further allow the Council to understand, monitor and manage usage and therefore cost.

REGO options through Laser are expected to be able to provide us with 25% more Green Energy than we currently attain under the CCS contract but this might not be applicable in year one of the contract, due to signing up initially to the basic contract. After year one, we will be able to expand contract options and chose REGO sites, this choice will lead to an opportunity to procure 100% REGO 'green energy'.

## **Analysis**

Switching providers is key to opportunities to ensure economic MTFP cost avoidance (inflation on these contracts has been established to date) and broader environmental policy agenda.

Whilst switching framework suppliers does have risks, transferring the energy contract to Laser delivers the following benefits:



- utilising a supplier who offers more flexibility in purchasing energy with some opportunity for direct spot buying, and therefore more able to react to changing market conditions
- cost avoidance of circa £300,000 on an energy spend of circa £9M; £80,000 directly attributable to General Fund expenditure, with the balance benefitting schools and HRA
- opportunities to embed within the contract 'smaller sites' billing which should provide an additional cost avoidance of circa £10,000.
- the ability to buy up to 25% additional named green energy generation (REGO - Renewable Energy Guarantee of Origin) which will contribute to the Council sustainability/climate emergency targets.
- The ability to trade flexibly using 'time of use' or variable tariff's

One of the stated ambitions of a migration to this framework will be the procurement of 100% green (Renewable Energy Guarantees of Origin: REGO) energy within a year of joining the framework, supporting the Councils' policy agenda including Climate Emergency. This would equate to an indirect carbon reduction value of 11,156 Tonnes of CO2. This equates to an energy REGO 'offset' of 37 GWh's of energy usage, the Councils corporate energy usage volume.

## **Recommendation**

Therefore, it is recommended to Executive to approve the in principal procurement strategy set out in the Procurement Business case for the migration of the Councils energy buying strategy from the current framework provider (CCS – Crown Commercial Service) to the Laser framework. And enable the officer team to engage in negotiations with providers to bring forward this change,

## **Timescales**

The current contract with CCS expires in March 2024. The Council is required to give six months' notice of a change in contract to both framework providers so a final decision is required by September 2023. It is more advantageous to the Council to give more notice, where possible.

Due to the current volatility of the energy market and the unknown impact of long term government policy intervention, there are risks and uncertainty, as well as opportunities, with changing provider now. This paper was due to be considered by the Executive in October 2022 but was pulled due to the announcement at the time of government interventions in the energy markets, with a financial aid package on energy costs and uncertainty whether changing supplier would have meant WBC wouldn't have benefited from this assistance package. It has subsequently now been clarified that the government's current energy costs initiatives apply only within this financial year 2023/23. Therefore we can proceed with the energy re-procurement contract for implementation in 2024. We will continue to review any future government interventions to understand any impacts and act accordingly in the Council's best interest,

This in principal decision will enable the officer team to negotiate on a future contract provision, and report back to the Executive and Council with a recommendation on future contract provision and timescales for this implementation.

## 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)	No additional impacts (cost/saving) as contract changes not within current financial year.	Additional budget/inflation requirements will need to be presented to Executive	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	No additional impacts (cost/saving) as contract changes not within this financial year.	Additional budget/inflation requirements will need to be presented to Executive	Revenue
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	Cost avoidance of £300,000.	Additional budget/inflation requirements will need to be presented to Executive	Revenue

### Other Financial Information

General Fund budget for 22/23 is £1.3m, with a further £500,000 in the process of being allocated from the corporate inflation provision. The current MTFP budget process includes a further inflation provision of £600,000 for 23/24, taking the overall budget to £2.4m. This contract will negate a further budget pressure in the MTFP to the sum of £300k in a full year from 2024/25.”

Changing provider should offer more flexibility in purchasing energy with some opportunity for direct spot buying, variable and ‘time of use’ tariffs etc and therefore are more able to react to changing market conditions. The ability to react more flexibly to the changing market would help ensure the Council is achieving best value.

There are opportunities to embed within the Laser contract ‘smaller sites’ billing which should provide an additional cost avoidance of circa £10,000.

### Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

Consultation with market providers has been undertaken, Internal consultation with Finance, Procurement and Legal teams has been undertaken.

<b>Public Sector Equality Duty</b>
An EQiA is to be completed.

<b>Climate Emergency – <i>This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030</i></b>
The ability to buy named green energy generation (REGO -Renewable Energy Guarantee of Origin) which will contribute to the Council sustainability/climate emergency targets. One of the stated ambitions of a migration to this framework will be the procurement of 100% green (Renewable Energy Guarantees Origin: REGO) energy within a year of joining the framework.

<b>Reasons for considering the report in Part 2</b>
Some exempt information is contained in Appendix 2.

<b>List of Background Papers</b>
Appendix 1 – Procurement Business Case Appendix 2 – Exempt information relating to the Procurement Business case

<b>Contact</b> Ian Gough	<b>Service</b> Commercial Property
<b>Telephone</b> Tel: 0118 974 6714	<b>Email</b> <a href="mailto:ian.gough@wokingham.gov.uk">ian.gough@wokingham.gov.uk</a>

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In accordance with the Procurement and Contracts Rules and Procedures (PCRP) (see section 3.1.1): a formal procurement strategy is required for any procurement with a total value above £50,000. The level of approval required for the procurement strategy depends on the type of procurement and total ascertainable value of the contract, as indicated in the table below. Procurement Strategies, requiring Level 2 and 3 approvals, are also subject to review by Procurement Strategic Board (SPB).

**State “YES” in the applicable box at either Level 1, Level 2 or Level 3:**

**1. Level of Approval**

Type of Procurement	Level 1		Level 2		Level 3	
	Assistant Director & Director Approval		Executive Approval (NOTE: subject to Procurement Strategic Board Review)		Full Council Approval (NOTE: subject to Procurement Strategic Board Review)	
Goods and Services	£50k – £500k		> £500k		Annual Value >£5m or TAV >£25m (if capital >£15m)	X
Schedule 3 Services	£50k – £663,540 (VAT inclusive)		> £663,540 (VAT inclusive)			
Works	£50k – £5,336,937 (VAT inclusive)		> £5,336,937 (VAT inclusive)			

**NOTE:**

Level 2 & 3 approvals to be scheduled for Strategic Procurement Board in advance of Executive/Full Council – papers to be scheduled by Procurement. SPB meetings are held monthly.

Executive meetings (Level 2) are held each month but the submission of papers is strictly controlled, resulting in a cycle of at least 6-weeks – speak to Democratic Services for assistance.

Full Council meetings (Level 3) are held every second month and submission of papers is controlled as per Executive meetings – speak to Democratic Services for assistance.

**2. Project Information**

*Please complete all fields in black and forward to the relevant Service to complete fields in red.*

<b>Project / Contract Title</b>	Energy Procurement Contract
<b>Project / Contract Description</b>	New Energy Procurement Contract
<b>Expected Start Date &amp; Duration</b>	1/4/2024
<b>Any Extension/s Allowed</b>	Yes, one year extensions permitted through notification and ongoing, rolling (year by year), thereafter. There is a one year notification period to end any contract.
<b>Total Annual Value</b>	£7.5M
<b>Total Ascertainable Value</b>	£15 M over two years

<b>Procurement Advice</b> <i>This section is to be completed by Procurement</i>  <i>Summary of the advice, including the type of procedure, and if the PS is for setting up of DPS or framework agreement. Attached / append any written advice previously provided, if appropriate.</i>	Laser offers a compliant forward purchasing arrangement.  No clarity on prices until the Council has committed to forward purchasing (see dates below).  Service have confirmed intention & benefits below.
<b>If procurement is for software, specify outcome of your consultation with IMT and/or Business Change</b>	N/A
<b>Previous Contract Duration</b>	One year and one year extension possibility
<b>Previous Contract Value</b>	£5M
<b>Sign off</b> <i>To be completed by Procurement – name and signature of the Procurement Specialist providing the advice</i>	Rob Bradfield
<b>Date</b> <i>To be completed by Procurement – date signed off by Procurement</i>	1/3/2023

<b>Finance Advice</b> <i>This section is to be completed by Finance</i>  <i>Confirm budget availability and add any comments relevant to the budget.</i>	Budget availability
<b>Source of Funding</b> <i>(revenue/capital or specified other)</i>	Revenue
<b>Sign off</b> <i>To be completed by Finance – name and signature of the Finance Team providing the advice</i>	Mark Thompson
<b>Date</b> <i>To be completed by Finance – date signed off by Finance</i>	1/11/2022

**Background:**

This is a revised paper from an original planned for Executive in October of 2022. This report was pulled due to government intervention in the energy markets, with a financial aid package on energy costs. WBC feared at the time, that changing supplier would mean that we wouldn't have benefitted from this government assistance package. Given the time allowed we now better understand Government interventions and how this would affect WBC energy procurement, we are now confident that we can proceed with the energy re-procurement contract. However, this is with the caveat that future government intervention will need to be reviewed to understand any impacts and of course, we will act accordingly, in our best interests.

The current energy procurement contract needs reviewing every five years minimum. Over the last two years it has become apparent that we need a more flexible approach to trading our energy procurement.

Whilst CCS are planning to offer what officers within the Council need, they currently do not offer this style of trading yet.

There are no issues with CCS's level of service provision but they are not seen as currently able to provide the type of service we need, going forward. In a turbulent energy market, the methodology of how they buy energy, is not 'flexible' enough for what we need.

### **3. Project Justification**

#### **Link to Service or Corporate Objectives**

This project is for the planned migration of the Councils energy buying strategy from the current framework provider (CCS – Crown Commercial Service) to the Laser framework. The decision to move framework suppliers has been taken to ensure best value (energy price) for the Council. In addition, the levels of service offered by the Laser Framework supersede the current CCS offering. In terms of carbon reduction / sustainability, the new Framework provider would be able to offer REGO contracts, which are provided by determined, accredited, proven Green Energy sources. It will enable cost avoidance over the MTFP and help with our response to the Climate Crisis.

#### **Project Specific Objectives, Appraisal of Options and Project Timetable**

The Council has historically used the CCS Framework for energy provision. What has become increasingly clear over the last two years, is that the framework suppliers are less able to respond to huge fluctuations / volatility in available energy market rates. The Laser contract operates in a marginally different way to the CCS Framework and whilst still offering an opportunity to 'bulk buy' in advance, similar to the CCS framework, Laser also offer small opportunities for direct 'spot' buying. This is typically 70% to 30% ratios, whereas the CCS framework is typically 100% advance year brought. Direct cost avoidance will be small, estimated at £20,000 on an energy spend circa £5M but the various other opportunities are attractive to the Council. This includes notable opportunities to buy named green energy generation (REGO) and opportunities to embed within the contract 'smaller sites' billing. This should provide an additional cost avoidance c£10,000. The opportunity to buy green energy will help in sustainability / climate emergency targets. The 'top two' framework suppliers are generally acknowledged as CCS and Laser with over 95% of Local Authorities across the UK buying from one of these.

If we choose to stay with the current Framework supplier, CCS, we may marginally lose out on potential cost avoidance. At our level of Energy / Property provision, there really are only two main Framework providers sizeable enough for us to utilise. We need to be in a sizeable buying basket to enable energy market cost avoidance opportunities too. CCS or Laser. As an outside opportunity we might like to compare West Mercia Energy ; [www.westmerciaenergy.co.uk](http://www.westmerciaenergy.co.uk) but in my opinion they are not yet sizeable enough to cater for WBC.

Option 1 : Stay with CCS. The benefits of this are security of current provision and know price margins. There are some risks though in that many other Local Authorities are moving away from CCS. In the last year of market turmoil their buying strategy has been found wanting slightly and other providers, buy,

marginally, in a different, perceived slightly advantageous way. The offer is very inflexible in a very volatile market.

Option 2 : Switch to Laser. The benefits of this are that Laser buy in a slightly better way in a market of volatility, this could be perceived as more advantageous. According to Lasers own price comparison for the 2021 / 2022 financial year, their Electricity offering would have performed slightly worse than the CCS main contract (c+13% = increased costs of £169,000). However, would have performed better for Gas (c-23% = decreased costs of £253,000). Overall this would have indicated a cost avoidance to WBC of c£84,000. This option is not without risks though and switching frameworks (suppliers) is particularly troublesome. We would need to ensure 'forward' price some six months in advance of switchover. The Laser framework also has 'bolt on' options that would better serve our non-CCS portfolio. Something we are keen to investigate further, in future.

The Energy Team would recommend switching to the Laser framework.

Switching provider is key to opportunities to ensure economic MTFP cost avoidance. One of the stated ambitions of a migration to this framework will be the procurement of 100% green (REGO) energy within a year of joining the framework. Project timescales are tight, six months. We will require to switch by 1/3/2023, we need to provide six months advance notice to both framework providers in this regards.

### **Analysis**

*Switching providers is key to opportunities to ensure economic MTFP cost avoidance (inflation on these contracts has been established to date) and broader environmental policy agenda.*

*Whilst switching framework suppliers does have risks, transferring the energy contract to Laser delivers the following benefits:*

- *utilising a supplier who offers more flexibility in purchasing energy with some opportunity for direct spot buying, and therefore more able to react to changing market conditions*
- *direct savings/cost avoidance of circa £300,000 on an energy spend of circa £9M; £80,000 directly attributable to General Fund expenditure, with the balance benefitting schools and HRA*
- *opportunities to embed within the contract 'smaller sites' billing which should provide an additional cost avoidance of circa £10,000.*
- *the ability to buy upto 25% additional named green energy generation (REGO -Renewable Energy Guarantee of Origin) which will contribute to the Council sustainability/climate emergency targets.*
- *The ability to trade flexibly using 'time of use' or variable tariff's.*

*One of the stated ambitions of a migration to this framework will be the procurement of 100% green (Renewable Energy Guarantees of Origin: REGO) energy within a year of joining the framework, supporting the Councils' policy agenda including Climate Emergency. This could equate to an indirect carbon reduction value of 11,156 Tonnes of CO2. This equates to an energy REGO 'offset' of 37 GWh's of energy usage, the Councils corporate energy usage volume. This is cost dependant though.*

### **Benefits :**



Eventually this Framework contract will permit the utilisation of 100% REGO (Renewable Energy Guarantees of Origin) backed green energy procurement for the Council. In addition the new framework arrangement trades in a quicker / slicker way, enabling the Council to take more advantage of energy market price reductions. It is hoped that this will mean a reduced price for energy procurement, going forward.

- To trade more flexibly and take full advantage of the energy markets.
- We will secure more competitive pricing for energy
- Laser utilise smart procurement methodologies meaning WBC staff are engaged less in administration as was the case for the CCS Framework
- Laser utilise a full smart billing (automated / portal led) arrangement allowing for a reduction in WBC involvement in paper billing
- Laser offer a service whereby we are able to trade in 'time of use' tariffs and this appears more attractive to the Council in the future. This will allow for us to trade any potential renewable energy generation we generate ourselves.

**Project timetable:**

Key milestones	Dates	Owner
CCS contract – end arrangements	1/4/2023 – 1/4/2024	Ian G
Laser contract – forward purchasing (inclusion in basket): intention	1/10/2023	Ian G
Forward purchasing prices received by WBC (indicative)	1/1/2024	Ian G
Laser contract commence	1/4/2024	Ian G
SPB	ASAP	Ian G
CLT draft report	By 5 <sup>th</sup> Dec (in Modern Gov)	Ian G
Exec member approval	Advance of 26 <sup>th</sup> Jan	Ian G
Forward plan	Forward plan – Item Title : Energy re-procurement.	Ian G
	January 2023 (26 <sup>th</sup> )	Ian G

Executive (required on forward plan for 28 days in advance)		
Full Council	March 2023 (23 <sup>rd</sup> )	Ian G

### **Cost Benefit Analysis**

Commodity	Year (Oct-Sep)	PIA Price (Base/Gas)	6m Market Average
Electricity	2020-21	43.44	42.51
Electricity	2021-22	59.92	85.94
Gas	2020-21	36.32	32.79
Gas	2021-22	55.28	86.00

The above table has been provided by Laser. This should be treated with caution but this has been utilised by the Energy Team to provide the above corrected figures (outlined in Option 2 above).

Overall cost cost avoidance equate to a combined c£84,000. This is not the only justification for a switch to this Framework supplier though. The Energy Team are convinced that this Framework would be a better provider of levels of service we require moving forward. To take care of other energy buying needs and to assist with our Climate Emergency ambitions. The Laser framework currently offers a far superior opportunity to buy Green REGO energy contracts. It also offers better opportunities to supplies that are deemed 'landlord supplies', of which the authority have many.

### **Contract Management**

The contract will be managed by the Energy Team. Historically this has required one FTE member of staff to deliver and ensure operation. The contract manager will be Ian Gough.

KPI's in relation to the contract sit within the Policy Team (Rhian Hayes) and is an amount of carbon reduction (energy) against the corporate property portfolio. Going forward, we intend to incorporate the estates building profile too. The contract is for an initial one year period with a break clause after year one. If enacted, we could leave the contract within a year. The intention is to move towards a longer contract period, going forward, indicative at three years. We won't need an exit strategy with this contract but we will insist on a break clause for each individual year, meaning we can 'opt out' each year if something better becomes available.

#### **4. Approval**

*Please fill in the applicable fields according to the level of approval required.*

**Note: If Level-2 or 3 approval is required, the document should be signed by Assistant Director and Director at Level-1 first, and then presented to the Executive (and Full Council where appropriate) for final approval.**

**Level 1**

<i>Position</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Department</i>	<i>Signature</i>
<b>Assistant Director:</b>	Sarah Morgan	Commercial Property	
<b>Director:</b>	Graham Ebers	Deputy Chief Executive	

**Level 2**

**NOTE: Level 1 approval must be completed first.**

**Please state the date of the relevant Procurement Board & Executive meeting or Individual Executive Member Decision, at which the procurement strategy has been approved.**

<i>Date of meeting / approval</i>	<i>Item No</i>
Procurement Board	
Executive Approval	

**Level 3**

**NOTE: Level 1 and 2 approval must be completed first.**

**Please state the date of the relevant Full Council meeting, at which the procurement strategy has been approved.**

<i>Date of meeting / approval</i>	<i>Item No</i>
Full Council Approval	

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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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<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Revenue Monitoring 2022/23 Q3</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	The Executive on 26 January 2023
<b>WARD</b>	(All Wards);
<b>LEAD OFFICER</b>	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers
<b>LEAD MEMBER</b>	Executive Member for Finance - Imogen Shepherd-DuBey

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

To deliver the Council Priorities for the Community, ensuring the efficient effective and safe use of resources.

The Council agrees and sets its budget in the February preceding the current financial year and this report seeks to update Executive on the budget position throughout the year and provide an estimate of the outturn position and impact on balances at year-end (31 March 2023).

**RECOMMENDATION**

That the Executive note:

- 1) the overall forecast of the current position of the General Fund revenue budget, Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) illustrated in the Executive Summary and appendices attached to the report.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report is to allow the Executive to note the current of the forecast outturn positions for 2022/23 for the Council’s net revenue expenditure, its General Fund Balance (GFB), the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), and the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).

**Recommendation 1 – Current Position**

The Executive has agreed to consider Revenue Monitoring Reports on a quarterly basis. In February 2022, the Council agreed and set its net General Fund (Revenue) budget at £161.3 million; following year end, this is to be further adjusted to include supplementary estimates and agreed budget movements. This gives a working budget for each of the Councils Directorates. The working budgets and forecast outturn are shown in the table below.

<b>Department</b>	<b>End of Year Position</b>		
	Current Approved Budget	Current Forecast	Net over / (under) spend
	<b>£,000</b>	<b>£,000</b>	<b>£,000</b>
Adult Social Care	61,365	61,274	<b>(91)</b>

Chief Executive	11,871	11,761	(110)
Children's Services	37,813	39,041	1,227
Place & Growth	46,377	46,492	115
Resources & Assets	4,635	4,789	154
<b>Net Expenditure</b>	<b>162,062</b>	<b>163,357</b>	<b>1,295</b>

The current financial landscape continues to present an unprecedented challenge for the Council in terms of levels of demand on front line services and price inflation, as a result budgets are stretched.

Services are working extremely hard, supported by finance in understanding the impact of the demand on budgets, seeking to find options to mitigate pressures as they arise. In addition, programmes have been instigated to support the financial challenge including close control of expenditure; assessing sensible delays to capital projects to minimise exposure to borrowing; curtailing any other form of service delivery whilst minimising the impact and holding recruitment to posts where appropriate to support the in-year financial position.

There is still significant residual risk on the Council's financial position which will continue to be closely monitored as we move through the remainder of the financial year.

Further details of the outturn forecast position and variances are also shown at Appendix A. The main items of variance identified to date are:

#### Adult Social Care

The continued impact of growing demand and hospital discharge is causing some pressures to market costs and volumes and continues to be closely monitored. Delivery of savings is slightly ahead of target supporting a small underspend of (£91k) for the service.

#### Chief Executive

The (£110k) reported underspend relates to vacancy savings in Customer and Digital services. Of these savings £52k is on-going and built in the 23-24 budget, the remaining savings are all one-off in 22/23.

#### Children's Services

The £1.2m reported overspend relates to ongoing pressures from rising demand across both social care and home to school transport, along with recruitment challenges for essential case holding teams.

The number of children in care in Wokingham is now 144, a 30% increase on the same point last year. Despite targeted service work, such as that of the Compass Team, demonstrating successful outcomes in supporting children to remain at home thus avoiding expensive placement costs, demand levels have significantly exceeded budget



projections. Market pressures and availability of suitable placement options for rising complexity within the cohort is also having an adverse impact on unit cost. Changes to thresholds within the mandatory National Transfer Scheme (NTS) for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children will further increase budget pressure.

In-year applications for mainstream school places are currently at unprecedented levels, with over 460 applications received in June 2022, compared to around 180 for the same month in previous years. For SEND, current assessment requests for Education Health & Care Plans are currently over 30 pupils per month. While not all mainstream and SEND pupils will be eligible for funded transport, given the current place sufficiency challenges faced locally, risks remain that the number of pupils statutorily entitled to transport will continue to rise over the remainder of the financial year.

### Place and Growth

The £115k reported variance is due to lower than budgeted levels of car parking income, mitigated by reducing the amount of planned and reactive maintenance works being undertaken in year, as well as waste disposal tonnages being reduced. This is thought to be at least in part due to the current costs of living resulting in reduced waste disposal levels and therefore cost savings.

Risks do continue to exist around waste disposal due to the size of the contract and around Temporary Accommodation demand which has stabilised significantly since the increases seen during the first quarter of the year. Significant work has been undertaken in relation to the prevention of homelessness, but a risk around future increases in demand still exists.

### Resources and Assets

The £154k reported overspend includes a forecast income shortfall in leisure of £350k, this is an on-going risk as the service rebuilds following the pandemic and encounters further income loss because of hardship pressures. There are property pressures from voids and income shortfalls totalling £287k. The pay award of £300k is to be funded from Corporate Inflation and these are to be offset against a saving on interest on balances as a result of the recent changes in interest rates (£783k).

### General Fund

The General Fund Forecast for 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 is £7.731m, an improved position from the previous quarter. Work will continue throughout the last quarter of the year to contain costs and maximise efficiencies where possible to improve and firm up the year-end position.

See Appendix B for further details.

### Housing Revenue Account (HRA)

The Housing Revenue Account is currently expecting to exceed budget by £322k. This is a result of condensation and heating issues related to the cost of living crisis, as a result of tenants trying to save on heating. Also, a steep rise in costs relating to burst pipes, rental income being slightly less than budgeted and staffing related costs. The variance in rental income is less than 1% but there is an impact due to the size of the budget. Risks continue to exist around the exact amount of rental income due to regular

fluctuation as well as the level of voids and maintenance costs due to increases in costs of materials and labour. HRA reserves are estimated to be £1.0m on 31 March 2023. This remains a prudent level of reserves and above the minimum recommended reserve balance of £0.9m set out in the Medium-Term Financial Plan. See Appendix C for further details.

### **Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)**

Schools are funded through a direct grant from Central Government known as the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). This is used to fund individual schools through an agreed formula, costs associated with Early Years Services, education and support for children with Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND), and to fund relevant support services.

The DSG is forecasting an in-year adverse variance of £6.4m against a total budget of £168m (3.8% of total income). This represents a movement of £0.7m from Q2, reflecting the risk identified at that time within the High Needs Block.

As is the case with the vast majority of authorities across the country, the overspend on the DSG relates to ongoing pressure on the High Needs Block (HNB), driven largely by continuing increases in the number of children and young people with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and their related needs resulting in demand for specialist placements.

The number of children and young people with an EHCP in Wokingham has risen by 75% since 2018, with a 30% increase over the 2021/22 financial year of those in receipt of 'top-up' funding from the High Needs Block.

#### **Key risks to the HNB forecast**

Current indications from assessment activity are for potentially an additional 30 Education Health & Care Plans per month. In addition, a number of pupils await specialist placements which may increase costs as arrangements are made. While the movement at Q3 reflects further changes associated with the new academic year, risks remain that costs associated with supporting children and young people with an EHCP will increase further.

See Appendix D for further details.

#### **SEND Innovation & Improvement Programme / DSG Deficit Management Plan**

The SEND IIP is a large, ambitious programme of improvement and innovation, with its purpose to deliver the SEND Strategy (0-25), with five priority aims:

1. To strengthen local provision and quality of local practice
2. To improve the efficiency of processes (including timeliness and quality of EHCPs and the Annual Review process)
3. To ensure effective Transitions at all ages and stages
4. To strengthen sufficiency of local provision, more effective strategic commissioning and Value for Money, and greater impact on outcomes
5. All of the above enabled through effective and meaningful coproduction

In addition to improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND, the IIP is also designed to ensure that Wokingham gets the best value for money from its

allocation of resources to support delivery of services, for children and young people with SEND and their families.

WBC is participating in the Department for Education's Safety Valve Intervention Programme, with work ongoing to reach formal agreement by February 2023. This sets out an ambitious programme of work for the next 6 years, building on the SEND IIP, but further targeting financial sustainability for the local SEND system by reaching an in-year DSG budget balance by 2028/29.

## 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)	£163.4m	Yes	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	N/A	Yes	Revenue
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	N/A	Yes	Revenue

### **Other Financial Information**

Effective monitoring of budgets is an essential element of providing cost effective services and enables any corrective action to be undertaken, if required. Many of the budgets are activity driven and can be volatile in nature.

### **Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation**

None

### **Public Sector Equality Duty**

Public Sector Equality Duty assessment are undertaken during individual business cases.

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

None – this is only a report on the financial position for quarter three.

### **Reasons for considering the report in Part 2**

None

### **List of Background Papers**

Appendix A – Revenue Monitoring Summary  
Appendix B – General Fund Balance  
Appendix C – Housing Revenue Account Monitoring Summary  
Appendix D – DSG Monitoring Summary

<b>Contact</b> Stu Taylor	<b>Service</b> Business Services
<b>Telephone</b> 07525 804116	<b>Email</b> <a href="mailto:stu.taylor@wokingham.gov.uk">stu.taylor@wokingham.gov.uk</a>

## REVENUE MONITORING REPORT December 2022

## GENERAL FUND SUMMARY

Department	End of Year Position			Comment on major areas of estimated over / (underspend)
	Current Approved Budget	Current Forecast	Net over / (under) spend	
	£,000	£,000	£,000	
Adult Social Care	61,365	61,274	(91)	The continued impact of growing demand and hospital discharge is causing some pressures to market costs and volumes and continues to be closely monitored. Delivery of savings is slightly ahead of target supporting a small underspend for the service.
Chief Executive	11,871	11,761	(110)	Savings on vacancies in Digital and Customer services total (£110k).
Children's Services	37,813	39,041	1,227	Rising demand from children in care / care leavers and home to school transport, along with significant recruitment challenges are driving budget pressures in-year. Unbudgeted costs are in part being mitigated by reserves held and management action on discretionary spend, however a significant challenge remains.
Place & Growth	46,377	46,492	115	Car parking income continues to be lower than budgeted, which is partially offset by expenditure on the waste disposal contract having reduced through a reduction in the volume of waste being collected combined with reducing the planned and reactive highways maintenance works in year.
Resources & Assets	4,635	4,789	154	The main forecast variances include income shortfall in leisure £350k, this is an on-going risk as the service rebuilds following the pandemic and encounters further income loss as a result of hardship pressures. There are property pressures from voids and income shortfalls totalling £287k. The pay award of £300k is to be funded from Corporate Inflation and these are to be offset against a saving on interest on balances as a result of the recent changes in interest rates (£780k).
<b>Net Expenditure</b>	<b>162,062</b>	<b>163,357</b>	<b>1,295</b>	

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**Estimated General Fund Balance - 31st March 2023**

Note	£,000	£,000
<b>1 Estimated General Fund Balance (as at 31/3/2022)</b>		<b>(£9,026)</b>
<u>Supplementary Estimates</u>	£0	
		<b>£0</b>
<u>Service Variance</u>		
Adult Social Care & Health	(£91)	
Chief Executive	(£110)	
Children's Services	£1,227	
Resources and Assets	£154	
Place and Growth	£115	
		<b>£1,295</b>
<b>Estimated General Fund Balance 31/3/2023</b>		<b>(£7,731)</b>

Notes

1. General balance as at 31/03/22 is estimated pending completion on the 2021/22 statement of accounts.

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## REVENUE MONITORING REPORT 2022/23

Report Date: December 2022

Service	End of Year Position			Comment on major areas of estimated over / (underspend)	
	Current Approved Budget	Current Forecast	Net over / (under) spend		
	£,000	£,000	£,000		
<b>Housing Revenue Account</b>					
<b>Capital Finance</b>					
	Expenditure	4,837	4,837	0	
	Income	(20)	(20)	0	
	Net	4,817	4,817	0	
<b>Fees &amp; Charges / Capital Finance Charges</b>					
	Expenditure	97	140	43	Increase in electricity costs have resulted in the existing budget no longer being sufficient to cover this cost.
	Income	(85)	(103)	(18)	
	Net	12	37	25	
<b>HRA General Management</b>					
	Expenditure	2,036	1,998	(38)	A combination of various small savings in relation to management expenses, such as training & development and printing & distribution.
	Income	(87)	(87)	0	
	Net	1,949	1,911	(38)	
<b>HRA Housing Repairs</b>					
	Expenditure	3,905	4,087	182	Recent increase in expenditure relating to burst pipes, condensation and heating issues relating to the energy/cost of living crisis (with tenants trying to save on heating) £130k and increased utility costs £50k.
	Income	(130)	(145)	(15)	
	Net	3,775	3,942	167	
<b>HRA Housing Services</b>					
	Expenditure	2,234	2,421	187	
	Income	(17,917)	(17,967)	(50)	
	Net	(15,683)	(15,545)	138	HRA rental income is currently forecast to be slightly under budget, there is however natural fluctuation in this during the year meaning the position could vary a little by year-end. A further £100k of overspend is in relation to staffing costs.
<b>Sheltered Accommodation</b>					
	Expenditure	350	363	13	
	Income	(531)	(514)	17	
	Net	(181)	(151)	30	
<b>Subtotal Excluding Internal Recharges</b>		(5,310)	(4,988)	322	
Internal and Capital Charges		5,310	5,310	0	
<b>Total</b>		0	0	322	

Housing Revenue Account Reserves	£,000	£,000
HRA Reserves as at 31st March 2022		(1,323)
Planned Spend	0	
Net Variance	322	
2022/23 Forecast Net Spend against Reserves		322
<b>HRA Reserves as at 31st March 2023 (Forecast)</b>		<b>(1,001)</b>

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## REVENUE MONITORING REPORT 2022/23

Report Date: December 2022

Service	End of Year Position			Comment on major areas of estimated over / (underspend)
	Current Approved Budget	Current Forecast	Net over / (under) spend	
	£,000	£,000	£,000	
<b>Dedicated Schools Grant Central School Services Block</b>				
Expenditure	995	995	0	
Income	(995)	(995)	0	
Net	0	0	0	
<b>Early Years Block</b>				
Expenditure	11,289	11,654	365	
Income	(11,289)	(11,654)	(365)	
Net	0	0	0	
<b>High Needs Block</b>				
Expenditure	29,642	32,034	2,392	Ongoing increasing number of children & young people with an EHCP, coupled with challenges around sufficiency of local provision
Income	(25,779)	(25,660)	119	
Net	3,863	6,374	2,511	
<b>Schools Block</b>				
Expenditure	129,842	129,973	131	Small overspend reflects required growth fund expenditure to deliver mainstream places
Income	(129,842)	(129,842)	0	
Net	0	131	131	
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,863</b>	<b>6,505</b>	<b>2,642</b>	

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<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Capital Monitoring 2022/23 - Q3</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	The Executive on 26 January 2023
<b>WARD</b>	(All Wards);
<b>LEAD OFFICER</b>	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers
<b>LEAD MEMBER</b>	Executive Member for Finance - Imogen Shepherd-DuBey

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

Effective use of our capital resources to meet the Council Plan investment priorities and delivering value for money for residents.

**RECOMMENDATION**

The Executive is asked to:

- 1) note the position of the capital programme at the end of Quarter 3 (to 31 December 2022) as summarised in the report below and set out in detail in Appendix A to the report.
- 2) approve and note the proposed carry forwards in the capital programme as set out in Appendix B.
- 3) approve the increase of the schools devolved capital budget by £388,333 to ensure the revised budget allocation matches the confirmed ringfenced grant funding.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report informs the Executive of the progress of the Council in delivering its capital programme for the financial year 2022/2023. The Executive have previously agreed to consider Capital Monitoring Reports on a quarterly basis and this report highlights the capital monitoring as at the end of the third quarter of the financial year (31 December 2022).

The programme will continue to be monitored and reviewed throughout the financial year and any further rephasing will be notified to Executive for approval.

**Recommendation One**

The table below sets out a summary of the financial position for the capital programme as at the end of quarter three. Since quarter two, there has been a significant positive movement in the reported underspend position, moving from £18.6m to £35.9m. A breakdown of the major variances is detailed below. In addition, carry forwards of the current year budget in future years have increased from £212.8m to £284.9m. As we move through the financial year, projects can be delayed due to planning, design and construction challenges. The Council are also reassessing business cases and project timelines on some capital projects in light on the current national economic conditions the Council find themselves in (e.g. interest rates, inflation, etc).

The executive is asked to note this position. Further information is provided in Appendix A.

		£'million
Capital programme approved at Council (Feb 2022)	a	123.2
Budget rephased from prior years (existing projects)	b	288.2
Budget movements in year	c	26.9
<b>Current approved budget</b>	<b>d = a + b + c</b>	<b>438.3</b>
Forecast spend for 22/23	e	117.5
Forecast carry forward into 23/24	f	284.9
<b>Forecast variance (underspend) / overspend</b>	<b>g = (e+f) - d</b>	<b>(35.9)</b>

As of 31 December 2022, there are £(35.9m) in savings across the capital programme identified. These are made up as follows:

Analysis of material budget savings identified as of 31 December 2022	£'million
<b><u>Chief Executive's Office</u></b>	
IT - Hardware (mobile phone replacements) <i>Reported in capital programme review paper (Jul'22)</i>	(£0.08m)
<b><u>Children's Services</u></b>	
Matthews Green (St. Cecilia CofE Primary School) - efficiency savings throughout life of the projects (design + procurement)	(£0.85m)
New Arborfield Primary - efficiency savings throughout life of the projects (design + procurement)	(£0.27m)
Bohunt Secondary School - contingency budget held for post completion costs not required.	(£0.19m)
School Kitchens - reduction in number schools due to academisation <i>Reported in Q2 capital monitoring (Oct'22)</i>	(£0.13m)
Schools Access - reduction in need for minor works programme.	(£0.05m)
Primary Strategy - expansion schemes at Loddon and Highwood completed with savings.	(£0.04m)
<b><u>Housing Revenue Account (HRA)</u></b>	

Housing Repairs & Adaptions for Disabled - plans for spend reduced to match available funding.	(£0.23m)
<b><u>Place &amp; Growth</u></b>	
Winnersh Triangle Parkway - unforeseen issues caused by the Thames Water Main. <i>Reported in Q1 capital monitoring (Jul'22)</i>	£1.3m
Land Acquisition for Major Road Schemes - budget not required.	(£7.3m)
Managing Congestion and pollution - to be reinvested in active travel and bus priority <i>Reported in capital programme review paper (Jul'22)</i>	(£4.8m)
SCAPE Major Road Schemes- schemes near completion including shared costs due to work carried out by others. <i>Reported in Q2 capital monitoring (Oct'22)</i>	(£3.9m)
Payment of commuted sum to WHL - current projects completed <i>Reported in Q2 capital monitoring (Oct'22)</i>	(£3.9m)
Warren House Embankment Stabilisation <i>Reported in capital programme review paper (Jul'22)</i>	(£3.0m)
Greenways	(£2.1m)
Wokingham Town Centre Environmental Improvements	(£1.4m)
Highways Infrastructure Flood Alleviation Schemes <i>Reported in capital programme review paper (Jul'22)</i>	(£1.3m)
Bridge Strengthening - Earley Station Footbridge <i>Options for site being to be revaluated and if required a new bid will be submitted in a future year</i>	(£0.9m)
Public Rights of Way Network	(£0.6m)
Electric Vehicle (EV) Charge Points - Budget reduced to match government grant approved. <i>Reported in Q2 capital monitoring (Oct'22)</i>	(£0.46m)
Transport corridor improvements (Shepherds Hill to Thames Valley P+R) - works focusing on Sutton Seed Roundabout.	(£0.43m)
A329(M) & Drainage (Central Reserve Concrete Barrier and Carriageway) <i>Reported in capital programme review paper (Jul'22)</i>	(£0.35m)
Permanent & Portable Variable Message Signs (PVMS) Project - trail ended with costs less than planned. <i>Reported in Q1 capital monitoring</i>	(£0.10m)
Street lighting column structural testing - less requirement following borough-wide LED street lighting replacement project	(£0.02m)
<b><u>Resources &amp; Assets</u></b>	
Wokingham Town Centre Regeneration - former Marks & Spencer's Site - Options for site being to be revaluated and if required a new bid will be submitted in a future year	(£3.0m)
Redesigning use of WBC assets to generate future income <i>Reported in capital programme review paper (Jul'22)</i>	(£1.4m)

IT / System related projects (server rooms, software and Councillors laptops) <i>Reported in capital programme review paper (Jul'22)</i>	(£0.2m)
Outdoor gyms x 3 locations - scheme reviewed and now cancelled.	(£0.08m)
<b>Total</b>	<b>(£35.92m)</b>

Based on the savings above, approximately £27m of unringfenced funding has been made available to support the funding of the capital programme in 23/24.

### **Recommendation Two**

As part of the monthly monitoring of the capital programme, the profiling of expenditure is reviewed and where required, a more realistic profile of the expenditure over the life of the project will be updated. Appendix B provides a list of the capital carry forwards identified to date this year, totalling £284.9m. These projects will be reprofiled across the next three financial years.

These carry forwards are the cumulative position and therefore include the £212.8m identified and reported to the Executive in previous quarters.

The Executive are asked to approve and note the proposed carry forwards in the capital programme as set out in Appendix B;

### **Recommendation Three**

The Executive are asked to approve the increase of the schools devolved capital budget by £388,333 to ensure the revised budget allocation matches the confirmed ringfenced grant funding of £777,333. The Council were notified in December of additional capital funding for schools. Eligible schools and sixth-form colleges will receive an allocation from an additional £447 million of capital funding to improve energy efficiency in 2022 to 2023. This is part of an additional £500 million of capital funding for schools and further education institutions in England.

This funding is for institutions that were eligible for devolved formula capital in 2022 to 2023.

## **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)	£117.4m	Yes	Capital
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£284.9m carry forward	Yes	Capital



Following Financial Year (Year 3)	tbc when 23/24 budget set	tbc	Capital
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<b>Other Financial Information</b>
None

<b>Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation</b>
None

<b>Public Sector Equality Duty</b>
Equality assessments are carried out as part of each capital project.

<b>Climate Emergency – <i>This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030</i></b>
The capital programme includes projects which help achieve our priorities in relation to climate change.

<b>Reasons for considering the report in Part 2</b>
N/A

<b>List of Background Papers</b>
Appendix A: Capital Monitoring Summary Report for Quarter 3 (2022-2023) Appendix B: List of proposed rephasing of projects in Quarter 3 to 2023-2024

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## CAPITAL MONITORING REPORT DECEMBER 2022

Directorate	Current Approved Budget £,000	Forecast Spend £,000	Carry Forwards £,000	(Under) / Overspend £,000	Major Areas Of Forecast Overspend / (Underspend)
Adult Social Care & Health	14,589	2,018	12,571	0	No material variances identified at this stage.
Chief Executive's Office	6,824	4,688	2,059	(77)	(£0.08m) underspend IT - Hardware (mobile phone replacements).
Children's Services	23,579	13,903	8,135	(1,541)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. (£0.85m) saving Matthews Green (St. Cecilia CofE Primary School) <b>and</b> (£0.27m) saving New Arborfield Primary - efficiency savings throughout life of the projects (design + procurement).</li> <li>2. (£0.19m) saving Bohunt Secondary School - contingency budget held for post completion costs not required.</li> <li>3. (£0.13m) underspend School Kitchens - number of schools covered by arrangement has reduced leading to a reduced spend requirement in current &amp; future years.</li> <li>4. (£0.05m) underspend Schools Access - reduction in need for minor works programme.</li> <li>5. (£0.04m) underspend Primary Strategy - expansion schemes at Loddon and Highwood completed with savings.</li> </ol>
Housing Revenue Account (HRA)	39,726	17,185	22,314	(227)	1. (£0.23m) Housing (Tenants Services) - plans for spend reduced to match available funding.
Place & Growth	161,639	43,194	89,023	(29,422)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. £1.3m overspend on Winnersh Triangle Parkway - unforeseen issues caused by the Thames Water Main.</li> <li>2. (£7.3m) Land Acquisition for Major Road Schemes - budget not required.</li> <li>3. (£4.8m) Managing Congestion and pollution - to be reinvested in active travel and bus priority.</li> <li>4. (£3.9m) SCAPE Major Road Schemes - near completion including shared costs due to work carried out by others.</li> <li>5. (£3.9m) Payment of commuted sum to WHL - current projects completed.</li> <li>6. (£3.0m) Warren House Embankment Stabilisation.</li> <li>7. (£2.1m) Greenways.</li> <li>8. (£1.4m) Wokingham Town Centre Environmental Improvements</li> <li>9. (£1.3m) Highways Infrastructure Flood Alleviation Schemes.</li> <li>10. (£0.9m) Bridge Strengthening - Earley Station Footbridge</li> <li>11. (£0.6m) Public Rights of Way Network</li> <li>12. (£0.46m) Electric Vehicle (EV) Charge Points - Budget reduced to match government grant approved.</li> <li>13. (£0.43m) Transport corridor improvements (Shepherds Hill to Thames Valley P+R) - works focusing on Sutton Seed Roundabout.</li> <li>14. (£0.35m) underspend A329(M) &amp; Drainage (Central Reserve Concrete Barrier and Carriageway).</li> </ol>
Resources & Assets	191,929	36,440	150,839	(4,649)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. (£3m) underspend Wokingham Town Centre Regeneration - former Marks &amp; Spencer's Site - Construction &amp; refurbishment - Options for site being to be revaluated and if required a new bid will be submitted in a future year.</li> <li>2. (£1.4m) underspend Redesigning use of WBC assets to generate future income.</li> <li>3. (£0.2m) underspend in IT / System related projects (server rooms, software and Councillors laptops).</li> <li>4. (£0.08m) underspend Outdoor gyms x 3 locations - scheme now cancelled.</li> </ol>
<b>Total</b>	<b>438,286</b>	<b>117,429</b>	<b>284,941</b>	<b>(35,916)</b>	

**Notes:-**

Details of carry forwards are shown on next page in Appendix B.

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**Appendix B - December 2022 - List of proposed rephasing of projects into future years**

Project	Amount £	Reprofiled to		
		2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
<b>Adult Social Care &amp; Health</b>				
Older People's Dementia Home	7,888,851	1,397,851	6,491,000	0
Adult Social Care Accommodation Transformation <i>Options to be developed to meet statutory obligation to house people with Learning disabilities or transitioning from Children's to Adult Social Care</i>	3,322,988	3,322,988	0	0
LD Demand Management - Transitions House 2 - Purchase to house people transitioning to ASC (Supported Living)	508,000	508,000	0	0
Learning Disability Outreach and Overnight Respite Centre - Loddon Court	380,000	380,000	0	0
Mosaic Modernisation Reimplementation	283,000	283,000	0	0
Replacement for Day services for adults	121,256	121,256	0	0
Suffolk Lodge - Fire Alarm replacement	53,399	0	53,399	0
ASC Accommodation Transformation - Winnersh Bungalow	13,300	13,300	0	0
<b>Total - Adult Social Care &amp; Health</b>	<b>12,570,795</b>	<b>6,026,396</b>	<b>6,544,399</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Chief Executive's Office</b>				
IT - Enhancement, Security & Infrastructure	829,443	829,443	0	0
Twyford Library Enhancement project	824,652	824,652	0	0
Berkshire Records Office	323,000	323,000	0	0
Library Offer	81,609	81,609	0	0
<b>Total - Chief Executive's Office</b>	<b>2,058,703</b>	<b>2,058,703</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Children's Services</b>				
Special Education Needs (SEND) Investment Programme / Sufficiency	4,907,617	4,907,617	0	0
Care Leaver Supported Accommodation: Funding for renovation costs of Seaford Court	820,000	820,000	0	0
South West New School/Spencer's Wood Primary School (New Build)	709,500	709,500	0	0
Arborfield / Barkham Primary school - Furniture, Fixings Equipment & Technology	350,000	350,000	0	0
St. Cecilia CofE Primary School (Matthews Green) - Furniture, Fixings & Equipment	312,500	312,500	0	0
Sixth Form Expansion	280,000	280,000	0	0
Basic Needs Primary Programme	241,820	241,820	0	0
Schools Led Enhancement - Various schools	223,888	223,888	0	0
Alder Grove Primary - Furniture, Fixings Equipment & Technology (Shinfield West - Silver Meadow)	133,240	133,240	0	0
Care Leaver accommodation	80,000	80,000	0	0
Schools Access	32,516	32,516	0	0
Gorse Ride Inf. School - building works to improve access for disabled children	32,397	32,397	0	0
Primary strategy - Furniture, Fixings Equipment & Technology	10,511	10,511	0	0
Healthy Pupil Capital - Hillside Primary	1,086	1,086	0	0
<b>Total - Children's Services</b>	<b>8,135,075</b>	<b>8,135,075</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Housing Revenue Account (HRA)</b>				
Gorse Ride Regeneration Project - <i>budget approved at Feb '22 Executive now realigned to meet latest project delivery timing</i>	21,006,583	21,006,583	0	0
Purchase of council houses HRA	1,307,640	1,307,640	0	0
<b>Total - Housing Revenue Account (HRA)</b>	<b>22,314,223</b>	<b>22,314,223</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

Project	Amount £	Reprofiled to		
		2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
<b>Place &amp; Growth</b>				
SCAPE - Road infrastructure <i>Infrastructure to facilitate delivery of South Wokingham SDL including South Wokingham Distribution Road now planned for future years delivery</i>	55,500,000	13,875,000	27,750,000	13,875,000
Land Acquisition for Major Road Schemes <i>Future requirements to deliver SCAPE road infrastructure including post construction procedures of completed road schemes</i>	958,794	958,794	0	0
Toutley Highways Depot Modernisation <i>Early stages of project, majority of spend in next financial year</i>	7,249,213	4,784,213	2,465,000	0
Sports Provision to serve North & South SDL's	6,370,000	150,000	6,220,000	0
California Crossroads <i>Delivery not expected to begin until Easter 2023</i>	5,519,687	5,119,687	400,000	0
Earley Station Footbridge <i>Options to be approved construction unlikely until next financial year</i>	2,100,000	100,000	2,000,000	0
Greenways <i>Land owner agreement delays and public consultations delays</i>	496,373	496,373	0	0
Gypsy, Roma, Traveller - additional pitches	1,590,000	0	1,590,000	0
Public Rights of Way Network - Loddon Long Distance path <i>Land owner agreement delays</i>	742,831	414,390	328,441	0
Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans	1,200,000	1,200,000	0	0
Wokingham Borough Cycle Network <i>Bader way design &amp; build contract to construct Bridge for phase 3, construction not expected until next financial year.</i>	1,149,169	1,149,169	0	0
Self-Build Project <i>Wider business case to be looked at during the year</i>	999,460	849,000	150,460	0
Completed Road Schemes Retention	730,138	730,138	0	0
A327 Cycleway'	897,924	897,924	0	0
Integrated Transport Schemes	857,834	857,834	0	0
Borough Wide Non SDL Play Area Enhancement Project	578,769	578,769	0	0
Transport corridor improvements - Shepherds Hill to Thame Valley Park, Park & Ride <i>Design stage due later this financial year, dependant on capacity, proposing construction next summer.</i>	570,000	570,000	0	0
Planning & Public Protection Partnership (PPP) - System replacement	297,000	297,000	0	0
Kentwood Development - Cycle & Pedestrian Improvements	236,984	236,984	0	0
Highway Drainage Schemes (road subsided)	163,956	163,956	0	0
Safer Routes to Schools	150,000	150,000	0	0
Dinton Storage Barn	147,219	147,219	0	0
Bus Stop Infrastructure Works to Support North Arborfield SDL Bus Strategy	125,000	125,000	0	0
Coppid Beech Park & Ride	100,000	100,000	0	0
Electric Vehicle Charge Points	100,000	100,000	0	0
Cantley Park Destination Play	67,026	67,026	0	0
Mandatory disabled facility grants - various small projects	74,355	74,355	0	0
Biodiversity Capital Projects	25,000	25,000	0	0
Street Lighting Column Structural Testing	20,000	20,000	0	0
Ashenbury Park, Landfill	6,000	6,000	0	0
<b>Total - Place &amp; Growth</b>	<b>89,022,732</b>	<b>34,243,831</b>	<b>40,903,901</b>	<b>13,875,000</b>

Project	Amount £	Reprofiled to		
		2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
<b>Resources &amp; Assets</b>				
Community Investment <i>Fund for Commercial and Housing opportunities, future strategic opportunities being developed.</i>	67,000,000	67,000,000	0	0
Solar Farms (Barkham) <i>Delays to the programme have occurred due to delay in securing planning permission and negotiations over connection to the grid. Those matters have now been resolved.</i>	18,018,567	18,018,567	0	0
WBC (Holdings) Ltd Loan <i>Only one housing project in pipeline then nothing further expected in current financial year.</i>	16,392,426	6,000,000	6,000,000	4,392,426
Strategic Property and Commercial Assets (Investment Fund)	14,959,477	14,959,477	0	0
Renewable Energy Infrastructure projects <i>Business cases for Solar investment being developed, schemes to progress in future years.</i>	13,985,000	7,500,000	1,500,000	4,985,000
Carnival Pool Area Redevelopment <i>Future requirements of Town Centre Regeneration schemes to be determined including highways Improvements.</i>	14,537,813	14,537,813	0	0
Infrastructure to enable Toutley East development <i>Delay in obtaining outline planning consent.</i>	3,175,000	3,175,000	0	0
Energy Reduction Projects	1,250,000	625,000	625,000	0
3G Pitch at Earley	763,000	763,000	0	0
Montague Park Community Facility	226,700	226,700	0	0
Property Maintenance and Compliance - General	200,532	200,532	0	0
Cantley Park Enhancement	164,559	164,559	0	0
Commercial Property Site Initial Design Work	148,100	148,100	0	0
Technology Forge Cloud Implementation	18,049	18,049	0	0
<b>Total Resources &amp; Assets</b>	<b>150,839,223</b>	<b>133,336,797</b>	<b>8,125,000</b>	<b>9,377,426</b>
<b>Total Reprofiting identified as at end of December 2022</b>	<b>284,940,751</b>	<b>206,115,025</b>	<b>55,573,300</b>	<b>23,252,426</b>

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<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Corporate Peer Challenge - Follow Up Visit</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	The Executive on 26 January 2023
<b>WARD</b>	(All Wards);
<b>LEAD OFFICER</b>	Chief Executive - Susan Parsonage
<b>LEAD MEMBER</b>	Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Business and Economic Development- Clive Jones

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

The report presents the findings and conclusions of the Corporate Peer Challenge follow-up visit that took place in October 2022 providing residents with an independent assurance of the Council's progress and improvements since November 2021.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

That the Executive notes the progress report of the Corporate Peer Challenge at Appendix 1.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Local Government Association's (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) offer is effective and well regarded by the local government sector. By bringing together political and managerial leadership, through the use of member and officer peers, a peer challenge provides robust, strategic and credible challenge and support to councils. Peer challenge also enhances the capacity of the sector and helps to avoid insularity within councils.

Wokingham Borough Council received a CPC visit in November 2021, the results of which were reported to Executive on 7 March 2022 together with an improvement action plan.

In October 2022, the CPC team undertook a follow up visit to assess progress and ongoing challenges. The LGA's findings from the visit are reported at Appendix 1.

In summary, the CPC team reported "that there has been a palpable and positive change at Wokingham, in tone, style and purpose and felt that they were encountering a council that was very different to a year ago which is a credit to the work of both officers and members."

## **BACKGROUND TO THE CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE**

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. At its meeting of 7 March 2022, the Executive considered the findings of CPC review that took place in November 2021 and agreed an action plan to address the areas of improvement identified. It was also noted that the CPC team would undertake a follow-up visit to assess progress later in the year.

## **FOLLOW-UP VISIT**

6. In October 2022, the CPC team met with members and officers to assess the progress made since their November 2021 visit.
7. Initial feedback was given by the LGA at the end of the follow up visit on 19th October and this has now been followed up by the written report attached at Appendix 1.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION**

***The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and 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 February 2022 LGA report and associated action plan is published on the Council's Website together with the December 2022 follow-up report.

#### **Public Sector Equality Duty**

This is an update report. An Equality Impact Assessment 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.

#### **Reasons for considering the report in Part 2**

Not applicable.

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

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Report – February 2022

WBC Action Plan – February 2022

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Follow Up Report – December 2022

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# LGA Corporate Peer Challenge – Progress Review

Wokingham Council

Wednesday 19 October 2022

Follow up note





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# 1. Introduction

The council undertook an LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) during 9-17 November 2021 and published the full report with an action plan in March 2022.

The progress review is an integral part of the Corporate Peer Challenge process and is designed to provide space for the council's senior leadership to:

- Update peers on the progress made and to receive feedback on this including how the action plan aligns to the CPC's recommendations
- Consider peer's reflections on any new opportunities or challenges that may have arisen since the peer team were 'on-site' including any further support needs
- Discuss any early impact or learning from the progress made to date

The LGA would like to thank Wokingham for their commitment to sector led improvement. This progress review was the next step in an ongoing, open and close relationship that the council has with LGA sector support.

# 2. Summary of the approach

The progress review at Wokingham took place remotely on 19 October 2022.

The progress review focussed on each of the recommendations from the Corporate Peer Challenge, under the following theme headings:

- Local priorities and outcomes
- Organisational and place leadership
- Governance and culture
- Financial planning and management
- Capacity for improvement

For this progress review, the following members of the original CPC team were

involved:

- Paul Najsarek – Former Chief Executive, London Borough of Ealing
- Jon Bell – Director of Human Resources, London Borough of Barnet

In addition, the follow members were also on the Progress Review Peer Team:

- Cllr Richard Kemp – Leader of the Liberal Democrats, Liverpool City Council
- Sophie Poole - Peer Challenge Manager, Local Government Association

The peer team met virtually via MS Teams over the course of 4 hours with the following representatives from the council:

- Susan Parsonage, CEX of Wokingham Council
- Clive Jones, Leader of Wokingham Council
- Stephen Conway – Deputy Leader of Wokingham Council
- Graham Ebers – Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Resources and Assets
- Matt Pope – Director of Adult Services
- Sally Watkins- Assistant Director of Chief Executive's Office
- Andrew Moulton – Assistant Director of Governance
- Graham Cadle – Assistant Director of Finance
- Mark Gwynne - Strategic Lead for Community, Strategy & Comms
- Jackie Whitney – Head of Customer Experience

### **Changes at Wokingham since November 2021**

Since the original Peer Challenge in November 2021 there has been a change of control following the local elections in May 2022, resulting in Wokingham moving into no overall control.



### 3. Progress Review - Feedback

#### Overview

The Peer Team observed that there has been a palpable and positive change at Wokingham, in tone, style and purpose and felt that they were encountering a council that was very different to a year ago which is a credit to the work of both officers and members.

The council has clearly embraced the issues they were facing at the time of the original peer challenge and turned them into opportunities using the financial position and a change in political control as an impetus for change.

The Peer Team were told that the new administration made a conscious decision from the outset not to 'shy away' from difficult decisions and understood the importance of getting quickly up to speed on the financial challenges facing the council.

In taking this approach the new administration has invested time in quickly establishing trust with officers, creating an open and transparent culture by encouraging discussion and challenge. The new administration has been keen to foster a collaborative and cross-party approach with Leaders of the other political groups taking up key leadership positions. The Peer Team heard that this approach is working well, and the administration is open to actively involving opposition members in scrutiny.

The Peer Team were particularly impressed by the mature approach the council has adopted since the team were last at Wokingham. This was evident in the new Leader and the way in which he works with officers and councillors from across the organisation. The professional way in which officers worked with members was also noted. The Peer Team could clearly see that officer member relationships were in a good place with mutual respect on both sides which is having a positive impact on the way the council is run. An example of this in practice was when a paper was brought to discuss a change in the election cycle. Officers and members described how there was an open conversation with evidence brought forward by officers around the different options, providing professional advice and outlining a preferred recommendation. Members reviewed this and decided not to agree the officer's

recommendation. However everyone involved in the process felt there had been an open, honest and mature discussion leading the political leadership to make their decision.

There is also evidence that Wokingham has become more externally focussed, seeking out good practice from other councils e.g. when developing the Arts and Culture Alliance as well working in partnership with the community in response to the cost-of-living crisis. The Peer Team also felt that the council's customer service work was stronger and were impressed by the Organisational Foundation Programme which covers six key areas: Customer Experience, Business Intelligence, Contract and Procurement, Asset Opportunities, Workforce and Community and Partnership, which felt integrated and coherent.

While the Peer Team could see the progress made, there are steps in the journey that the council needs to give particular attention to along the way. Staying focussed on the impact and purpose of what the council is doing and why, is key. At the start of any organisational change programme of this length and breadth, it is important to invest time in building a strong foundation, with a sound infrastructure and clear processes, as Wokingham are doing. However, in doing so, it is also important not to lose sight of what the benefits are to the residents and community. For example, in developing the council's response to meeting the challenges of climate change, poverty and social housing, always be clear about the impact the council is making. The Peer Team also encourages the council to look at sustainability of the improvements being made and ensure they are firmly embedded in the organisation so that in moments of crisis, the council is able to quickly respond alongside delivering business as usual.

It is clear that the organisation has made significant progress in building the foundations for improvement as set out in the original recommendations, moving from a directorate led approach and transforming to a corporate approach, which is welcome. As the council does this, it is important to retain the learning of what worked well in the directorate-based approach i.e., strong customer/user focus and corporate services as enablers of change, as the authority adopts a more consistent corporate approach.

In the original Peer Challenge the team recommended bringing to life the narrative

which sets out the ambitions and future vision for the place and the organisation. Work has begun on this, but the Peer Team encourages the council to purposefully continue to complete the job.

Equality, diversity and inclusion is an important theme that cuts across everything a local authority delivers. The Peer Team recognises that the organisation is on a journey to embedding EDI. The documents shared by the council reflected the progress made more fully than during the conversations the Peer Team had with the authority. Ensuring EDI is a core part of the leadership narrative is important as the council continue to embed their new culture.

**3.1 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 – human resources, finance and 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.

The Peer Team heard that the council has invested a considerable amount of time understanding the new administration priorities, looking at key objectives particularly around partnership working focused around the investment of arts and culture. The council has also been keen to build on the community relationships developed during Covid by addressing the challenges of the cost-of-living crisis and bringing key charities into the heart of how the community responds and reaches people in crisis. The Peer Team were told that a lot of work has gone into strengthening the arts and

culture alliance. The council looked externally and reached out to the London Borough of Waltham Forest who were previously the London Borough of Culture. The council were keen to emphasise that the Arts and Culture is an alliance and partnership led, not a council strategy.

The Peer Team were told that work has been done to build in the skills and capability required in the organisation to support the strategy for partnership working, as well as to attract the right people to come to Wokingham. This has been linked in with the development of the customer strategy.

The administration were brought quickly up to speed by officers on the budget situation, prompting members to regularly communicate with residents about the scale of the challenge facing the council, and being open about the difficult decisions that need to be made.

**3.2 Local priorities and outcomes**

6	Further embedding of the council vision to act as a golden thread throughout all the strategies and 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, for example, domestic abuse, voluntary and community sector (VCS) strategy, anti-poverty. It is recommended that this partnership approach continues and to further enhance it, use of the new Wokingham Borough.

The Peer Team was pleased to hear progress that has been in taking a co-production approach to partnership working which is a cultural change for Wokingham. An example of this is the new Hardship Alliance that has been developed with partners which is a very much community led piece of work. Wokingham’s aim is to create a borough vision that is shaped by the partners, which

requires a recalibration of relationships and building on the strong foundations that already exist. The council is moving into the space of enable and facilitator and working more closely with town and parish councils which requires more focus and a commitment. Another example is the council's response to the Cost-of-Living crisis and taking a co-production approach through the Hardship Alliance recognising that not one group can find the solution. The Peer Team were told that the council has developed a data cell, which pulls together the key indicators around the impact on residents which is analysed on a weekly basis with a view to seeing how partners can put in prevention measures.

The council vision is taking longer to embed, but the Peer Team were pleased to hear that the council was investing time, scheduling events throughout 2023 as part of their new council plan, to be in place from 2024.

**3.3 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 (EDI).
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The Peer Team were pleased to see that progress has been made in developing the organisational development of the organisation bringing stability, capability and capacity in the HR function. OD has been set as a key corporate project with the Director of Adult Services taking on the role of project sponsor. There is a new HR structure in place, a new AD of HR starts new in post shortly and a consultation has been launched around the new people strategy. The LGA is aware that work has been done on EDI through the council's equality and diversity training programme including modules on Allyship with EDI in employment, Anti-discrimination and By-Stander training taking place later in the year.

**3.4 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
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	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 and behaviours that underpin good governance and visible leadership.
13	Recommend a review of the current election cycle.

The council has made good progress on governance. Senior staff were involved in the production of the annual governance statement to audit committee, integrating risk management in that process. There were also examples of 200 staff being briefed about different aspects of governance, to further embed this into the culture of the organisation. A governance dashboard is used to focus on areas of governance. A Governance Review was commissioned by CfGS (Centre for Governance and Scrutiny) in the earlier part of the year which has led to there being more of a focus on pre-scrutiny decision making, so that scrutiny plays more of a role in the quality of decision making. Training has been provided for the Chair and the Deputy Chair to ensure that scrutiny discussions are productive and depoliticised. Group meetings take place before every meeting now and the Chief Executive meets with all the Group leaders.

The Peer Team were also pleased to hear that a new Audit Committee member has 'raised the level of challenge' which is a positive development. Wokingham explored changing the current election cycle with a transparent and open discussion taking place with members who decided to stay with thirds. New ward boundaries will come into play when Wokingham have all outs in 2024.

The Peer Team also heard how the culture change of the organisation has changed with an increase in communication and engagement across all levels of staff. Senior

officers regularly meet to collaboratively come up with solutions for cross cutting work and a thriving managers network also exists. The council has introduced the 'Big Chat' polling 300 staff on key issues. Both the Leader and Deputy Leader have appeared.

This collaborative way of working has also extended to the council's approach to consultation and seeking views of residents and to engage in the way services are shaped and delivered. Currently every resident is being invited to share their views around collecting waste.

**3.5 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.

The Peer Team were told that the understanding of good risk management is being increasingly understood in the organisation. Risk management groups exist across all departments depts and there is more clarity around what the key risks for the organisation are.

The Peer Team were also informed that the council has brought in more scenario planning into their financial considerations, particularly following the impact of Ukraine, the tail of Covid and the Cost-of-living crisis which involved a number of away days to crystallise what are the most important elements for the council. The council has undertaken an assets review to identify the best use of the council footprint and where to make savings and discussions are already taking place with service managers around managing suppliers in light of the rise of inflation. The council also recognises that customer experience is a key part of that - reducing failure demand as an example.



### **3.6 Capacity for improvement**

16	Ensure that the finance, human resources and 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.

There was clear evidence that Wokingham has focused on building its capacity in particularly bolstering their change function. The Peer Team were also informed that key roles have been appointed building capacity in the corporate centre such as a new AD of Finance as well as a new AD for HR and OD. As mentioned previously a new OD strategy has also been developed and a communications review is underway with a view to strengthening the communications function.

Wokingham have also developed a comprehensive cross council approach with their Organisation Foundation Programme. As part of this, the Peer Team were told that work is underway with the Customer Excellence workstream, and a new website is being developed looking at customer journeys.

The Peer Team were told that officers feel that this approach has made the Corporate Leadership Team more joined up as a result with joint ownership across senior officers in owning the key challenges facing the council.

## **4. Final thoughts and next steps**

The LGA would like to thank Wokingham for undertaking an LGA CPC progress review.

We appreciate that senior managerial and political leadership will want to reflect on these findings and suggestions in order to determine how the organisation wishes to



take things forward.

Under the umbrella of LGA sector-led improvement, there is an on-going offer of support to councils. The LGA is well placed to provide additional support, advice and guidance on several the areas identified for development and improvement and would be happy to discuss this.

Mona Sehgal (Principal Adviser) is the main point of contact between the authority and the Local Government Association (LGA), and their e-mail address is [mona.sehgal@local.gov.uk](mailto:mona.sehgal@local.gov.uk)

## 5. Annex 1 – Signposting

Wokingham has already been open to receiving a range of support from the LGA since the Peer Challenge. Additional support to consider is listed below:

- **Political mentoring** – through the LGA’s political group offices member mentors from other councils can be arranged for senior councillors. Typical mentoring engagements stretch over six months, providing the space for honest conversations, to be challenged and supported in a confidential environment.
- **Leadership Essentials programmes** – a series of programmes and workshops designed as themed learning opportunities for councillors both in Leadership roles as well as in opposition. Event concentrates on a specific portfolio area or a specific theme. The LGA can also deliver Leadership training for a cohort of officers or members at the council offices including political awareness training, how to be an effective ward councillor and scrutiny training.
- **Equality peer challenge** – the LGA can offer a bespoke equality peer challenge using the Equality Framework for Local Government.

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<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Revised Local Bus Services Improvement Plan</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	The Executive on Thursday, 26 January 2023
<b>WARD</b>	(All Wards);
<b>LEAD OFFICER</b>	Director, Place and Growth - Steve Moore
<b>LEAD MEMBER</b>	Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways - Paul Fishwick

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

Revised Bus Service Improvement Plan which includes proposals which represent a change of policy. The Department for Transport (DfT) will use the document to award future bid funding.

The benefits to residents are:

- Improved accessibility to jobs, retail and services
- Improved business-to-business connections
- Reduced social isolation
- Reduced carbon emissions
- Improved air quality and congestion

## **RECOMMENDATION**

That the Executive

- 1) Approve the Revised Local Bus Service Improvement Plan for publication, with the delivery of proposals subject to Department for Transport funding being available.

## **SUMMARY OF REPORT**

The National Bus Strategy published in March 2021 required all Local Transport Authorities (LTA) in England and outside of London, to publish a local Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and agree an Enhanced Partnership (EP). An EP is a legal partnership agreement which is agreed following the publication of the BSIP. The Council is expecting to form an EP during 2023 and will bring this document to the Executive Committee separately for approval.

The Levelling-Up white paper (February 2022) highlights the important role of bus services for access to jobs, retail, and services, as well as for business-to-business connectivity and achieving positive health outcomes. The Council's first BSIP was published on 29<sup>th</sup> October 2021. All LTAs are required to review their BSIPs on an annual basis. The Department for Transport (DfT) will use the revised document as a means for awarding any future funding for local bus services.

Wokingham Borough Council was unsuccessful in achieving any BSIP grant funding in May 2022 for the October 2021 submission. Therefore, the BSIP has been revised to take account of feedback from the DfT and changes in the local bus market since October 2021. The key changes to the draft BSIP are:

- Updated background information
- Strengthening the role of partnership working
- Revised targets and policies

There is still no certainty over whether any funding will be made available to the Council from the DfT to support the delivery of BSIP outcomes.

## BACKGROUND

The Revised BSIP has been written in accordance with the National Bus Strategy and the associated guidance issued by the DfT. The Revised BSIP also takes account of feedback from the DfT in relation to the Council's first BSIP. Bus services play an important role for providing access to jobs, retail, and services, as well as for business-to-business connectivity and achieving positive health outcomes. Bus services have recovered to 81% of their pre-pandemic passenger levels.

The objectives of the Revised BSIP are:

- 1) To grow passenger numbers to pre-pandemic levels and to continue that growth.
- 2) To return bus services to pre-pandemic levels, improve levels of service and extend to new areas of demand.
- 3) For a bus network which supports the continued economic growth of Wokingham Borough and the wider Thames Valley region.
- 4) To improve bus journey times, reliability, and punctuality along key transport corridors.
- 5) Make fares affordable and simpler.
- 6) Deliver a greener bus network by reducing carbon emissions and provide residents with attractive greener travel alternatives.
- 7) Improve bus integration with rail passengers, cyclists, pedestrians and car drivers
- 8) Improve accessibility to transport services and the local bus network for communities in rural and low-density areas.
- 9) Ensure bus travel is a safe means of travel.

All BSIP targets are set out in Section 3. An overview of the required BSIP targets is shown in the table below.

Target	2018/19	2019/20	Target for 2024/25	Target for 2029/30	Target for 2039/40
Journey times on key corridors	No data	75.3 Mins	72 Mins	68 Mins	61 Mins
Reliability	No data	74.94%	80%	85%	90%
Passenger numbers	2.8 million	2.8 million	3.08 million	4.2 million	5.6 million
Average passenger satisfaction	64%	67%	70%	75%	80%

A delivery action plan and set of related proposals are set out in Section 4. The draft BSIP proposals focus on the key themes in the National Bus Strategy and are as follows:

- More frequency and reliable services
- Making fares affordable and simpler
- Delivering a greener bus network by reducing carbon emissions and providing residents with attractive greener travel alternatives
- Improving bus integration with rail passengers, cyclists, pedestrians, and car drivers
- Improving passenger engagement and satisfaction with bus services
- Improving accessibility to transport services and the local bus network for communities in more rural and low-density areas

The revised BSIP has been presented to the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny committee on 29<sup>th</sup> November 2022.

### Next Steps

1. To publish the Revised BSIP on the MyJourney website by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023.
2. To negotiate with local transport providers on detailed measures and facilities which will form part of the schemes to in the Enhanced Partnership.
3. Agree a passenger charter with local transport operators as to the level and quality of services our residents can expect.
4. To follow the statutory consultation process to make a legally binding Enhanced Partnership.
5. To bring back an Executive report on the Enhance Partnership Scheme prior to the Enhanced Partnership being made.

### BUSINESS CASE

If we do not publish an annual update to the BSIP and go on to make an Enhanced Partnership, then we will potentially lose £111,000 pa in Bus Service Operator Grant (BSOG) funding (full year affect).

All proposals are subject to Department for Transport funding being available to deliver them. If we do not make any changes to the BSIP then the Council is unlikely to be successful in achieving any future bid funding for improving local bus services.

### FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

***The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and 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)	nil	n/a	n/a
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	nil	n/a	n/a
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	nil	n/a	n/a

#### Other Financial Information

The recommendation will cost £0 if it is agreed and will avoid a potential revenue loss of £111,000 pa. All proposals contained within the Revised BSIP are subject to Department for Transport funding being provided.

<b>Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation</b>
Consultation on the BSIP has been undertaken based on the advice provided by the Department for Transport.

<b>Public Sector Equality Duty</b>
An Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken and approved by Inclusions Team.

<b>Climate Emergency – <i>This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030</i></b>
The BSIP includes ambitious policies which will help the Council reach carbon neutrality by 2030, for example by implementing electric buses and reducing the need for a private car.

<b>Reasons for considering the report in Part 2</b>
Not Applicable

<b>List of Background Papers</b>
Revised Local Bus Service Improvement Plan (Revised BSIP)

<b>Contact</b> Rebecca Brooks	<b>Service Place</b>
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**WOKINGHAM  
BOROUGH COUNCIL**



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# Wokingham Bus Service Improvement Plan 2 2023-2040



**January 2023**



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- 4.6 Improve accessibility to transport services and the local bus network for communities in more rural and low-density areas
- 4.7 Ensure bus travel is a safe means of transport

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## Foreward from Concillor Fishwick

Our Bus Service Improvement Plan has been revised and updated to reflect the important role bus services play in meeting the ever increasing challenges the borough is facing. Developed in partnership with local bus operators, neighbouring authorities and local businesses, this plan is a precursor to the borough's fourth Local Transport Plan.

Whilst funding for all Council services is, and will continue to be, extremely challenging, our ambition for local bus services remains strong. It is important that we provide an alternative to car-based travel which is affordable, socially equitable and green. This Plan sets out how we will work in partnership to transform the borough's bus network.

Over the past 12 months Councillors have approved over £300,000 of additional funding to help the borough's bus services recover from the impacts of the pandemic. Improvements have also been made to ticketing arrangements and the cost of travel. Work is continuing at the Winnersh Triangle Park and Ride site using Local Enterprise Partnership Funding. Thames Valley Park and Ride opened in June 2022 with the hospital trust funding a staff shuttle bus. Moving forward there are plans to make improvements to local roads which will mean improved journey times for buses. Difficult discussions to increase parking charges are also taking place.

This Plan is a long-term strategy for the transformation of the borough's bus network. Delivery of the plan is subject to suitable funding being secured, with some of the proposals expected to take longer to deliver than others. The plan will be revised and updated regularly as decarbonisation, bus priority and other improvements are implemented. Any comments or suggestion about the Plan are welcomed as we aim together, to deliver a better bus network which meets the needs of residents, businesses, and visitors to the borough.

There are some big challenges ahead, but please join us on the journey to more sustainable travel with bus as a key part of this.

Councillor Fishwick

## 1. OVERVIEW

### 1.1 Scope of the BSIP

This is the borough’s second Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) which has been revised and updated to take account of feedback from the Department for Transport (DfT). This Plan sets out the strategy for bus services in the borough over the next 17 years. Once the revised BSIP is adopted, an Enhanced Partnership agreement will be formed and used to deliver the improvements. The Council and local bus operators will work together to transform the borough’s bus network. The Council is committed to continuing and building on the good working relationships that already exist with neighbouring local authorities, the Royal Berkshire Foundation Trust, Reading University, and other local stakeholders to deliver better bus services. The success of the plan will be monitored and reported on every six months with reviews taking place annually.

This BSIP covers the whole of Wokingham Borough. The administrative boundary of the borough is shown in Figure 1.1. There are three distinct areas:

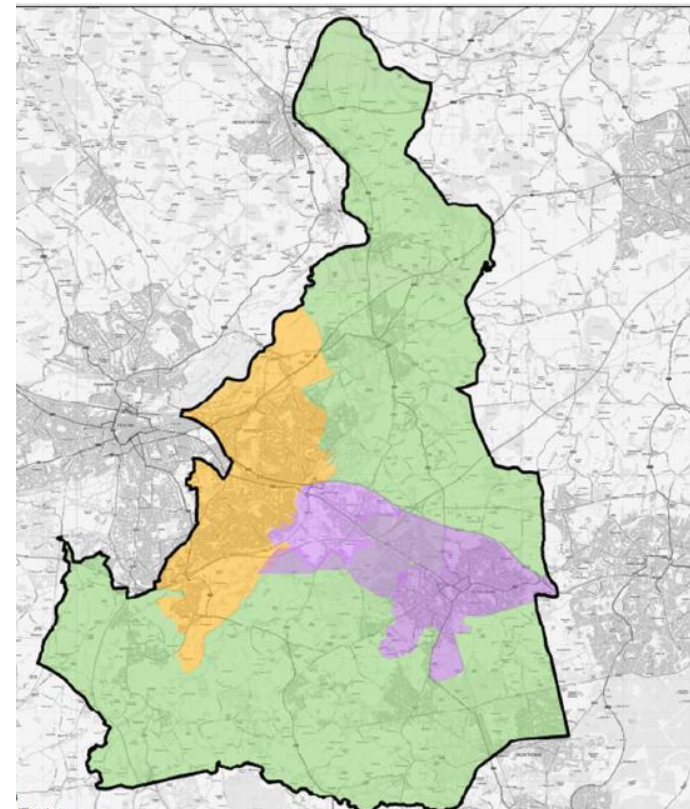
- Yellow area: Woodley, Earley and Shinfield with a population of about 85,000. Located to the west of the borough, adjacent to the Reading border which in transport terms function as a ‘greater’ Reading area.
- Purple area: Wokingham town and Winnersh with a population of about 45,000. This area has the highest level of self containment and active travel. The A329(M) and A329 corridors link Reading, Wokingham and Bracknell.
- Green area: Villages and rural areas with a population of about 45,000. Lower density and more car dependence although rail travel is common.

This BSIP aligns with the National Bus Strategy and is a precursor to the borough’s fourth Local Transport (LTP4). The duration of the BSIP is from 2023 to 2040. While quite a long time in the future this period corresponds with the emerging Local Plan. The LTP4 is emerging and this latest BSIP is consistent with its aims.

### Pandemic & Recovery

Prior to the pandemic bus use in the borough had grown by 40% over the past 10 years, which contrasted greatly with the national trend of declining bus use. The success in Wokingham Borough was built on securing developer funding to invest in

**Figure 1.1 Wokingham Borough and Area Types**





bus services, incentivising bus use through behaviour change and delivering bus priority infrastructure in new communities. The pandemic significantly impacted bus travel, particularly at the borough’s Park and Ride sites. With bus passenger journeys growing faster in Wokingham Borough than most other areas of the country pre-pandemic, there is confidence that bus passenger journeys can recover and will continue to grow.

This BSIP replaces the Wokingham Public Transport Plan issued in 2011.

The Council’s Enhanced Partnership will be published in 2023 and available at: <https://www.myjourneywokingham.com/bus-travel/enhanced-partnership/>

**Population Growth**

Wokingham Borough is a relatively affluent borough and one of the healthiest in England. The borough has an overall population of 173,945 people. The population is projected to increase by approximately 1% per annum with it likely to reach 180,900 by 2037. The greatest increase is expected to be in those over the age of 85.

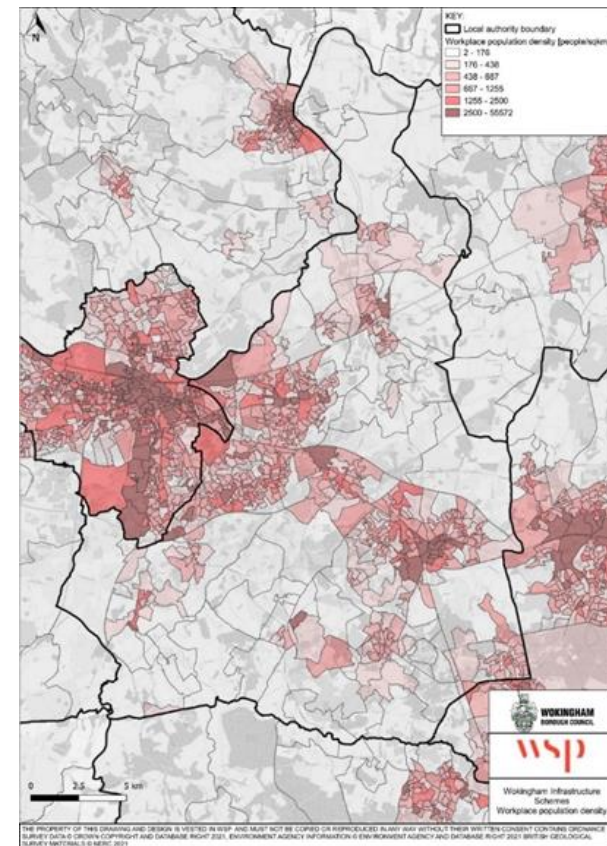
The average population density is 972 people / km<sup>2</sup>, but it varies considerably across the borough as shown on Figure 1.2. These densities correspond to the three area types referred to above in Figure 1.1. In recent years up to the first quarter of 2020, the borough saw a steady increase in bus service demand and supply.

**Alternative Travel Choices**

The borough sits in the top 10% of areas in the UK for car ownership (% households with car/van) in 2011. Car ownership trends are anticipated to have continued to match or exceeded the national average in the 10 years since 2011. 68% of journeys to work were undertaken by private vehicle, compared to 18% by sustainable mode in 2011.

The variation in density and rurality of the borough reflects bus usage as shown on Figure 1.3. It shows the Journey to Work data and suggests a direct link between bus use and density. It ranges from the red area with less than 3% to the yellow areas of 9-12% on the edge of Reading. In the rural areas, the high levels of car ownership makes providing and

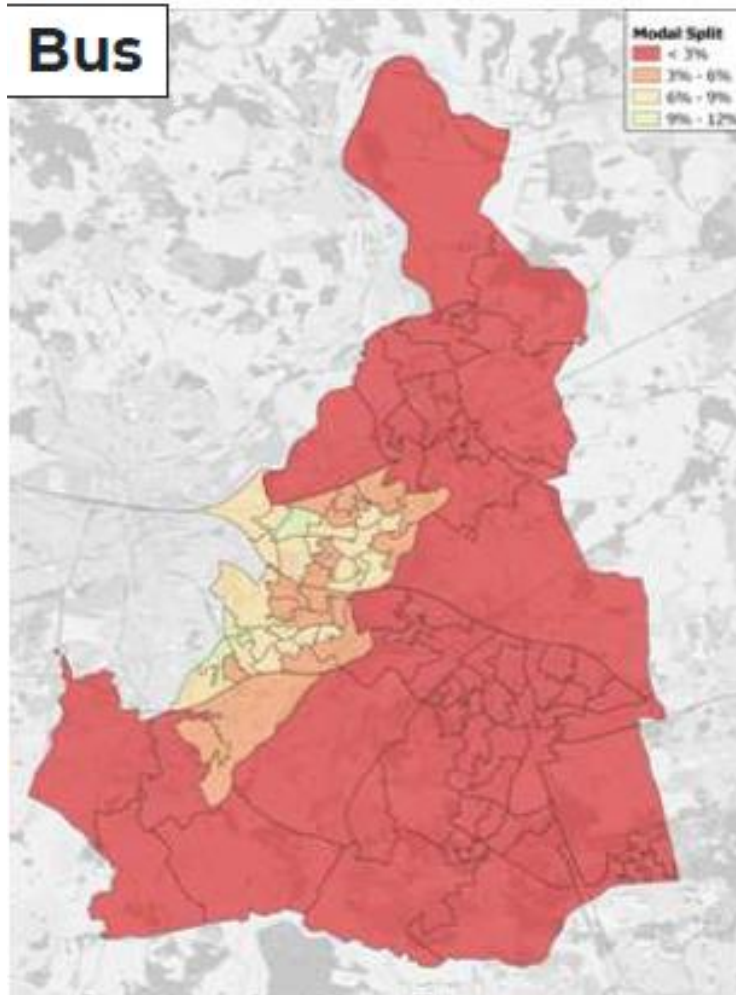
**Figure 1.2 Populaton Density**



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sustaining local bus services challenging. In terms of bus provision there is a semi-monopoly situation with one bus operator providing nearly 80% of the services operated across its two companies. The lack of competition is potentially a concern in terms of ensuring that there are competitive responses to tenders.

**Figure 1.3 Bus Usage by Area.**



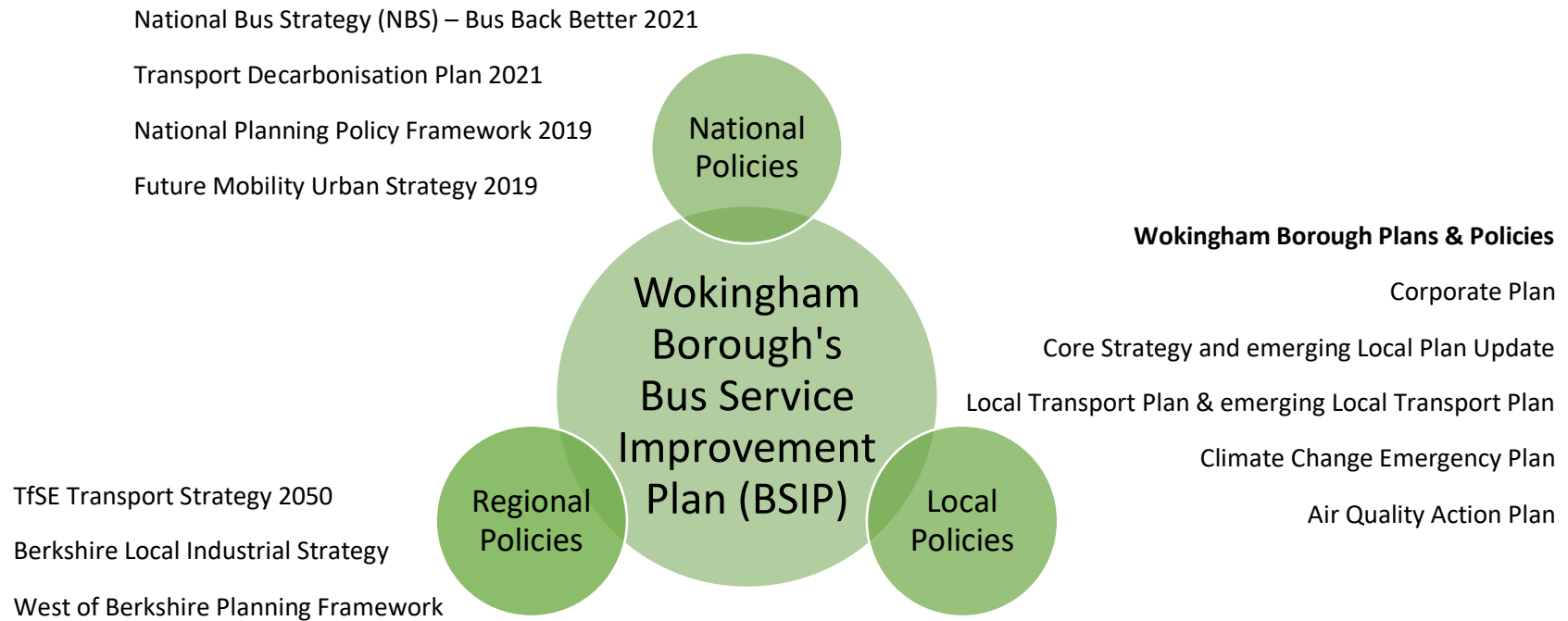
The Council is working with developers, bus operators and other partners to ensure bus services are provided. Further pump priming will be necessary to achieve the highly attractive level of bus service and increase use of local bus services to the level set out in the National Bus Strategy. In the past the Council has used this approach to establish the original bus service along the A327 using developer funding to achieve a financially sustainable service. Similarly, on the A329 corridor the Council historically supported evening and Sunday journeys until they were viable commercially. Pre-pandemic the Council was once again working to enhance the A327 service in accordance with strategic growth in the borough.

**1.2 Alignment with Policies**

The BSIP has been developed to align with key national, regional, and local policies as shown on Figure 1.4. In particular, the objectives highlighted in the National Bus Strategy (NBS) to “get bus use back to what it was before the pandemic [and] then ... increase patronage and raise buses mode share”. With one of the highest levels of car ownership in the country, buses in Wokingham Borough will truly need to meet the NBS’s aspiration of being an attractive alternative to the car for far more people.

This plan is full aligned with our emerging fourth Local Transport Plan (LTP4). This plan is a precursor to LTP4 and will be a daughter document to LTP4 once it is adopted. The BSIP is a live document and will be updated and reviewed annually to ensure continued alignment, as both LTP4 and the Local Plan Update emerge.

**Figure 1.4 The Policy Framework**



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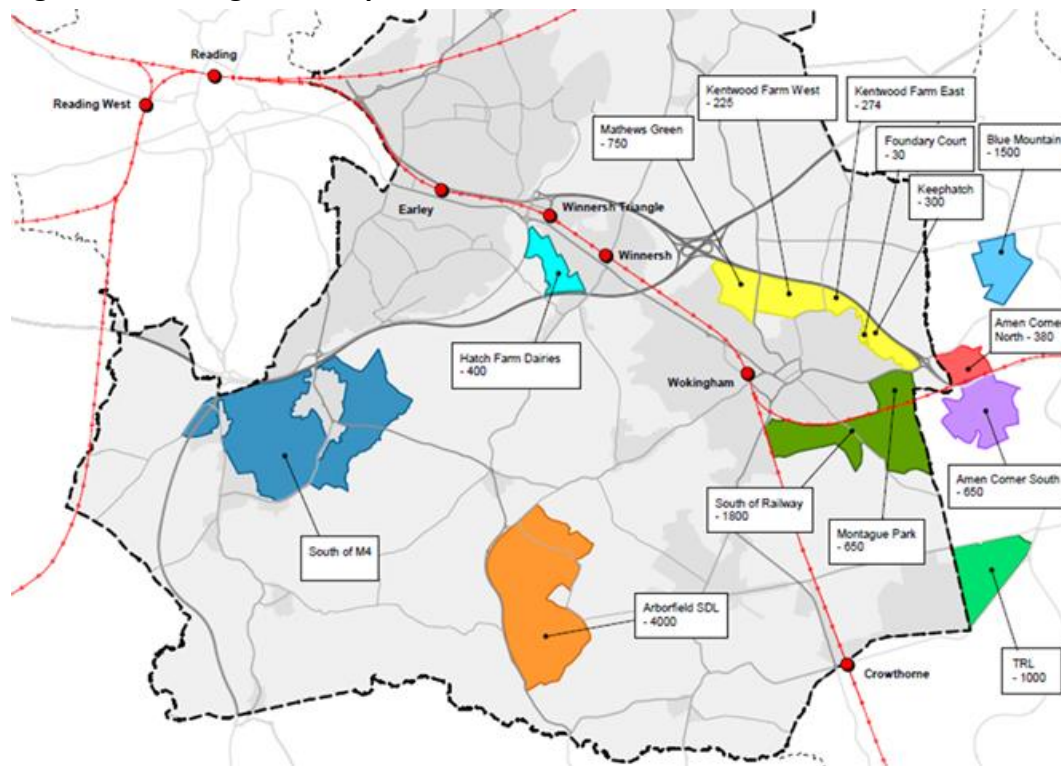
This plan aligns with the emerging vision of LTP4 to deliver and maintain a safe, reliable and join-up transport system that connects new and existing communities, businesses and commercial centres. In achieving the vision, we will ensure our bus network is easy to understand, provides faster journey times, integrates with other modes of travel and is a greener alternative to the car.

**Balancing the Need for Growth with Sustainable Communities**

One of the challenges which our Corporate Plan highlights is to manage and balance need with the requirements for new housing, whilst protecting the quality of our environment and the sustainability of our existing communities. The number of households in the borough is

growing which provides an opportunity for greener travel and particularly an increase in bus travel. We will work in partnership with local bus operators to achieve a virtual cycle of improvement, with an increase in services and frequencies to match any growth in bus travel. The Council’s Core Strategy sets out the Council plans for accommodating up to 10,000 new homes in the borough by 2026, as required by Central Government housing allocations set for Wokingham Borough. Figure 1.5 shows where most new homes are accommodated in one of four strategic development locations, these are: North Wokingham (yellow), South Wokingham (green), the area to the South of the M4 (blue) and in and around Arborfield (orange).

**Figure 1.5 Strategic Development Locations**



To support new communities the Local Plan Core Strategy 2006-2026 incorporates 22 Strategic Transport Network improvements. Many of the strategic improvements have already been delivered including the rebuilding Wokingham Station as a public transport interchange and construction of the Mere oak and Coppid Beech Park and Ride sites. Strategic Transport Improvements still to be delivered include:

- High quality express bus services or mass rapid transit along the A4 and A329 corridors.
- High quality express bus services or mass rapid transit between Reading and Woodley town centres.
- High quality express bus services between Green Park and Twyford stations.
- Improvements to the quality and frequency of public transport services along other parts of the network.
- Measures to improve cross Thames travel which may include a bridge.

When funding becomes available it is expected that these schemes will be progress. There is an updated Local Plan being worked on and is likely to cover a 15-year period until 2039/40.



### **Decarbonisation and Improved Air Quality**

Wokingham Borough Council declared a climate emergency on 18th July 2019. In declaring a climate emergency, the Council set out the commitment to lead by example in achieving a carbon neutrality by 2030. In 2017, 31.4% of Wokingham Borough's overall carbon footprint was because of transport emissions. These emissions exclude traffic associated with the M4 and national railways.

Key priorities for reducing the Borough's carbon footprint include reducing carbon dioxide emissions from transport. The actions the Council commits to undertake which are relevant to local bus travel are:

- The promotion of active and sustainable travel choices
- Encouraging greater use of public transport networks.
- Encouraging transport operators to use greener vehicles, including electric vehicles; and
- The use of intelligent transport systems to prevent future congestion

The Council's Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) was published in 2018 and identifies two Air Quality Management Areas in the borough, Wokingham Town Centre and Twyford Crossroads. Local bus services serve both areas where there is a need to reduce NO<sub>2</sub> and NO<sub>x</sub>. A reduction in HGV and bus emissions would contribute significantly to meeting the targets in the AQAP for the above pollutants as they were estimated to contribute over 23% of the pollutant levels in these areas.

We will support the outcomes of the AQAP by supporting operators to take opportunities to green their fleets by using retrofit programmes, embracing new technologies and migrating to electric vehicles.

### **Partnership Working & Cross-Boundary Travel**

Excellent partnership working has been one of the contributing factors to the level of passenger growth achieved within the borough. It is through partnership working with local bus operators and the University of Reading that enhancements to the Leopard service and 600 service were achieved. Most recently partnership working with the hospital Trust, Reading Buses and Reading Borough has allowed the Thames Valley Park & Ride to become operational and sustainable, when nationally park and ride is largely unviable following the pandemic.

We have, and will continue to, work with all local bus operators, community transport providers, volunteer transport providers and other local stakeholders throughout the development of this plan. With 55% of local bus services having destination in Reading Borough, we have worked particularly closely with Reading Borough and align our proposals where appropriate, to maximise the benefits of any funding allocations.

### 1.3 Vision

**The Council's vision for Bus Services in Wokingham Borough is for a high-quality bus network for residents and visitors that contributes towards improving accessibility, local air quality, reducing road congestion and enabling carbon neutrality by 2030.**

### 1.4 Objectives

A series of objectives have been identified, based on the National Bus Strategy, but with an emphasis on those that apply to Wokingham Borough.

**Objective 1: Grow passenger numbers to pre-pandemic levels and to continue that growth.**

Whist bus passenger journeys in Wokingham Borough increased against the national trend for the 10-years leading up until 2020, the effects of the pandemic have been significant. Bus passenger levels are at about 81% of their pre-pandemic levels and concessionary travel remains the most affected. Residents place a high importance on high quality, affordable and accessible local bus services.

**Objective 2: Return bus services to pre-pandemic levels, improve levels of service and extend to new areas of travel demand.**

By 2037, the population of Wokingham Borough is projected to reach 180,900 people, which is the equivalent to adding 20 people a day. Wokingham Borough Council's Core Strategy and Local Plan update set out the plans for the delivery of 10,000 new homes and the associated communities and infrastructure across the borough. As the borough continues to grow local bus services must support and enable residents to make the journeys they need to make. It is also part of the growing Thames Valley region.

**Objective 3: Improve bus journey times, reliability and punctuality along key transport corridors.**

Along many of the main transport corridors buses are delayed in traffic especially during peak periods. While there are physical constraints along sections of road due to the nature of the road network, every effort is needed to deliver bus priority measures with bus lanes, bus gates and traffic signals. There is also potential to speed up boarding times with ticketing systems. Reducing journey time variation so there is greater reliability is also important.

**Objective 4: Make fares affordable and simpler.**

As the cost-of-living increases, making fares affordable is more important than ever. Fares in Wokingham Borough are below the national average for an average 3-mile journey. Targeted fare reductions have already taken place in some areas of the borough because of feedback from passengers. Discussions are taking place with Reading borough about joint fare schemes which will benefit many residents in the borough

and encourage bus travel. The opening and relaunch of park and ride sites in the borough present a good opportunity to consider a strategy for seamless, affordable fares and ticketing schemes with the aim of attracting more passengers back to these services.

**Objective 5: Deliver a greener bus network by reducing carbon emissions and provide residents with attractive greener travel alternatives.**

The Council is aware of the pressing concerns of the climate change and has committed to reaching carbon neutrality by 2030. The way residents travel and the distances covered have a significant impact on the borough's carbon footprint. One bus has the potential to take 75 cars off local roads, reduce congestion and reduce the associated carbon footprints by 111 tCO<sub>2</sub>e. With approximately 5,101 miles driven in the Borough for each of these cars per year, we will encourage residents and visitors to make greener choices in the way that they travel.

**Objective 6: Improve bus integration with rail passengers, cyclists, pedestrians and car drivers.**

Interchanges and bus stops need to be convenient, easy to use, comfortable and safe. Rail passengers require easy access to bus services. Bus stops should be the appropriate standard (Gold, Silver or Bronze) and be well maintained. Our Park & Ride services will need to offer a seamless, comfortable, and convenient travel experience to make them attractive and ensure viability.



**Objective 7: Improve passenger engagement and satisfaction of bus services.**

It is important that passengers are satisfied with the services provided to both retain and attract more passengers to local bus services. The National Highways and Transport surveys for Wokingham Borough helps identify aspects of bus travel which are most important to residents and those aspects where there is least satisfaction, to allow for effective targeting of improvements.

**Objective 8: Improve accessibility to transport services and the local bus network for communities in more rural and low-density areas.**

In rural communities the difficulties some residents experience with poor accessibility to local transport provisions, and the effects this can have on their ability to access key services, is understood and needs to be improved upon.

**Objective 9: Ensure bus travel is a safe means of transport.**

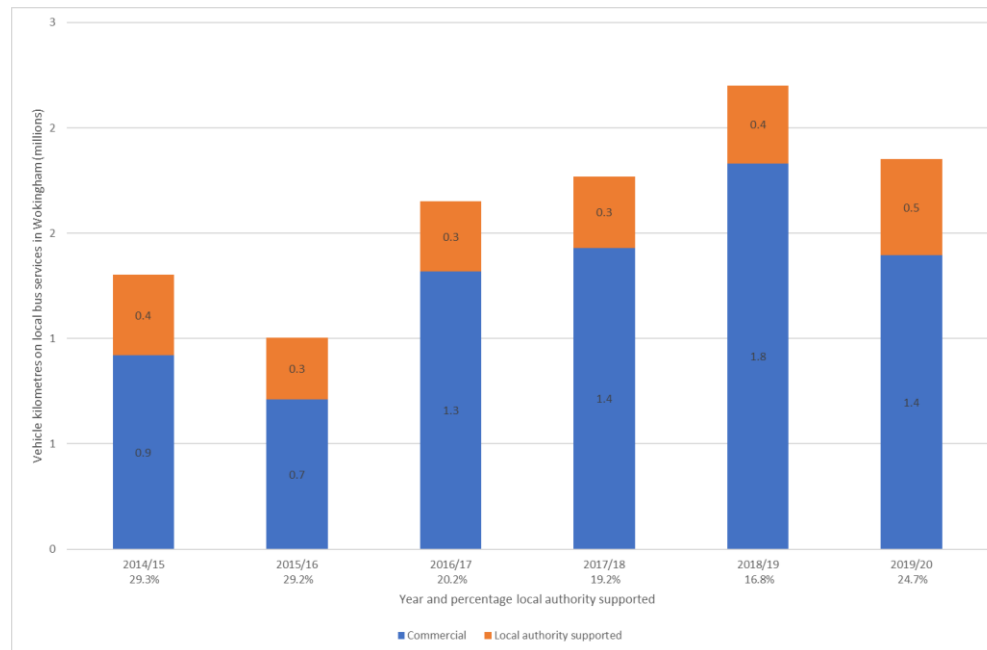
Bus travel is a relatively safe mode of transport, mainly due to a strong regulatory system for drivers and vehicles. Personal safety can be an issue and bus stops and the routes to them as well as on buses need to feel safe environments.

## 2. CURRENT BUS OFFER TO PASSENGERS

### 2.1 Bus Passenger Growth & Usage

Wokingham Borough’s local bus network reflects the different types of areas within the borough. Higher frequency services which extend into Reading or Bracknell are provided along the main corridors and in the denser urban areas. In less dense rural areas, Town link services and weekly services provide access to shops and amenities.

**Figure 2.1 Vehicle kilometres on local bus services**

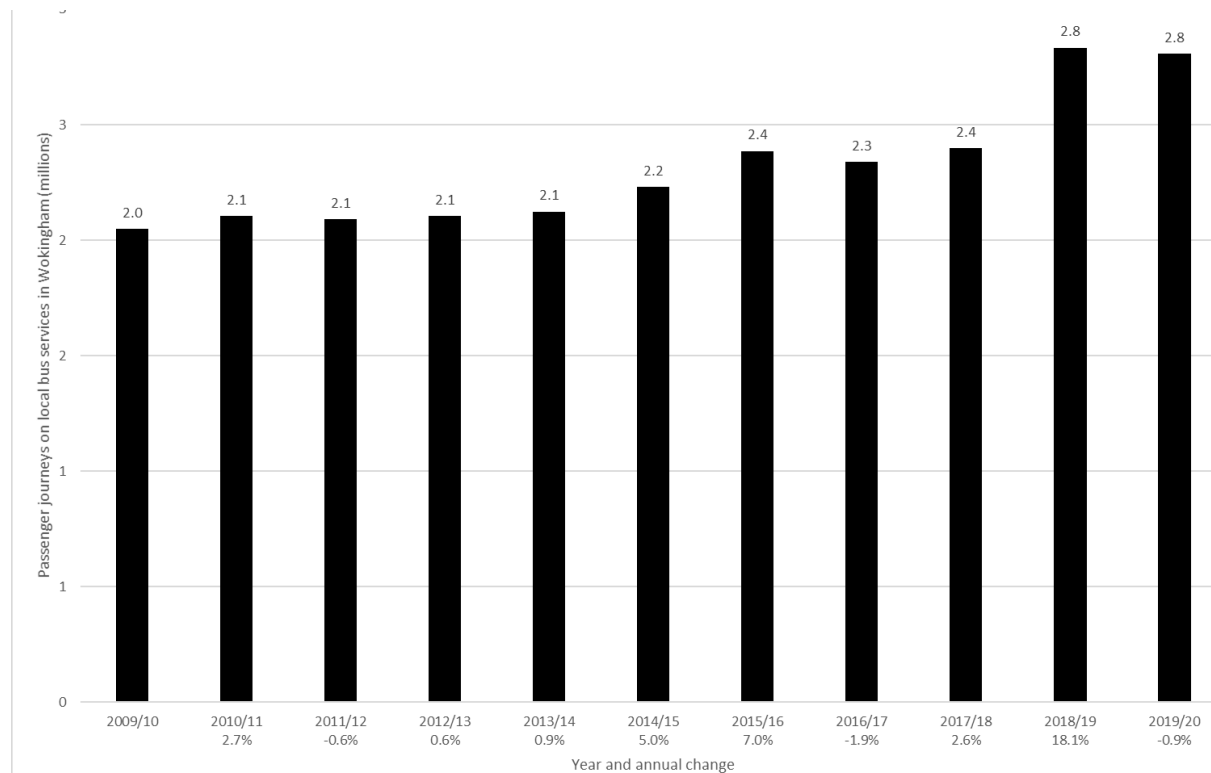


The network consists of 29 local bus services, three operational park and ride sites, plus seven local bus services which operate at school times only and allow members of the public to board. Six football services which only operate on match days to Reading Football Club are also provided. Across the network 1.9 million vehicle kilometres were operated in 2019, but this fell during the pandemic. Due to driver shortages and the need to respond to lower post-pandemic passenger levels, vehicle kilometres remain below 2019 levels.

The levels of passenger growth in the 10-year period from 2009/10 to 2019/20 in Wokingham Borough was the second highest in England, outside of London, at 40%. As can be seen in Figure 2.2, the Covid-19 Pandemic affected the final months of 2019/20, otherwise it is believed that this trend would have continued. The fall in vehicle kilometres but alongside a sustained number of passenger trips indicates a healthy increase

in average vehicle loadings in the borough and therefore an efficient operation. This is a trend which has also been observed in the neighbouring borough of Reading.

Figure 2.2 Bus journeys on local bus services between 2010 and 2020

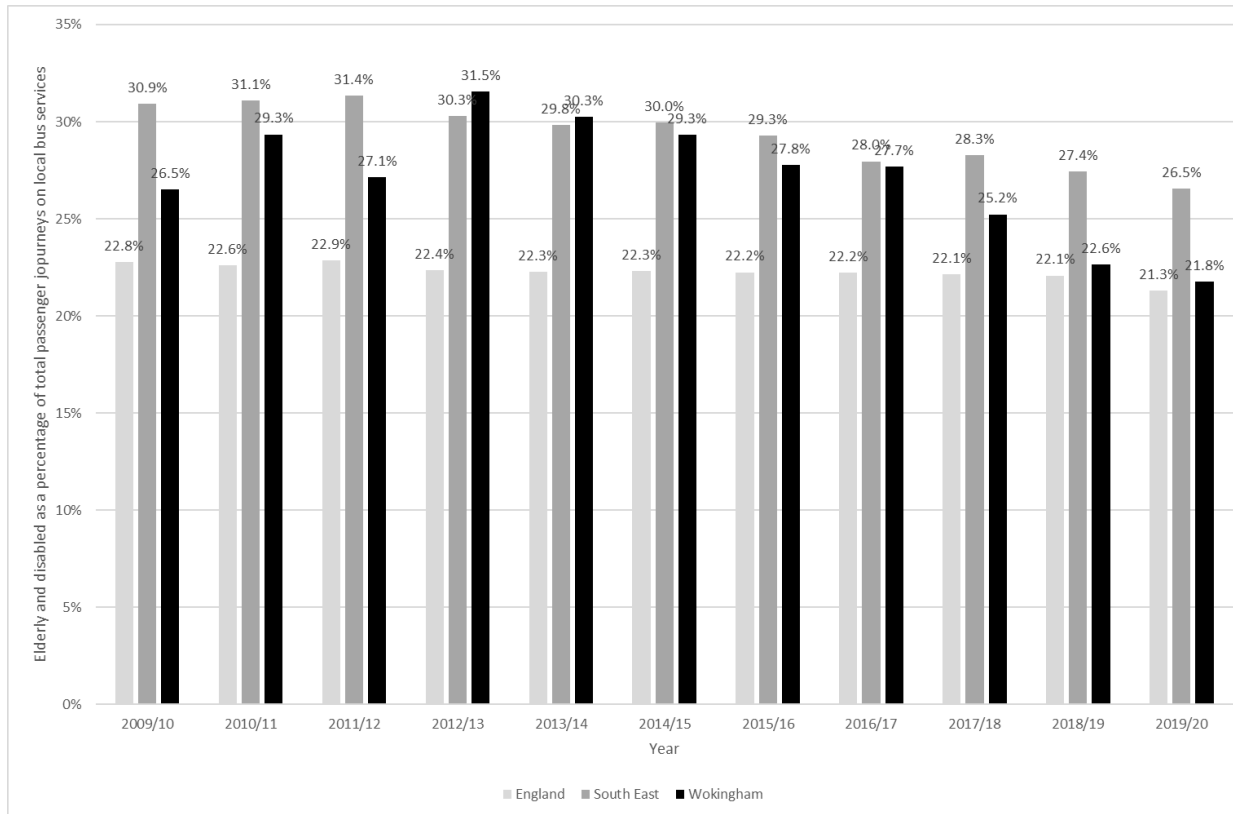


As a result of the pandemic bus travel reduced in Wokingham borough by 73%, which represents one of the highest reductions in the Southeast region. By September 2022, bus passenger numbers had recovered to 81% of pre-pandemic levels, although due to rising operational costs revenue was still significantly below this.

Pre-pandemic passenger growth was driven by investment in local bus services, which was linked to new development, a strong behaviour change campaign with My Journey and the delivery of bus priority in new communities. With further new homes still to be delivered and occupied this demonstrates that there is still significant potential for further growth in bus travel.

Of the 2.8 million passenger journeys 21.8% were made using a concessionary pass, which is similar to the English average, but is less than the 26% average for the Southeast region. The level of concessionary travel highlights the important social role local bus services facilitate in the borough. With an aging population, the social role of local bus services is likely to increase. Notwithstanding the growing number of concessionary passengers, the reduction in the proportion of concessionary passengers over time and in comparison, to neighbouring local authorities, is encouraging as this suggests a growth in fare paying passengers.

**Figure 2.3 Proportion of bus journeys in England, South East England and Wokingham taken by elderly or disabled concessionary passengers per annum**



Recognising the important role of local bus services, the Council currently provides support for 500,000 vehicle kilometres of bus travel per year. Further funding for bus services is constrained by the challenging financial situation with Council budgets. Inflationary costs are at a 40 year high and are affecting the cost of all Council services, including bus subsidies.

Wokingham Borough Council is the lowest funded unitary authority in the country. The Council is very reliant on Council tax to fund bus services. Central government provides a 14% contribution towards socially necessary bus services through the Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG) and nothing towards the Council’s near £1million concessionary fare bill. The Council provides additional financial support for socially necessary

services, which ranges from whole route support for services in Wokingham Town, Woodley and Earley to support for individual journeys operating once a week or at weekends in more rural areas.

Overall, it can be demonstrated that the borough has been successful pre-pandemic in achieving growth in bus travel. The pandemic has had a significant effect on bus travel. The bus network has been remodelled to ensure healthy average vehicle loadings and an efficient operation.

The longer-term challenges for the recovery are the choices which residents have in the way that they travel and the changes in travel behaviours as summarised on Figure 2.4. In 2011, 68% of journeys to work were undertaken by private vehicle and 18% were by sustainable mode. 41% of journeys to work by sustainable modes were towards Reading. Whilst the equivalent data from the 2021 census is not available until December 2022, with recovery at 81% of pre-pandemic levels, it is likely the impact of the pandemic will be reflected in the data and the current mode share for bus travel.

## 2.2 Local Transport Operators

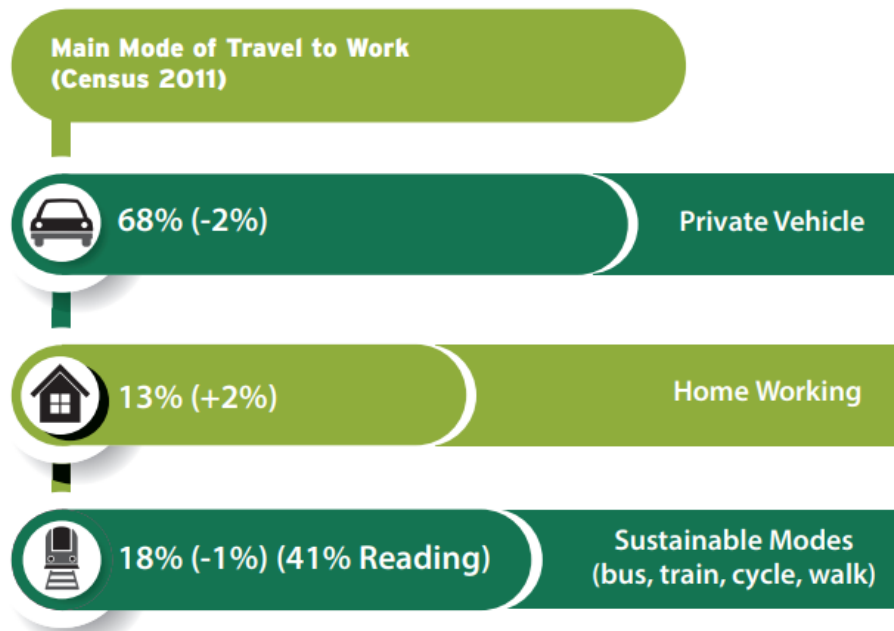
The bus companies operating services in the borough are summarised on Table 2.1. The dominant operator is Reading Buses. Reading Buses operates services along the entire length of the A329 and A327 corridors and part way along the A4 corridor. Reading Buses also operates most services in the Woodley area, all those in the Earley area and all Park and Ride services from Winnersh Triangle, Mere oak and Thames Valley Park.

Thames Valley Buses, the other main operator. Thames Valley Buses operate all the Wokingham Town link services in Wokingham Town and the surrounding area, plus an inter-urban service connecting Wokingham, Twyford and Reading. All of Thames Valley Buses services receive financial support from Wokingham Borough Council. Reading Borough Council owns Reading Transport Limited which is an arms length company and trades as Reading Buses and owns Thames Valley Buses.

Arriva operates one service on the A4/A321 corridor from High Wycombe via Henley and Twyford to Reading.

Three operators have a small presence, operating either school specials, once a week shopping services or privately contracted services. These operators are:

**Figure 2.4 Effects of the Pandemic**



- Horseman Coaches who operate three registered school bus routes and three ‘weekly shopper’ bus routes that each offer one return trip on one day each week from rural villages. All routes operated by Horseman Coaches receive financial support from Wokingham Borough Council.
- Stagecoach who operates one commercial school bus routes into Hampshire.
- Stewarts Coaches (owned by National Express Group) operate a privately contracted express shuttle bus route from Reading Station to Thames Valley Business Park. The service is not registered as a local bus service because it does not charge fares, instead the business park covers the whole cost of providing the service.

**Table 2.1 List of local bus operators and routes operated in Wokingham**

Local bus operator	Registered address	Local bus routes operated
Reading Transport Limited (trading as Reading Buses)	Great Knollys Street, Reading, RG1 7H	Leopard route: 3 Lion routes: 4/X4 Orange routes: 13, 14 Little Oranges routes: 19A/19B/19C Claret routes: 21, 21A Park and Ride routes: 500, 600, 81, H3
Thames Valley Buses Limited	Unit 3, Maple Centre, Downmill Road, Bracknell, RG12 1QS	121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 125A, 125B, 127, 128, 129, 151, 151A
Horseman Coaches	2, Acre Road, Reading, RG2 0SU	145, 153, 154 202, 244, W983
Stagecoach (South) Limited	Bus Station, Basin Road, Chichester, PO19 8DG Depot address: Halimote Road, Aldershot, GU11 1NJ	406
Arriva the Shires Limited	4 Westmoreland Avenue, Thurmaston, Leicester, LE4 8PH Depot address: Cressex Business Park, High Wycombe, HP12 3RH	850
Stewarts Coaches Limited	Headley Park Eight, Headley Road East, Woodley, Reading, RG5 4SA	Thames Valley Park shuttle (not registered as a local bus route)



In addition to the above several 'closed door' school bus routes exist that are not available to the public, serving both mainstream secondary schools and independent schools in the area. The Council is also aware that Abbey School, Reading Blue Coat School, Reading School and Leighton Park School all commission their own closed door coach routes.

National Express coach routes serve the Mere oak Park and Ride site at Three Mile Cross, just south of the M4 in Wokingham Borough, but do not form part of the local bus network. Since June 2022, Reading Buses operate hospital shuttle buses from both Mere oak and Thames Valley Park and Ride sites, on behalf of the Royal Berkshire Foundation Trust. Discussions are on-going between the Council, Royal Berkshire Foundation Trust, and Reading Buses as to how these services can be developed further.

Community 'dial-a-ride', demand responsive transport minibus services are provided by Readibus and Keep Mobile. These services are provided for people with reduced mobility. Community 'dial-a-ride' services are only available to those who have registered with the operator in advance and who are not able to use conventional bus services.

Several community volunteer services also operate across the borough and provide for additional ad hoc trips where residents are unable to access public transport or other forms of transport. These volunteer services are provided by:

- Earley Volunteer Services
- Earley Minibuses
- Shinfield Volunteer Services
- Twyford and Wargrave Volunteer Services
- Wokingham Volunteer Services
- Woodley Volunteer Services

Wokingham Borough Council has extended the use of concessionary passes to community transport services and volunteer services for medical trips. The Borough Council, along with local Town and Parish Council's provide grants each year towards the back-of-house operation of these services.

### 2.3 Bus Accessibility and Frequencies to Key Destinations

Analysis of accessibility to key destinations in Wokingham Borough has been undertaken.

Two sets of maps for each destination were created, one for bus only and one that includes both bus and train. The five sets of maps cover the following time periods:

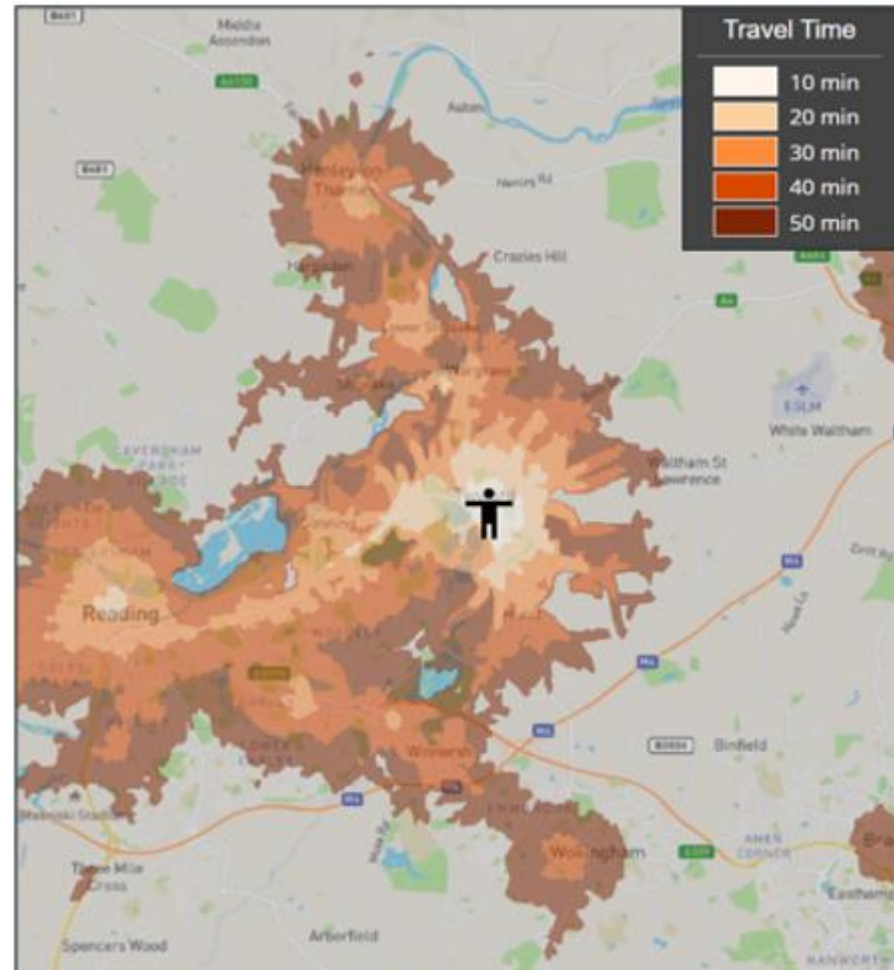
- AM Peak 07:00 hrs to 09:00 hrs
- Interpeak 09:00 hrs to 16:00 hrs
- PM Peak 16:00 hrs to 18:00 hrs
- Late PM 18:00 hrs to 00:00 hrs

Wednesday has been taken as a typical weekday, Saturdays and Sundays have also been considered. The five locations selected were:

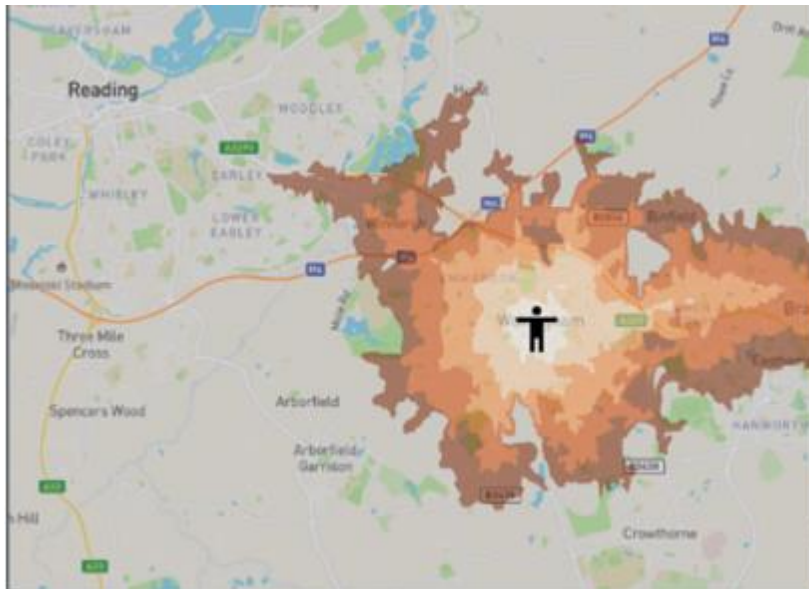
- Royal Berkshire Hospital
- Twyford Station (we have used 06:00 to 08:00 for the peak period for this destination) (Fig 2.5)
- University of Reading
- Wokingham Town Centre (Fig 2.6)
- Winnersh Triangle Station (Fig 2.7)

The results of the accessibility analysis indicated that for residents in Earley / Lower Earley, journey times to Twyford Station (Fig 2.5) and Winnersh Triangle ranged between 20 to 50 minutes by bus and train due to the need to travel into Reading and out again. The equivalent travel times by car from the junction of Beech Lane / Rushey Way to Winnersh Triangle business park would be 9 minute and to Twyford Station 14 minutes. To make journeys to work, especially to London, more attractive by public transport, a more direct bus route would be beneficial. Discussions with the management company at Winnersh Triangle business park, indicate employees at the park would benefit from an express bus link to Twyford.

Figure 2.5 Public Transport Accessibility Map to Twyford Station (Wed 8am)



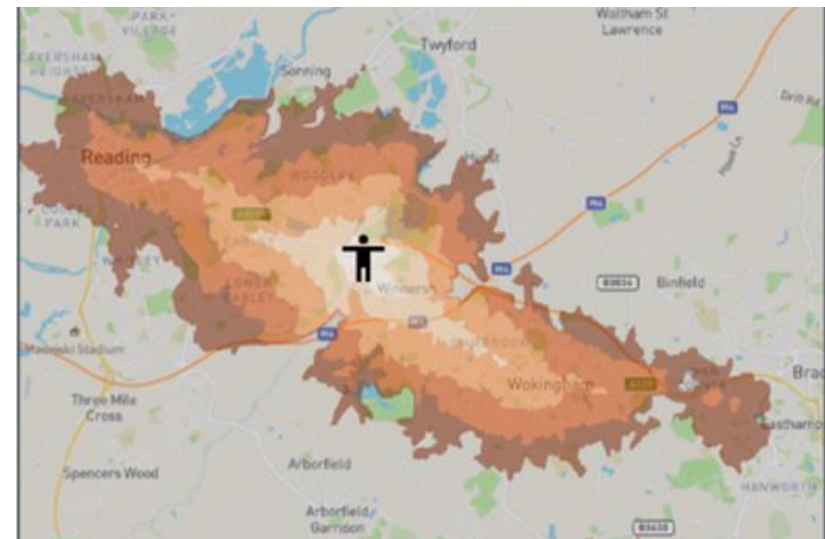
**Figure 2.6 Bus Service Accessibility Map to Wokingham Town (Wed 9am)**



Wokingham town has recently been regenerated and offers a combination of retail, leisure, and employment opportunities alongside basic everyday amenities such as banks and supermarkets. Wokingham Station is also located close to the town centre and provides for onward travel to destinations on the London Waterloo line and the North Downs line.

Accessibility to Wokingham town by local bus services (Fig 2.6) is good for local residential areas which boarder the town, such as Emmbrook and Woosehill and North Wokingham. Journey times extend beyond 20 minutes for passenger travelling to Wokingham Town from Binfield, the Barkham and Finchampstead areas and from the Winnersh area. Beyond these areas bus journeys times may exceed 30 or 40 minutes.

**Figure 2.7 Bus Service Accessibility Map to Winnersh Station (Wed 9am)**



Winnersh Station (Fig 2.7) is located on the A3290 corridor, adjacent to The Forest Secondary school. The accessibility analysis highlights that there is poor access to the corridor for those residents living in Woodley, Earley and Shinfield. As schools in these areas are full, many students travel from these areas to the four secondary schools which are located on this corridor.

Overall, the accessibility analysis highlights that access to the Royal Berkshire Hospital, Twyford station and Winnersh Triangle is generally good for residents living in areas along the A329 corridor and in the urban areas, but more challenging for residents in rural areas. Residents living just off the A3290 corridor, do not always have direct bus links to schools and rail stations. The same is true for residents in urban areas wanting to access Wokingham town.

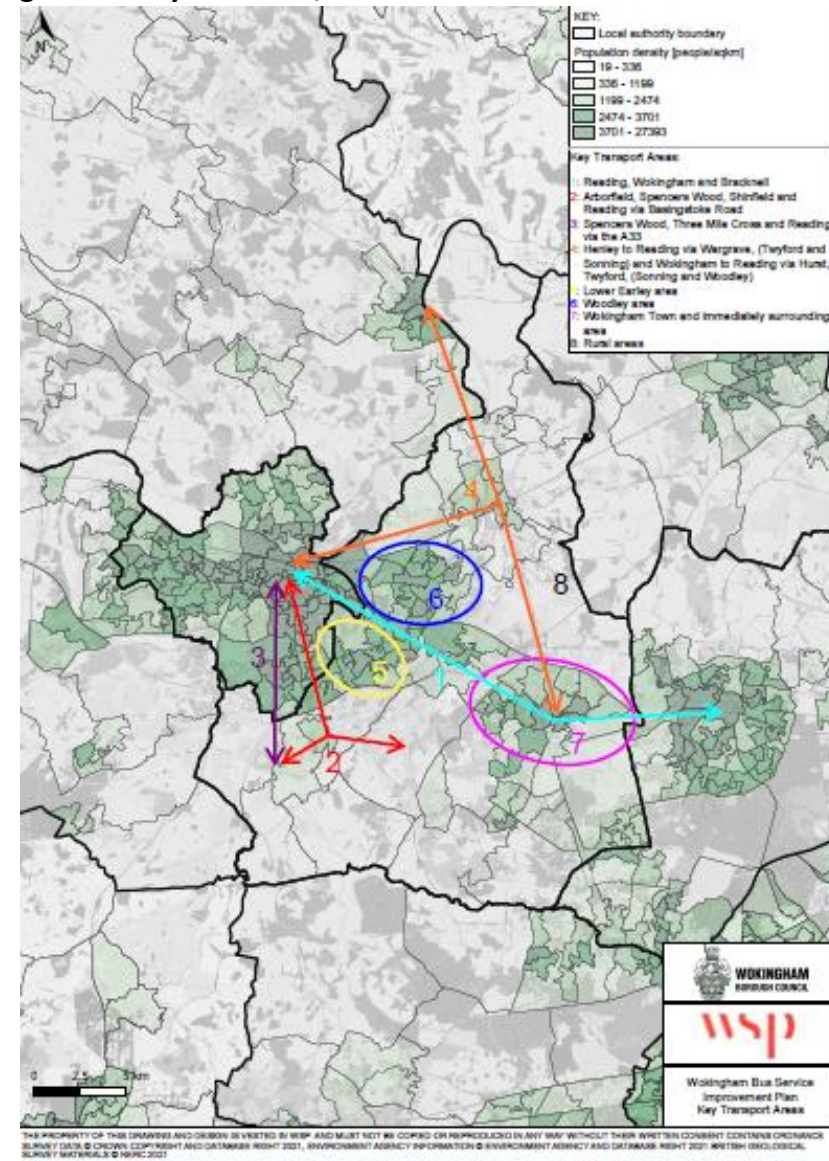


### Key Corridors, Urban Areas and Less Dense Rural Areas

The main bus corridors are listed below and shown on Figure 2.8. There are also three urban areas and three lower density rural areas. The key corridors are:

1. **A329** – the main east-west corridor through the borough which connects the residential communities of Wokingham Town, Winnersh and Earley to Reading and Bracknell. The corridor follows the London Waterloo rail line and provides connections to local stations. There are also several secondary schools and the route is branded with Reading Buses “Lion”.  
**A329(M)** – accommodates the park and ride service from Winnersh Triangle Business Park to Reading Town Centre. It includes an existing bus lane and priority on the approach to Sutton Business Park. The services are branded with the Park and Ride livery. The Park & Ride bus service is withdrawn until summer 2023 due to a decking of the car park.
2. **A327** – connects Wokingham Town to Reading Town via the communities of Barkham, Finchampstead, Arborfield and Shinfield. The corridor is currently being enhance as both Shinfield and Arborfield development areas are located on this corridor, along with the newly developed Thames Valley Science Park and future film studios. The corridor is branded with Reading Buses “Leopard”.
3. **A33/ B3349** – corridor has the potential for growth due to development in the Shinfield area. Currently bus services connect Reading Town Centre, with Thames Valley Science Park and Spencers Wood, as well as to the more rural villages of Swallowfield and Riseley. The busiest sections of the corridor are between Spencers Wood and Reading Town Centre. This corridor was remodelled in 2021 to extend the 600 services from Mere oak Park and Ride.

Figure 2.8 Key Corridors, Urban Areas and Less Dense Rural Areas



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4. **A4/A321** – provides access between Reading Town Centre and High Wycombe for the communities of Woodley, Sonning, Charvil, Twyford and Wargrave. Thames Valley Business Park and Sutton Business Park are also located along this corridor. Twyford Station with the improved Elizabeth line and Wargrave station with the Henley branch service are served by local bus services. There is no uniform branding on this corridor.

### Urban Areas

There are three main urban areas in Wokingham Borough and these are:

5. **Earley/ Lower Earley/ Maiden Erleigh** – a large residential areas with a high proportion of family homes. There is a local secondary school, a good number of primary schools, local convenience shops, doctors’ surgeries, and a supermarket. There are significant numbers of secondary age students using bus services to access schools in Reading, along the A3290 and in Woodley. The area is branded with Reading Buses “Claret” Service.
6. **Woodley and North Earley** – Woodley town centre has a good range of shops and is the main interchange for local bus services. Local bus services serve the surrounding residential areas with local orbital bus services. There are several primary schools and doctors’ surgeries in the town. The area is branded with Reading Buses “Orange” brand.
7. **Wokingham Town and Surrounding areas** – the recently regenerated town centre is central to the area. The A329 and A327 corridors serve the town centre and the recently regenerated Wokingham Station. Local link bus services provide access from the surrounding communities of Emmbrook, Woosehill, the Norreys Estate, Easthampstead, Finchampstead and Barkham. There are also the areas of new development to the north and south of the Town along with a new park and ride site on the east of the town, boarding with Bracknell Forest Borough.

### Rural and Low-Density Areas

8. Rural and lower density areas are located to the north, south and east of the borough as shown on Figures 1.1 and 1.2.

### Bus Frequencies Analysis

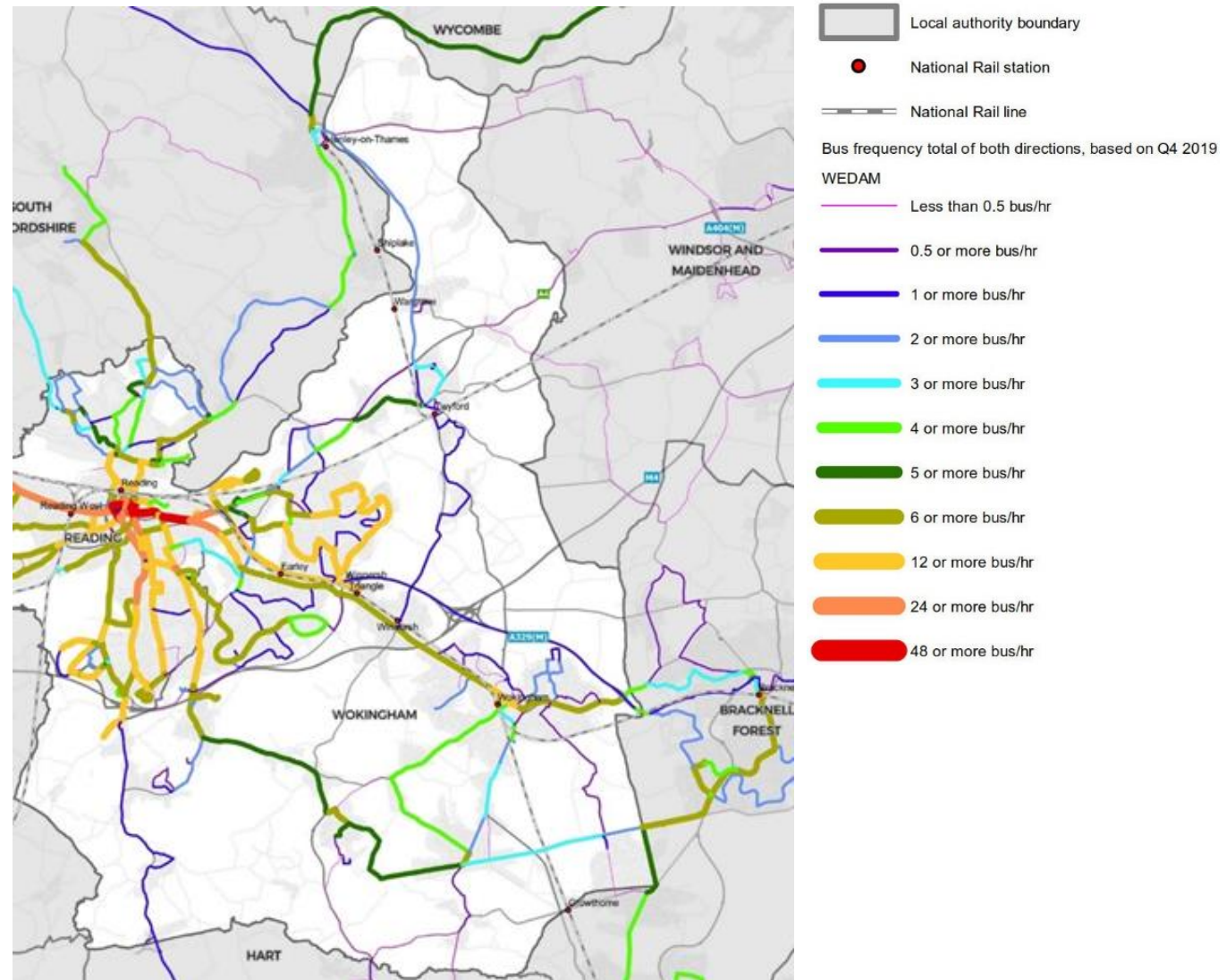
Figure 2.9 shows bus frequencies for a Wednesday AM peak period and detailed in Table 2.2.

The bus frequency map reflects services pre-Covid (Q4 2019) as the bus network has been changed recently and is still settling down. There is a reasonable level of service on most key corridors and urban centres in the Borough, particularly bearing in mind the high level of car ownership. The local bus network provides the highest frequencies on the key corridors travelling into Reading Town Centre and from the urban areas of Woodley, Earley and Shinfield which border Reading Borough. Other towns and villages in the borough, which do not lie on a key corridor, do not have the same levels of local bus service provision.

#### Key Corridors

Frequencies on key corridors vary based on time of day and the day of the week. Turn up and go frequencies are in place on the A327 and A4 corridors on their busiest sections. Frequencies reduce as the routes serve less dense areas to the east. The A329 corridor frequency is 3 buses an hour throughout the

Figure 2.9 Bus frequency map: Wednesday AM Peak 07:00-09:00 in 2019



day, reduced in 2021 from 4 per hour. Evening and Sunday services are provided in part on all key corridors.

**Table 2.2 Key Corridors – Local Bus Frequencies (buses per hour)**

Corridor	Routes	Destination	Peak (M-Fri)	Off-Peak (M-Fri)	Sat	Evening (M-Fri)	Sun
<b>A329</b> Reading – Wokingham – Winnersh – Bracknell	4, X4	Wokingham	3	3	3	1	2
		Winnersh	3	3	3	1	2
<b>A327</b> Reading – Shinfield – Arborfield – Wokingham	3	Shinfield	6	5	5	2	2
		Arborfield	4	3	3	2	2
		Wokingham	1	1	1	0	0
<b>A4/A321</b> Reading – Twyford – Wargrave – Henley	13/14	London Rd	6	6	6	2	2
	128/129 /127, 850	Twyford	2	2	2	1	0
		Wargrave	1	1	1	1	0
		Henley	1	1	1	1	0
<b>A329 (M)</b> Winnersh - Reading	500	Reading	service withdrawn until mid 2023, when works completed on P & R				
<b>A33/B3349</b> Reading – Shinfield – Spencers Wood – Swallowfield – Riseley	600	MereOak P & R	2	2	2	2	0
		Spencers Wood, Shinfield, Swallowfield & Riseley	1	1	1	1	0

Rail services provide alternative provisions along the A329 corridor and the A321 corridor. The A329 has four trains an hour end to end with two stopping services at local stations (Winnersh, Winnersh Triangle and Earley). The Henley branch line complements bus services between Twyford, Wargrave and Henley with 2 trains per hour. Rail services also extend to evenings and weekends.

Twyford, with a population of around 7,000 people, has two buses per hour to Reading via different routes and one bus per hour to Wokingham. Bearing in mind the improved train services provided by the Elizabeth Line, transport connections at Twyford Station have the potential to be enhanced.

**Frequencies in Urban Areas**

All three urban areas have a higher frequency urban corridor service which are complemented by less frequent local urban link services.

**Table 2.3 Urban Areas – Local Bus Frequencies (buses per hour)**

Urban Area	Routes	Area	Peak (M-Fri)	Off Peak (M-Fri)	Sat	Evening	Sun
<b>Earley /Lower Earley / Maiden Erleigh</b>	21	Earley	4	4	4	2	3
	19a/c,	Maiden Erleigh	2	2	2	0	0
	19b	Lower Earley	1	1	1	0	0
<b>Woodley and North Earley</b>	19a/c,	North Earley	2	2	2	0	0
	13/14	Woodley Centre	7	7	7	2	2
	19a/c						
	128/127						
	13/14	East Woodley	6	6	6	0	0
19a/c							
13/14	South Woodley	6	6	6	0	0	
19a/c							
<b>Wokingham Town and Surrounding Area</b>	4/X4, 3	Wokingham Town Centre	9	12	10	3	3
	121, 122/3						
	124, 128/127/						
	128 151/A						
	121, 151/A	North Wokingham	3	2	1-2	0	0
	124	South Wokingham	0	1 per day	0	0	0
125/A/B	Finchampstead	1	1 every 2 hours	1 per day	0	0	
3	Barkham	1	1	1	0	0	
122/3	Woosehill and Emmbrook	1	1	1	0	0	

Between Earley and Reading the 21 provides a constant 3 buses per hour frequency into Reading, increasing in frequency at Reading University which lies on the Reading / Wokingham boundary. The 19a/b/c local link services provide local access from residential areas to local amenities and the Royal Berkshire Hospital. Resident feedback is that the direct link to the hospital is welcomed, but more frequent and direct services to Reading and Wokingham Towns are desirable.

Pre-pandemic monitoring of vehicle capacity during the morning travel period indicated that all services running out of Earley were at or over capacity. In some cases, passengers were unable to board the service they wanted, meaning residents could not get to work or school on time. A relief vehicle was temporarily added to the network to relieve the pressure, but the local bus operator would not commit to providing this in the longer term.

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In Woodley the 13/14 circular services provide the main services into Reading on a half hourly frequency in each direction. The 13/14s are complemented by the Thames Valley Buses 128 service and the circular 19a/c services from Woodley Centre to Reading creating a 15-minute frequency, when assuming the most direct circular route, i.e., the 13 or the 14. Selected parts of south and east Woodley experience a 20-minute frequency towards Reading and Woodley Centre through a combination of 13/14 and 19a/c services, when assuming the most direct circular route. More remote residential areas experience less frequent local bus services provided solely by the 19a/c bus service.

Local bus services along the A329 and A327 corridors travel into Wokingham Town. Several local town link services provide access from surrounding residential areas into the Town Centre (Wokingham Broad Street) where they connect with the higher frequency services. Generally, the frequency of services from surrounding residential areas into Wokingham Town is low, as in many cases, but not all, the bus competes with alternative travel choices such as walking and cycling. Figure 2.9 shows the Wokingham town services.

Evening and Sunday services are only provided on the urban corridor routes which are provided through each of the urban areas.

**Frequencies in Low Density and Rural Areas**

Low density and rural areas generally experience the least frequent local bus service provision in the borough. The frequency of fixed line rural services is reflective of the lower populations living in these areas. Community transport providers and volunteer driver services operate across all the rural and low-density areas and facilitate travel for those without access to any alternative transport.

Apart from the rural corridor service which runs between Reading Town Centre and Riseley, no fixed route local bus services are provided during evenings or at weekends.

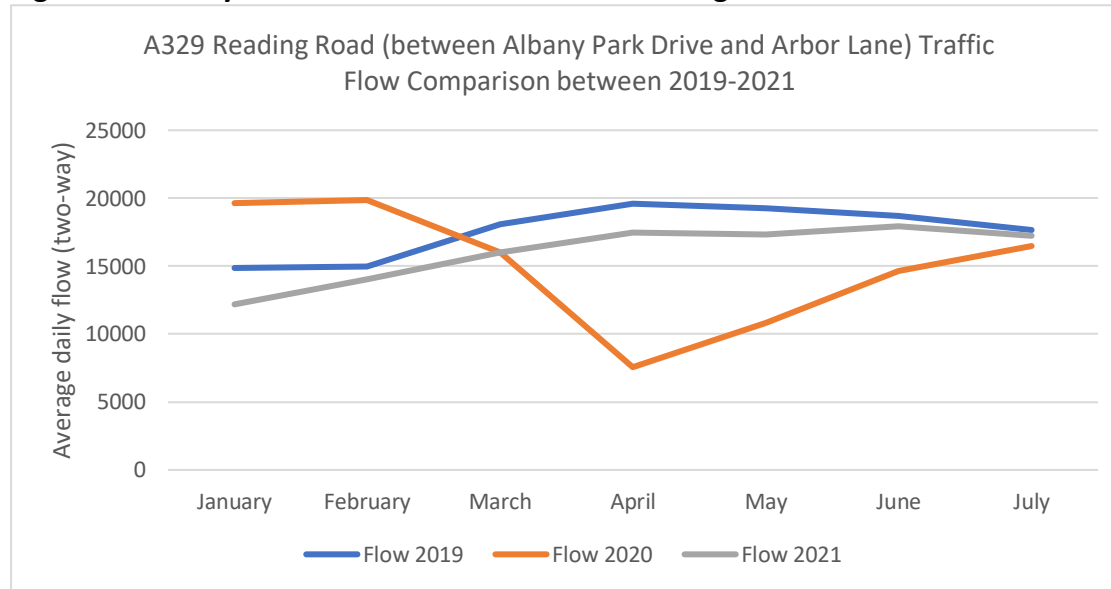
**Table 2.4 Rural / Low Density Areas – Local Bus Frequencies**

Urban Area	Routes	Area	Peak (M-Fri)	Off Peak (M-Fri)	Sat	Evening	Sun
Northern Parishes	153, 127	Wargrave	0	1 / week	1	0	0
	127	Remenham	0	0	1	0	0
	128, 127	Sonning	1	1	1	0	0
	850, 128	Charvil	2	2	2	1	0
Southern Parishes	600, 145	Spencers Wood	1	1	1	1	0
	600, 145	Swallowfield	1	1	1	1	0
	600, 145	Riseley	1	1	1	1	0
	145	Finchampstead Village	0	1 / week	0	0	0
	125/A/B	Wokingham Without	2	0.5	1 day	0	0
Eastern Parishes	128 in part	Hurst	1	1	1	0	0
	127	Ruscombe	0	0	1	0	0

## 2.4 Journey Time Reliability and Traffic Congestion

Increasing traffic levels and junctions operating over capacity reduce bus journey speeds and the reliability of services. Average daily flows (two-way) on the A329 were just under 18,000 vehicles in summer 2019, with flows returning to near pre-pandemic levels by summer 2021. On the A4 corridor average daily traffic flows were slightly higher at close to 20,000 vehicles in summer 2019, returning to just under 18,000 vehicles by summer 2021. In all cases traffic flows dropped significantly during the pandemic, in some cases by as much as 39% as shown on Figure 2.10. Traffic flows in 2022 have largely returned to pre pandemic levels.

**Figure 2.10 – Key Corridor Traffic Flows: A329 Reading Road**

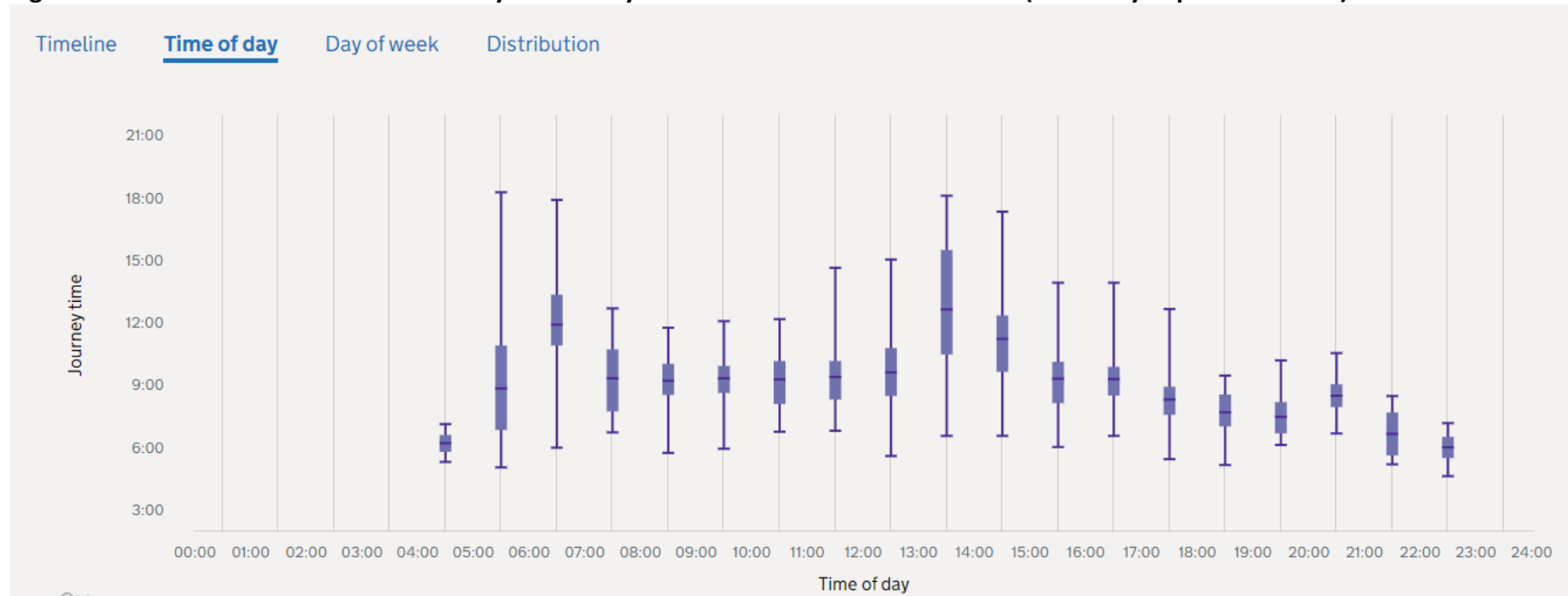


### Speed of local bus journeys

The variation in timetabled journey times provide a good indication of where bus services face daily challenges from slow traffic speeds or high passenger boardings. Analysis has been carried out on the main five corridors using the DfT Bus Open Data (BODS) analysis. Figure 2.11 shows this for A329 corridor northbound along Reading Road. The profile shows longer journey times and ranges in time in the early morning and afternoon.

Where bus journey times are extended due to slow traffic speeds bus priority measures are an effective way of providing quicker bus journey times.

**Figure 2.11 Variation in Scheduled Journey Time Daily Profile on the A329 Northbound (Weekday September 2022)**



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**Bus Reliability and Punctuality**

Knowing when and where a bus will arrive is fundamental to making local bus services attractive and convenient to use. In 2020 residents’ satisfaction with the reliability of local buses was measured by Ipsos Mori as part of the National Highways and Transport (NHT) Survey. Wokingham Borough was ranked 27th out of 113 Council’s surveyed with 60% of the Borough’s residents being satisfied with the reliability of local bus services. Satisfaction with bus reliability varied across the borough. The highest satisfaction levels were in North Shinfield, Bulmershe and Whitegates, Loddon and Coronation wards and the lowest satisfaction levels in the more rural and low-density areas to the north and south of the borough (NHT Survey, 2021).

On average 72.5% of buses departed stops on time in 2019 rising to an average of 91.3% during the pandemic. The 18.8% difference in bus service punctuality demonstrates the challenge local bus services face from the daily variations in traffic conditions and from the potential effects of congestion.

Bus punctuality levels vary greatly by service. The longest routes tend to experience the highest risk of poor reliability, whilst the shorter town link routes have a much lower risk of poor reliability. The greatest improvements in reliability during the pandemic were experienced on the key corridor services and in the Woodley and Earley areas.

Roadworks can significantly disrupt bus services. The Council's Streetworks team has long worked in partnership with utility companies to keep bus operators updated on roadworks. Feedback from local bus operators indicates that the council is doing better than most in keeping them informed of when and where roadworks take place in the borough. For corridor and cross-boundary services a coordinated approach with neighbouring Councils is required to ensure these longer services are not subject to several sets of delays. The Council is willing to work with the Department for Transport to further develop the Bus Open Data system to help taking account of disruption on the network.

Post Covid in 2022, reliability has been affected by driver shortages, notably by Thames Valley Bus services. Driver shortages are a problem facing bus operators nationally. In the Thames Valley the problem is compounded by the cost of living compared to driver wages and the competition for drivers in all sectors including the haulage industry. The borough is actively working with local bus operators to promote their recruitment campaigns, but for an interim period has been forced to introduce temporary timetables.

### **Bus Priority & Cross-Boundary Travel**

Just over half of bus services (55%) in Wokingham Borough have a destination in Reading. Reading Borough experiences high levels of congestion so have implemented a series of bus priority schemes. In recent years bus priority measures developed in Reading Borough that have assisted the operation of bus services in Wokingham Borough, include:

- Red Route 'no stopping' restrictions introduced in 2017 in Reading to reduce disruption to Reading Buses route 17. These restrictions have also reduced congestion on parallel routes into Wokingham including the 4/X4, 13 and 14.
- South Reading Fast Track Public Transport (FTPT) Corridor which is a bus priority scheme on the A33 corridor primarily in Reading but promoted in collaboration with Wokingham Borough Council. It is currently being extended in phases.
- Bus Priority at M4 Junction 11 which has benefited Park & Ride buses serving MereOak Park and Ride and those travelling along the Basingstoke Road corridor.

Reading Borough Council were successful in securing £26m of BSIP funding in 2021. As a result of this funding additional bus priority measures are proposed in Reading borough which could further benefit local bus services operating in Wokingham Borough. The proposed bus priority measures are:

- Action B1: Develop detailed delivery programme of bus priority measures for all corridors based on level of funding available.
- Action B5: Implement inbound bus lane on A4 London Road between borough boundary and Cemetery Junction benefitting 15 buses per hour, all of which travel through Wokingham Borough.
- Action B6: Implement inbound bus lane on A4 London Road between Sidmouth Street and London Street benefitting 17 buses per hour.
- Action B8: Introduce a package of bus signal priority measures at key junctions to complement new bus priority lanes, which will positively impact bus services from Wokingham borough.
- Action B9: Introduce more effective enforcement of existing Red Route and new enforcement of moving traffic offences at key 'yellow box' junctions, following the transfer of powers from the police to local authorities, which will positively impact bus services from Wokingham Borough.

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Open Bus Data suggests that the most significant delays to cross boundary bus services occur in Reading Borough. Wokingham Borough welcomes measures which will improve journey times and bus reliability for all passengers. However, it is noted that in some cases, such as with Action B5, the A4 London Road bus lane, the proximity of the scheme to the Wokingham Borough boundary and the condensing of two lanes of traffic into one lane, is likely to mean queuing traffic in Wokingham borough and therefore may extend some bus journey times in Wokingham Borough. To maximise the journey time benefits for buses in Wokingham Borough, continuous bus priority from the London Road bus gate to the borough boundary and extending into Wokingham Borough is required.

The Council has secured bus priority measures within the borough where new development takes place. A new sustainable transport link which permits only buses and those who cycle or walk to use it was opened in February 2020 linking Shinfield to Spencers Wood. The sustainable transport link is a key component of a wider local strategy to improve bus services in the area, by linking the development site with the FTPT scheme along the A33 to Reading Town Centre.

Other more localised bus priority measures are provided through traffic signal control at bus gates in the borough, in Woodley and at Mere oak Park and Ride. A further bus gate is provided in the Twyford area.

## 2.5 Bus Stop Infrastructure

The Council manages 620 bus stops across the borough, shown on Figure 2.12. Around a quarter of local bus stops have bus shelters, 34 have direct access to real time information and 100% of fixed stops have at stop timetable information.

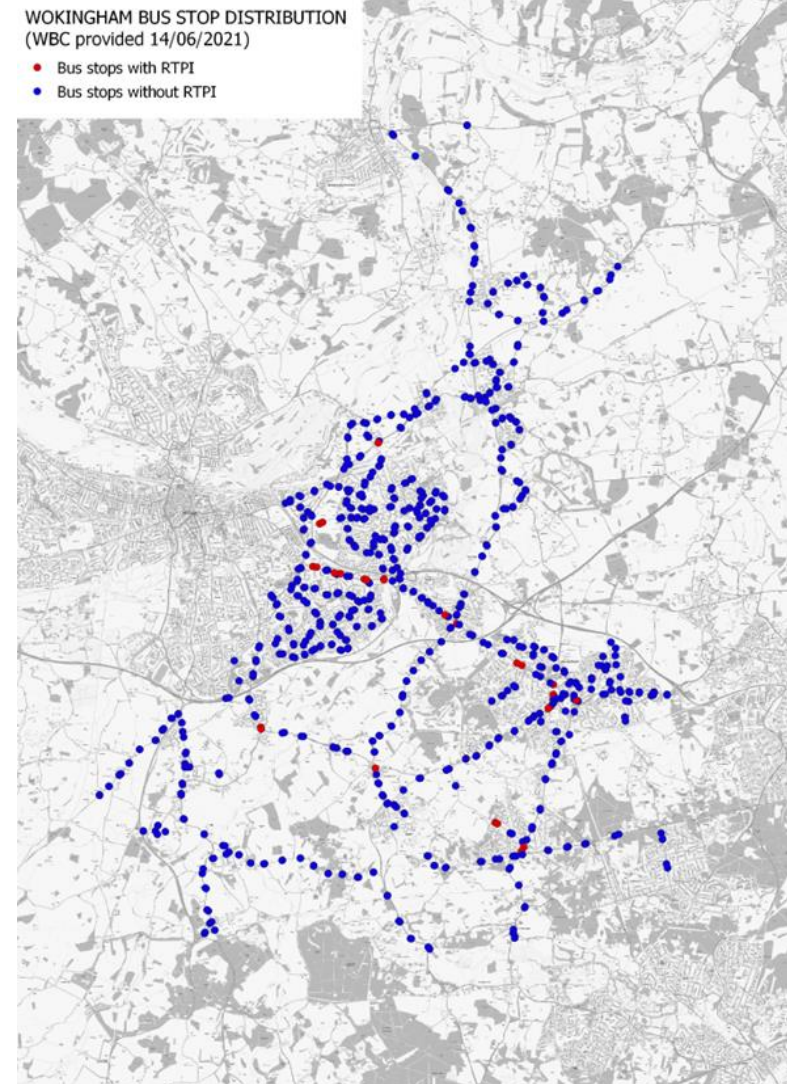
The Council has a bus stop policy which divides bus stops into three tiers:

- Bronze: (flag & timetable) for lower use stops such as those in rural areas or on the edge of villages.
- Silver: (flag, timetable & shelter) for stops in villages and on radial routes within towns serving normal residential and employment catchment areas where passenger information is of benefit.
- Gold: (flag, shelter & real time passenger information) for the high-profile stops found in town centres, with high volumes of boarding passengers both in the peak periods and throughout the day. Also applied to hospitals and other locations where an improved waiting environment is beneficial to groups of passengers.

The Council will look to upgrade stops in line with these standards where funding is available. Where shelters are provided, these are either provided by a third party as part of an advertising and maintenance agreement or by the Borough Council with local Town and Parish councils being requested to take on their maintenance.

The Council's standard shelter includes perch seating, a poster panel and anti-graffiti backing. Green roof shelters are being trialled in the borough. Should the shelters be successful, these may be rolled out more widely across the borough.

**Figure 2.12 Bus Stops in Wokingham Borough**



Poster panels are made available to bus operators to display network maps. Local bus operators provide paper timetables at all stops within the borough. The design of bus stop infrastructure is sensitive to the branding of the bus route. Flag graphics are branded to the route unless multiple services use the stop.

The borough’s real time passenger information system (RTPI) is operated by Reading Buses on behalf of Wokingham Borough Council and Reading Borough Council. The Council spends £16,620 a year maintaining these screens at the ‘Gold’ stops. The red dots on Figure 2.12 shows where these are located.

Rail services provide alternative provisions along the A329 and A321 corridors. The A329 corridor has four trains an hour end to end with two stopping services at local stations (Winnersh, Winnersh Triangle and Earley). The Henley branch line complements bus services between Twyford, Wargrave and Henley with 2 trains per hour. Rail services also extend to evenings and weekends.

Twyford, with a population of around 7,000 people, has two buses per hour to Reading via different routes and one bus per hour to Wokingham. Bearing in mind the improved train services provided by the Elizabeth Line, transport connections at Twyford Station have the potential to be enhanced.

## 2.6 Fares and Ticketing

Average bus fares in Wokingham Borough remain below the national average for an equivalent 3-mile journey, as shown on Table 2.6. There are specific groups for whom more affordable bus travel is important. Affordable bus travel can be a barrier to bus use for residents on low income, young people and those seeking work.

**Table 2.6 Average Local Bus Fares**

<b>Ticket type</b>	<b>Wokingham Borough</b>	<b>National average (2019)*</b>
Adult single	£1.93	£2.48
Adult Day ticket	£3.95	£5.21
Adult Weekly ticket	£17.26	£18.03

Reading Buses provide the most comprehensive fare offer which includes young people in employment and education up until the age of 18, as well as those seeking work. Fares offered by Arriva, Stagecoach and Horseman are only reduced for young people until the age of 16.

**Table 2.7 Fare Offer on Local Bus Services**

Both Reading Buses and Thames Valley Buses operate a combination of point-to-point fares and zonal fares. All other operators in Wokingham Borough implement some form of point-to-point fares. Fares per kilometre vary by route and area. Inequitable fares were previously raised by communities on the edge of fare zones, as an area of dissatisfaction. For these communities the nature of fare zones meant a steep change in the cost of travel. In January 2022 Reading Buses introduced a new Reading & Wokingham fare zone to address this inconsistency which provided some travel cost savings for passengers.

<b>Fare Offer</b>	<b>Under 16s</b>	<b>Under 18</b>	<b>Job Seeker</b>	<b>Group Fares</b>
Reading Buses	x	x	x	x
Thames Valley Buses	x	x		x
Arriva	x			x*
Stagecoach	x			
Horseman Coaches	x			
* family ticket				

For services into and around Town Centres bus fares must be attractive compared to town centre parking charges. For some local bus services this means advertising the fares they charge more widely as they are already at an affordable level. For others this means promoting the value for money they already offer or restructuring the ticketing offer to ensure better value. In Wokingham Town on some routes Reading Buses and Thames Valley Buses run on the same sections of route. In January 2022 Reading Buses and Thames Valley Buses introduced integrated ticketing across their services in response to the previous BSIP and requests from residents. Further work is still required to integrate the Reading Buses/Thames Valley Buses ticketing offer with Arriva’s services. It remains a BSIP ambition to have a borough wide bus ticket, with a capped daily rate.

Imperfect knowledge of fares can present a barrier to bus travel. Whilst all operators in Wokingham Borough accept cash fares, the majority also accept contactless payment. For passengers who may not have a debit card, smart cards and mobile ticketing provide alternative options. In both cases tickets can be pre-purchased and loaded onto a card or mobile device in advance of travelling.

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**Table 2.8 Payment Options by Operator**

Payment Option	Cash Fares	Contactless Payment	Mobile Payment	Smart Card
Reading Buses	x	x	x	x
Thames Valley Buses	x	x	x	x
Arriva	x	x	x	
Stagecoach	x	x		
Horseman Coaches	x			

Over 50% of tickets purchased on Reading Buses in Wokingham Borough are via an electronic device. The ticketing categories with the highest proportions of electronic purchases are period passes. Higher levels of electronic ticketing purchases are also seen in relation to young people. For Thames Valley Buses the proportion of ticket purchases via electronic devices is slightly lower with cash fares still

dominating across their network in the Borough. The reason for a lower proportion of electronic tickets being purchased on Thames Valley Buses is likely to be due to this option only recently being introduced, whereas Reading Buses passengers have been able to purchase electronic tickets since 2017.

**Table 2.9 Ticket Types by Operator**

Ticket Type	Daily	Weekly	4-Week/ Monthly	Multi-Trip	Plusbus	Annual/ Academic
Reading Buses	x	x	x	x	x	x
Thames Valley Buses	x	x	x	x	x	x
Arriva	x	x	x	x	x	x
Stagecoach	x	x	x			x
Horseman Coaches	x	x	x			x

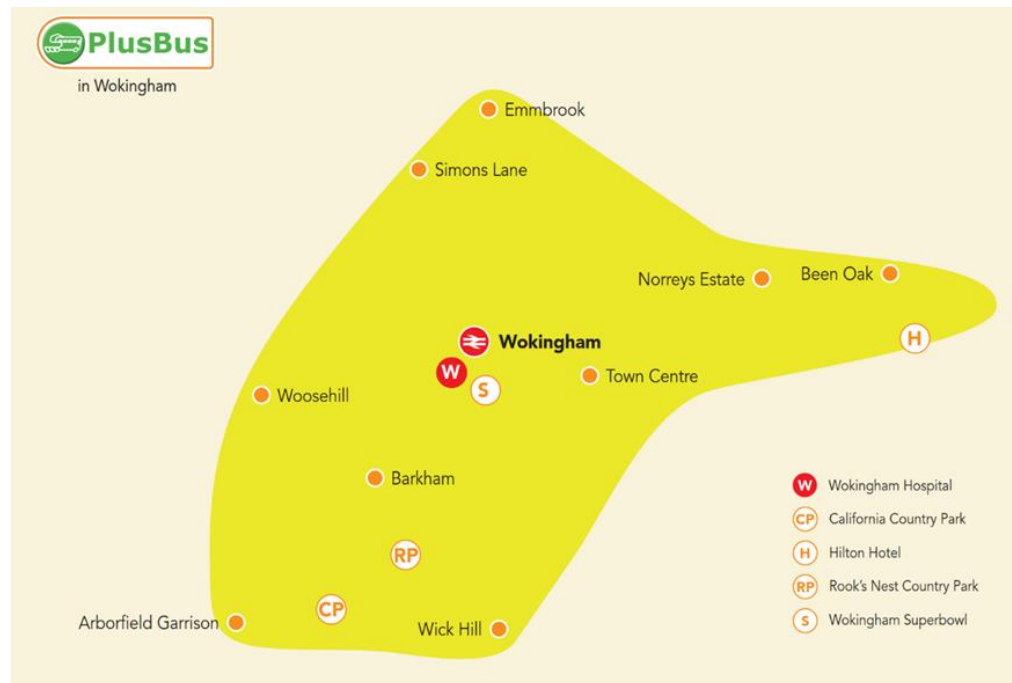
Changing working patterns during the Covid pandemic has resulted in a higher proportion of resident’s home working. Research by the rail industry suggests the average rail passenger travels 2.7 days per week for employment. Data from Reading Buses suggests that home working has had a

particular impact on bus services in Earley. To aid in the recovery, Reading Buses have now introduced flexible ticketing which allows trips to be used at any time instead of on consecutive days may be beneficial.

Park & ride services have been the slowest to recover, which is consistent with park and ride services nationally. The borough has worked with Royal Berkshire Hospital to establish a hospital shuttle bus and are discussing plans to open this service up as a public bus service. As with Winnersh Triangle Park and Ride, the integration of a parking ticket and a bus ticket is challenging. Park and Ride users need to be given favourable parking rates compared to those driving and visiting local facilities. A wave and pay solution which integrates both parking and bus ticket machines would allow for a seamless bus journey and a “best fare” solution. Furthermore, this would lay the foundations for “mobility as a service” which allows for cycle lockers, hire bikes and car clubs to be integrated into the charging model using the same technology.

Nowhere in the country has yet achieved this fully integrated offer for park and ride passengers. Wokingham Borough will work towards being one of the first.

**Figure 2.13 The Plusbus Area from Wokingham Rail Station**



The Wokingham PlusBus ticket allows for the purchase of local bus tickets at a rail station and then travel on any local bus service within the Plusbus area, shown on Figure 2.13.

The Reading PlusBus train and bus integrated ticket covers a wide area including railway stations at:

- Earley Station on the line towards Wokingham – however the ticket’s validity ends just short of Winnersh Triangle Station
- Reading Station

Winnersh Triangle Station and Winnersh Station on the line towards Wokingham are not covered by any PlusBus ticket. The borough will work towards including these stations within the PlusBus scheme.

Twyford Station on the Elizabeth Line is not covered by any PlusBus ticket. It is the Council’s aspiration to work with bus and rail operators to try and establish a PlusBus zone for

Twyford Station.

**2.7 Comprehensiveness of the network**

There are no areas in Wokingham Borough’s local bus network which are “over-bused” when considering the aspirations set out in the National Bus Strategy. There are areas within the borough where frequencies are uneven or less frequent than the Nation Bus Strategy aspires to. The Shinfield Road corridor and the area surrounding Wokingham Town are two such examples. The borough is working with local Parish Councils and local stakeholders to try and increase passenger numbers which will in turn support higher frequency services.

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Dedicated school services provide additional bus capacity at school times. Students and young people had the highest recovery rate of all passenger types since the pandemic. Over 600 students board buses in the borough to access education and this is still rising year on year. In September 2022 one school service was removed from the network and the Leopard 3 retimed to accommodate these passengers. There are plans to review further school only services for their potential to be integrated into the wider local bus network, and therefore helping to sustain the overall network through a “Total Transport” approach.

Reading University is located on the border of Reading and Wokingham Boroughs with approximately half of the campus in Earley. A significant number of students use local bus services and the student’s use of the 21 service, helps sustain the service. However, the use of the 21 service by students can result in some journeys being over capacity and unavailable for residents to use, especially during the first few weeks of term. During the summer months the 21 service reduces as far fewer students are travelling.

**2.8 Ease of Understanding the Network & Promotion**

Reading Transport operate nearly 80% of the local bus services in Wokingham borough either through Reading Buses or via Thames Valley Buses. Area and corridor-based brands have been developed for services across the borough. Wokingham Borough Council has worked with Reading Transport to continue this branding, where possible, through publicity and at stop infrastructure to strength brand identity. There are no conflicts in route numbering within the borough.

**Figure 2.14 The Orange Bus, on Route 13**



As an example, Woodley is characterised by the “Oranges”. The commercial 13/14s carry the branding shown on Figure 2.14. The brand is extended for the smaller contracted vehicles which operate in the same area and are known locally as the “Little Oranges” (19a/b/c). The Earley area is branded with the “Claret” services, whilst the key corridors in the borough are the “Lion” (A329) and the “Leopard” (A327). The A4 corridor, due to the number of services operating, does not currently carry a consistent brand. Achieving a consistent brand for the A4 corridor would be challenging given that the Arriva 850 service also operates in Reading Borough, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire.

Reading Buses fleet is one of the youngest in the country and as such already incorporates audio and visual announcements, branded interiors and in the case of

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commercial bus services Wi-Fi, and USB charging ports. Passenger satisfactions is generally very high in relation to the vehicles.

Three **travel guides** and a network map are produced each year as part of the Council’s My Journey programme. The travel guides are considered to be some of the best in the Country, being noted as “three excellent books. Each has an index of places serves and a system map. Each have town plans showing stops in Reading and Wokingham town centres despite the former even being outside the authority’s area. There is an excellent introduction in each book giving copious information on fares” <https://www.barrydoe.co.uk/best.pdf>.

The **My Journey website** provides information on all local bus services and links to local bus operators websites with live maps. Traffic to the website has grown steadily with 46% growth over the past 3 years. The October 2018 edition of Bus Monthly included a write-up on the My Journey bus information provision and noted that it is “excellent [and] a model for all local authorities”.

Reading Buses and Thames Valley Buses have an award-winning mobile application which covers everything from journey planning, to checking bus times and paying for bus travel. My Journey promotes the app to business, residents and commuters in the borough including live demonstrations at local events. The Council would like to see all Reading Transport’s services promoted on a single application particularly for passengers in Woodley and Wokingham Town.

**Behaviour Change & My Journey**

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Reading • Loddon Bridge • Reading Station via Royal Berkshire Hospital and Earley Gate

19a

**Monday to Friday (except Public Holidays)**

Service Number:	19a	19a	19a	19a	19a	19a	19a	19a	19a	19a	19a	19a	19a
Reading, St Mary's Butts [CR]	0811	0731	0813	0927	1032	1132	1232	1332	1432	1532	-	1741	1837
Reading, Station Road [SA]	0630	0740	0840	0940	1040	1140	1240	1340	1440	1545	1650	1750	1855
RBH South Wing	0637	0752	0851	0951	1051	1151	1251	1351	1451	1557	1702	1801	1903
Earley Gate	0643	0759	0858	0957	1057	1157	1257	1357	1458	1604	1709	1808	1909
Silverdale Road Shops	0645	0802	0901	1000	1100	1200	1300	1400	1501	1607	1712	1811	1912
Mill Lane - Gipsy Lane	0649	0806	0905	1004	1104	1204	1304	1404	1506	1611	1716	1815	1916
Loddon Bridge, The George	0653	0813	0908	1008	1108	1208	1308	1408	1509	1614	1719	1819	1919
Woodley Piazza	0705	0827	0921	1021	1121	1221	1321	1421	1522	1627	1733	1831	1930
Woodley, Chequers	0707	0830	0924	1024	1124	1224	1324	1424	1525	1630	1736	1834	1933
Bulmershe Sports Centre	0710	0834	0928	1027	1127	1227	1327	1427	1528	1633	1739	1837	1935
Culver Lane	-	-	0930	1029	1129	1229	1329	1429	1530	1635	-	-	-
Earley Gate	0717	0843	0935	1035	1135	1235	1335	1435	1540	1643	1745	1843	1940
RBH Main Entrance	0724	0851	0943	1043	1143	1243	1343	1443	1548	1651	1753	1850	1946
Reading, St Mary's Butts	0731	0901	0952	1052	1152	1252	1352	1452	1557	1702	1805	1858	1954
Reading, Station Road [SA]	0735	0905	0956	1056	1156	1256	1356	1456	1601	1706	1809	1902	1967

note:  
Use the Chequers stop for Woodford Park Leisure Centre

**No more stabilisers!**  
Learn to ride at Woodford Park Leisure Centre

term time only, please see [www.myjourneywokingham.com](http://www.myjourneywokingham.com) for details

Service 19a operates anti-clockwise in the Woodley area – for buses travelling in the opposite direction around Woodley please see service 19c on following pages

This service is operated by **Readingbuses** under contract to Wokingham Borough Council

[www.wokingham.gov.uk](http://www.wokingham.gov.uk) traveline - 0871 200 22 33 (calls from landlines cost 12p per min) or visit: [www.traveline.info](http://www.traveline.info) [www.reading-buses.co.uk](http://www.reading-buses.co.uk)

**Figure 2.15 Consistent Branding Across the Timetables and Information**

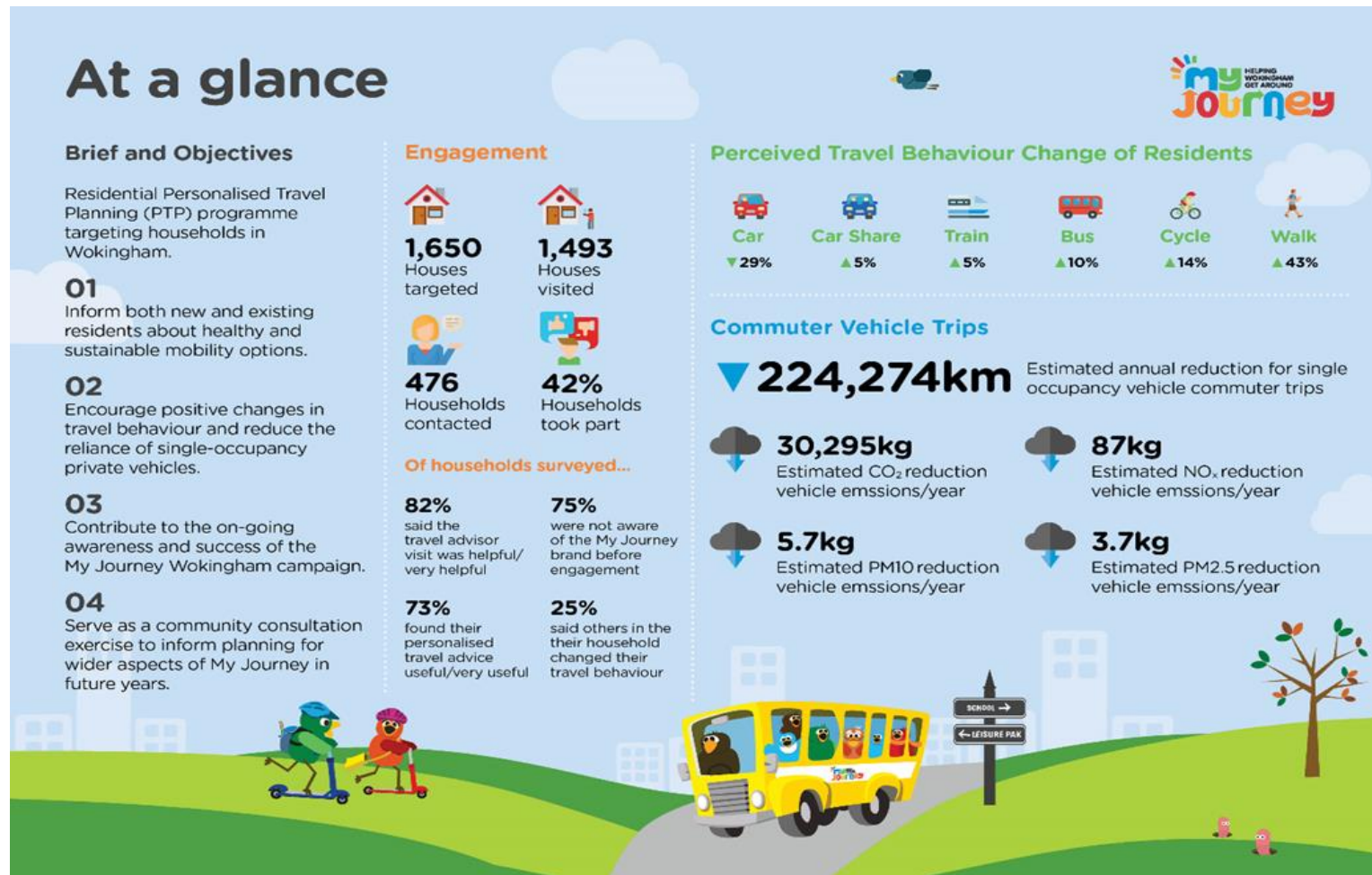
My Journey is a behaviour change campaign which promotes active and sustainable travel. The funding for the programme comes from S106 contributions which developers choose to provide instead of a travel plan. The funding contributes towards the provision of welcome packs for new homes in the borough, personalised travel planning, taster ticket, travel events, social media, the running of the website and development of travel initiatives and competitions. The Council and Reading Buses have worked jointly in promoting bus travel to residents, students, and



employees in new developments from first occupation through My Journey. Figure 2.16 shows a slide of the My Journey and its positive impacts on travel in the Borough.

Through **personalised travel planning** 77% of targeted households were issued with bus information directly and 25% of householders were given bus taster tickets. The results indicated that residents who took part in the scheme said that the number of journeys that they made by

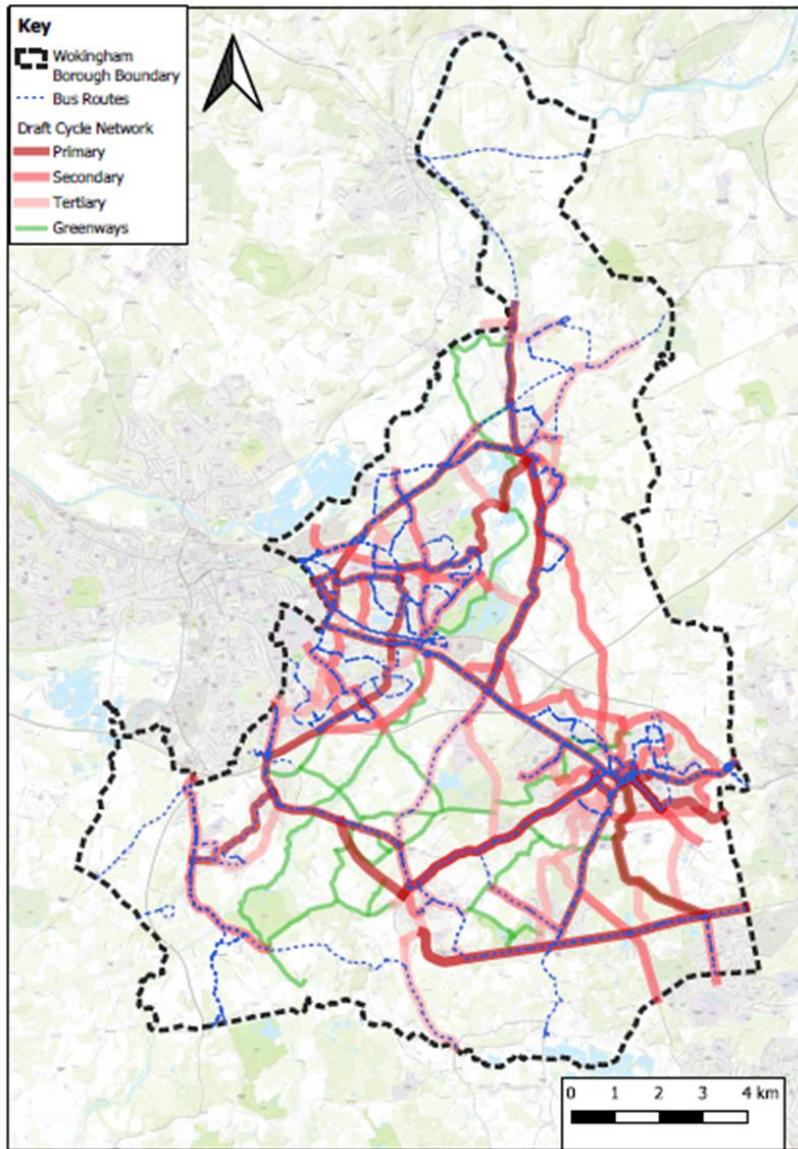
bus had increased by 10% six week later. The Council’s ambition is to roll out a similar offer to other areas of the borough that do not have S106 funding available to support the same level of engagement.



**Figure 2.16 My Journey Travel Planning Across Wokingham**

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## 2.9 Integration with Other Modes of Travel



**Figure 2.17 Emerging Borough Cycle Network**

### Integration with Walking and Cycling Networks

A boroughwide Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) is currently being developed. The interaction of this network with bus and rail services is being worked up in detail. This includes identifying key routes to transport hubs and important bus stop locations as part of the modelling to identify desire lines.

The LCWIP and this plan will need to be considered together as part of a multi-modal approach to door-to-door journeys which will enable residents to reduce their reliance on private motor vehicles for longer journeys. Figure 2.17 shows the current LCWIP strategic routes for cycling.

### Integration with Rail

There have been considerable improvements in recent years of bus facilities at rail stations, notably at Wokingham and Reading. Southwestern Railways and Great Western Railways' Customer and Communities Infrastructure Funds (CCIF) has been used to develop mobility plans for Wokingham, Winnersh, Winnersh Triangle, Earley and Twyford Stations. The mobility plans consider in detail connectivity for passengers who walk, cycle, and use the bus to local stations. The key findings of these studies are detailed in Table 2.10.

**Table 2.10 Review of Ease of Use of Bus / Rail Interchange**

Station	Summary of Key Findings
<b>Wokingham Station</b>	Direct connectivity is available via the new bus/rail interchange. There is good accessibility to the station during the day and at weekends, but on weekdays most services do not run early in the morning or late in the evening. 37% of journeys are made to the station on foot or by bicycle, 5% by bus and 18% by car. Car drivers highlighted limited bus services from rural areas which prevented them being seen as an alternative means of travel.
<b>Winnersh Station</b>	The A329 corridor is 5 minutes' walk from the station entrance. Access to buses to Twyford are less than 5 minutes' walk from the station. There is no parking provision at Winnersh Station. Over half (51%) of passengers walk or cycle to the station, with just 6% currently arriving by bus. Of those passengers who did arrive in a car, generally as a car passenger, 5% said they would consider the bus as an alternative.
<b>Winnersh Triangle Station</b>	Direct bus connectivity is possible from the Station, either at the entrance or via a 15-minute walk to the A329 corridor. Most bus services operate early in the morning and finish late at night and there is an opportunity for seamless integration between bus and rail. There are no bus services to the residential areas to the north or south of Winnersh Triangle. 76% of passengers walk or cycle to the station, with only 12% using the car. There is an opportunity for expanding the "PlusBus" zone and increasing information provision to make bus travel more attractive.
<b>Earley Station</b>	Bus stops on the A329 corridor are three minutes' walk from the station, whilst those in Woodley are 14 minutes' walk from the station. There is an opportunity to reduce this distance so that stops are more conveniently located for the passenger. Almost no passengers surveyed at the station arrived by bus, instead 68% choose to walk or cycle. Of the 26% who arrived by car, only 5% said that they would consider the bus as an alternative. The main reason for dissatisfaction with the station was related to the state of repair of a footbridge. The footbridge is the main pedestrian route from bus stops in the Woodley area to the station. A further footbridge provides access to the platforms. Neither footbridge is DDA complaint making it difficult to access for those with mobility impairments.
<b>Twyford Station</b>	A bus stop is located on the southern side of the station for buses arriving from Wokingham and Hurst. There is no real space or facility for buses to wait and passengers to wait. For buses to Wargrave and Woodley, there is approximately an eight minutes' walk to the nearest bus stops in Twyford centre. No signage directs passengers towards these bus stops. Bus services serving the station are very limited with the no early morning or late evening services. Parking at the station is very restrained with suppressed demand identified. With the introduction of the Elizabeth line demand for travel to and from the station is likely to increase. Rail passengers identified buses as having the greatest potential as an alternative to the car. Barriers to bus travel were poor frequency, no buses from Woodley and not being sure where to get on the bus.

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Wargrave, Crowthorne and Reading Stations are not covered by existing station mobility plans. Accessibility to these stations for bus passengers is as follows:

- Wargrave station is a short walk from local bus stops on the A321 corridor which are served by the Arriva 850 service every hour. Two trains an hour depart Wargrave station for Henley and Twyford. Wargrave Station is the most lightly trafficked rail station in the borough with 92,180 entry and exits during 2019/20. Accessibility mapping shows how Wargrave station has the potential to be developed as a transport interchange for access to Twyford, Reading and the hospital.
- Crowthorne Station is in the neighbouring Borough of Bracknell Forest. The station is 20-25 minutes' walk from communities within the southern parish of Wokingham Without. Crowthorne station provides good access to Farnborough, Guildford, and Heathrow.

Consultation with Bracknell Forest Borough Council, Wokingham Without Parish Council and Great Western Railways reveals a desire by all parties to enhance bus connectivity with the station as no bus service currently links to it.

- Reading Station is one of Britain's busiest stations which has recently been subject to an £850 million regeneration project. The station has excellent connectivity across the rail network with trains departing on average every 4 minutes into London. Direct trains also run to Bristol, Wales, Manchester, Newbury and Plymouth. The Elizabeth line was introduced to the station in 2020. The Reading Plusbus ticketing schemes in one of the most successful in the Country, making bus/rail interchange more seamless. Buses from Woodley, Earley and the A327 corridor all stop within 2 minutes' walk of the main station entrance. With the station being the start of routes for most routes within Wokingham's urban areas, buses are highly visible and sit at stops for the start of service. Reading Buses have been successful in getting bus timetables and bus departure screens into the station buildings. On-board screens also present rail information as they approach the station stops.

Based on interview data for with passengers who drive to Twyford station and a review of parking session ticket holder data, there may be potential for local bus routes or park and ride bus routes to operate from the Wokingham and Earley areas.

In all cases it was suggested that real-time next-bus departure information could be presented in the stations. Integration of rail information within the Reading Buses/ Thames Valley Buses mobile application may also be a benefit to passengers looking to make bus/rail journeys.

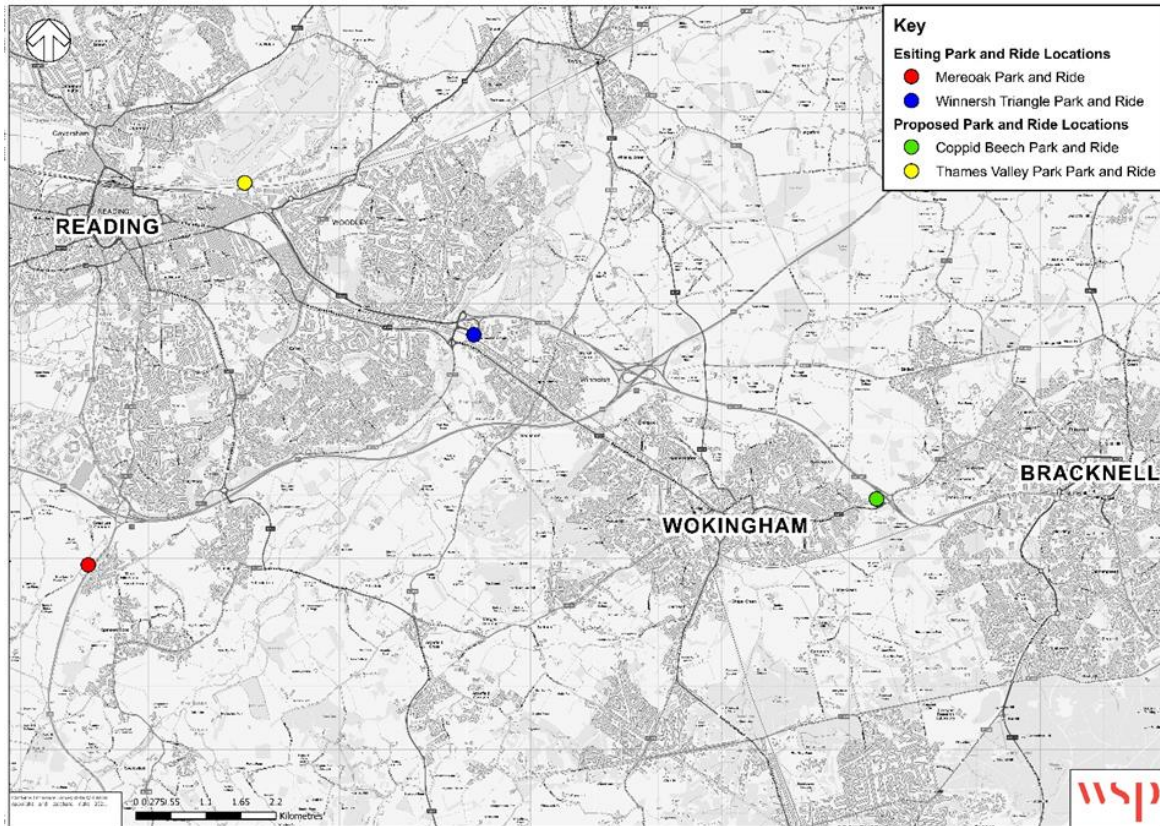
### **Park & Ride**

There are four park and ride sites in Wokingham. The locations are shown on Figure 2.18 and sites are as follows:

- MereOak is in the west of the borough, south of Reading, close to M4 junction 11. The site opened in 2015 and offers approximately 575 spaces. Since covid usage has dropped significantly and the main service now running is the 600. There are also National Express services to London Victoria. The hospital has recently started operating a service to this site for staff.
- Winnersh Triangle is midway between Wokingham and Reading town centres, close to the A3290/A329(M) junction and co-located with Winnersh Triangle railway station. Winnersh Triangle Park and Ride also opened in 2015 and offered a further 400 spaces for those travelling from the east. Winnersh Triangle is currently being expanded to offer an improved interchange facility with greater parking capacity, with services due to return in summer 2023.



Figure 2-18 – Park and Ride Locations



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- Thames Valley Park P&R site is a recently completed facility close to Reading town centre. It had a soft opening as a free car park in spring 2021, with enforcement of parking charges starting a few weeks later. The intention was to introduce a Park and Ride bus service into Reading Town Centre at the same time, however the pandemic had a significant impact on passenger demand. Currently it is mainly used as a Park & Ride to the hospital. By working in partnership with the Hospital, the site opened in June 2022 with a shuttle bus for hospital staff. Discussions are taking place to see how this could be developed further into a local bus service for the public.
- Coppid Beech, east of Wokingham towards Bracknell has just been completed. Concerns exist about the reduced demand since the pandemic with more homeworking and limited bus priority along London Road, the route into Wokingham.

Overall, the pandemic has caused considerable disruption to Park & Ride services and more flexible uses of the site is being looked at such as the hospital and University use.

## 2.10 Tackling Climate Change

**Table 2.11: Bus Fleets and Engine Types**

Operator	Corridor / Area	Total Vehicles	Ebus	Bio-methane	Euro 6	Euro 5
Reading	A329 – 4/X4	7	0	0	7	0
	A327 – 3	8	0	8	0	0
	A4 – 13/14	6	0	0	6	0
	Earley – 21	4	0	0	4	0
	Woodley – 13/14, 19a,b,c	8	0	0	8	0
	Southern Parishes - 600	1	0	1	0	0
Thames Valley Buses	Wokingham Town & Surrounding Area	6	0	0	6	0
Arriva	A4/A327	3	0	0	0	3
Horseman Coaches	Northern Parishes	1	0	0	1	0
	Southern Parishes	1	0	0	1	0
total buses		<b>45</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>3</b>
% by type of engine			<b>0%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>7%</b>

The details of what types of engines are used by operator is shown on Table 2.11. Reading Buses lead the way with one of the youngest and most environmentally friendly fleets in the UK. 100% of the Reading Buses fleet is rated Euro 6 or ultra-low emission due to the reduced CO2 emissions that bio-gas buses produce compared to a normal diesel bus.

The Wokingham Town link services are operated by Thames Valley buses. Most of the fleet operating in Wokingham Town and the surround areas, including the southern parishes, has recently been retrofitted with technology which improves the emissions rates of the vehicles from Euro 5 to Euro 6.

To fully decarbonise buses in Wokingham Borough the next step is to move towards electric vehicles and the provision of infrastructure to support their operation.

## 2.11 Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is a key measure of the success of local bus services. Appendix A contains tables summarising surveys from Transport Focus and the National Highways and Transportation Survey (NHT). The Transport Focus surveys capture bus passenger satisfaction results for Thames Valley Buses and Reading Buses. The surveys were undertaken in 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019. Given that 90% of services are provided by these providers, the Transport Focus surveys are considered to be representative of customer satisfaction across the BSIP area. The NHT surveys capture more general satisfaction levels for aspects of local bus services from Wokingham Borough residents during summer 2020.

For Thames Valley Buses, overall journey satisfaction is 94%. For all passengers, (fare-paying passengers, free pass holders, passengers not commuting and passengers saying they have a disability) were satisfied (either fairly or very) at 94% or more in every category.

All but two categories of the Thames Valley Buses 2019 survey show over 80% of all passengers identifying as satisfied. The two categories with satisfaction less than 80% are value for money and the information provided inside the bus with satisfaction levels of 62% and 67% respectively. These suggest areas of potential improvement, although they are still above the national average for these categories.

For Reading Buses overall satisfaction was 92%. Satisfaction was only less than 80% in 2019 in the following areas:

- Value for Money amongst all passenger groups
- Punctuality of the bus
- The length of time waiting for the bus
- The information provided inside the bus
- The amount of personal space you had around you

Excluding those aged 16 to 34, general satisfaction is consistently above 90% satisfied across the different passenger groups. Given the importance of satisfaction amongst the 16 to 34 age group, including that this is the key age group for introduction to independent travel on public transport, improving satisfaction for this passenger group will be considered carefully within this BSIP.

The NHT surveys identified 61% of residents were satisfied with local bus services overall compared to an average of 60% for residents in other local authority areas. Residents in Wokingham Borough also reported higher satisfaction levels with bus stop infrastructure, bus fares, personal safety and the overall quality of the bus services compared to residents in other local authority areas.

The areas where Wokingham residents' satisfaction fell below that of residents elsewhere in England was in relation to bus frequency, information on bus services, the responsiveness of transport and community transport provision.

Compared to previous years the greatest fall in satisfaction levels was around the provision of information, which is likely to be because of no printed information was being provided during the pandemic. Usually, Wokingham residents' satisfaction levels with information on bus services far exceeds the national average suggesting printed publicity is highly valued by residents.

## 2.12 Innovation

Reading Buses made a bid for a £1.5m technological upgrade and have secured funding for the project through the Government's Local Growth Fund via the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). The application to the LEP was made in 2020 for funding to upgrade the audio and visual next stop announcement hardware on buses as well as improve and implement live times infrastructure for customers for the whole of the Thames Valley area. The bid recognised that whilst Reading Buses are equipped with next stop audio and

visual announcements, Thames Valley Buses and Newbury & District buses are not, and this funding will enable those companies to upgrade buses. It also includes new bus departure screens at Reading and Newbury Stations, an upgrade of the back-office system and an improved online shop.

The funding will also allow Reading Buses to implement improvements to the system that provides the data to the buses, which will bring improvements to the 'real time' predictions on their app, website, bus shelters, railway stations and control room.

### **2.13 Financial Support for Bus Services**

Wokingham Borough Council provides £810,400 of financial support towards local bus services each year. £111,000 of this funding is provided by Central Government through the Bus Service Support Grant, the remainder is Council funding. Table 2.12 lists those services that receive financial support. This list is extensive, but several are for evenings and weekend services only.

In addition to the financial support provided by the Council, developer funding is also contributed towards the development of bus services in the Borough and most significantly in the Shinfield area. The Shinfield strategy is delivered in partnership with Reading Buses and Reading University. The impact of the Covid pandemic has meant that the growth required to maintain the strategy has not been achieved and government funding in the form of Covid Bus Service Support Grant (CBSSG) has provided a significant contribution towards the continued operation of the Leopard services in this area.

A further £1.6 million has been secured from developers for the provision of bus infrastructure in and around new developments. Other funding which the Council provides towards the operation of local transport services on an annual basis includes:

- £920,400\* for concessionary fare payments
- £103,00 towards the operation of community and volunteer transport services

(\*based on 2018/19 pre-covid payments)

£12.6 million has been committed for the construction and expansion of park and ride sites in the borough. Approximately £9.54 million of the funding has been secured from the Local Enterprise Partnership.

**Table 2.12: Local Bus Services Receiving Financial Support**

<b>Route</b>	<b>Operator</b>	<b>Funding Source</b>	<b>Route Number</b>	<b>Mileage**</b>
<b>Reading – Shinfield – Arborfield - Wokingham</b>	Reading Buses	S106	Leopards 3	349,800
<b>Reading – Three Mile Cross – Swallowfield – Riseley</b>	Reading Buses	Council	600	12,600
<b>Reading – Woodley – Earley – Reading</b>	Reading Buses	Council	19a/c	71,170
<b>Norreys Estate – Wokingham – Tesco</b>	Thames Valley Buses	Council / S106	121	28,412
<b>Woosehill – Emmbrook – Wokingham</b>	Thames Valley Buses	Council	122/3	13,904
<b>Wokingham – Finchampstead – Crowthorne</b>	Thames Valley Buses	Council / S106	125/A/B	21,408
<b>Reading – Sonning – Twyford – Maidenhead</b>	Thames Valley Buses	Council	127	9,464
<b>Reading – Woodley – Sonning – Twyford – Winnersh – Wokingham</b>	Thames Valley Buses	Council	128/129	104,228
<b>Reading – Three Mile Cross – Riseley – Finchampstead – Wokingham</b>	Horseman Coaches	Council	145	2,170
<b>Wokingham – Bean Oak – Bracknell</b>	Thames Valley Buses	Council*	151/151A	25,288
<b>Upper Wargrave – Reading</b>	Horseman Coaches	Council	153	787
<b>Stratfield Saye – Beech Hill – Loddon Court Farm – Reading</b>	Horseman Coaches	Council*	154	950
<b>Three Mile Cross – Lower Earley – Woodley – Bulmershe School</b>	Horseman Coaches	Council	983	3,021
<b>Shinfield – Lower Earley – Forest, Emmbrook &amp; Holt Schools</b>	Horseman Coaches	Council	202	3,116
<b>Whitley Wood – Lower Earley – Forest, Emmbrook &amp; Holt Schools</b>	Horseman Coaches	Council	244	6,422

\*Shared funding contributions with neighbouring authorities or Parish Councils

\*\*Based on annual supported scheduled mileage for 2019/20

**2.14 Car parking provision**

Car parking supply and pricing influences the attractiveness of local bus services. At Council owned car parks, charges have not been raised since 2018 and the borough is considering significant increases in these as shown on Table 2.13 below.

**Table 2.13: Parking Charges and Proposed Changes**

Time period	In Wokingham Town			Outside of Wokingham Town		
	Existing Charge	Proposed Charge	Increase	Existing Charge*	Proposed Charge	Increase
1 hour	£0.80	£1.30	£0.50	£0.50/£0.80	£1.00	up to £0.50
2 hours	£1.20	£2.50	£1.30	£0.60/£1.20	£2.00	up to £1.40
4 hours	£2.00	£4.50	£2.50	£1.50/£2.00	£4.00	up to £2.50
6 hours	£3.00	£6.50	£3.50	£3.00	£6.00	£3.00
> 6 hours	£4.00	£9.00	£5.00	£4.00	£8.00	£4.00

**Notes:**

\* charges vary by car park

– Existing charges apply 8am to 6pm Monday to Saturday inclusive

Proposed charges will apply 6am to 10pm Monday to Sunday inclusive

– Alternative charges apply to Country Parks, for market traders and beyond 10pm.

**Table 2.14: Town Centre Parking Provisions**

Area	Car Park	Owner	Spaces
Wokingham Town	Carnival	Council	529
	Denmark Street	Council	WBC
	Easthampstead (West)	Council	57
	Easthampstead (East)	Council	233
	Rose Street	Council	43
	Cockpit Path	Council	106
Woodley	Crockhamwell Road	Council	168
	Lytham Road (East)	Council	23
	Lytham Road (West)	Council	33
	Headley Road	Council	205
	Crockhamwell Road	Council	168

The above increases would mean an adult day ticket for the simply Reading zone would be the same price as four hours parking, and cheaper than six hours parking fees. An adult daily simply Wokingham & Reading bus ticket would be the same price as six hours parking. If there are two or more people travelling a group ticket for up to four people would also be more price competitive at £10.

All town centre car parks in Woodley are owned and operated by Wokingham Borough Council. Three of the four car parks are short stay only. Daily parking charges are the same as daily bus fares to Woodley Town Centre. For journeys to Reading Town Centre daily bus fares are the same as short stay parking charges. Feedback from Woodley Town Council is that lower fares are desirable to make bus travel to and from Woodley more attractive.

**Table 2.15: Rail Station and Park and Ride Sites Parking Provisions**

Car Park		Owner	Spaces	Parking Charges			
				Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Annual
Rail Station	Wokingham	Private	531	£8.60	£39.30	£115.90	£1,159.00
	Winnersh Triangle (Rail user)	Council	378*	£4.00	-	-	£607.20
	Earley	Council	45	£4.00	-	-	£607.20
	Twyford	Private	355	£7.60	£38.00	£130.00	£1,300.00
	Wargrave	Private	36	-	-	-	-
	Crowthorne	Private	43	£2.70	£13.50	£56.00	£570.00
	Reading	Private	1600	£25.00	-	£220.00	£1,850.00
Park & Ride Site	MereOak	Council	575	£1.00	-	-	-
	Winnersh Triangle (Bus user)	Council	378*	£1.00	-	-	-

Except for Earley Station and Winnersh Triangle car parks, car parks are operated by the private sector on behalf of the rail industry. For Twyford, Crowthorne and Reading Station car parks, rail passengers may book and pay online for their parking space in advance of arriving at the station. Apart from Crowthorne and Wargrave stations, daily parking charges are the same or more than local daily bus tickets. Where bus passengers are travelling longer distances or car sharing, then bus travel is less attractive. There is scope for the Council to work with operators on fare strategies to promote attractive and seamless fares for rail commuters.

For residents travelling to London from Woodley, it is more cost effective for the passenger to travel from Twyford Station than from Reading Station. The cost of an all-day peak time travelcard from Reading Station to London is £57.20, whereas the equivalent ticket from Twyford Station is £37.20. There are currently very limited local bus services connecting Woodley and Twyford station.

**2.15 Challenges and Opportunities for Bus Travel**

In reviewing the exiting situation, it is helpful to consider challenges and opportunities for bus travel in the borough. As previously noted, up to the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, Wokingham experienced bus passenger growth over the last few years. But post pandemic, there are several challenges and barriers to achieving further passenger growth.

Table 2.16 below summarises the main challenges and opportunities. Note that they are grouped into pandemic and economic recovery, travel choices and alternatives, carbonisation and air quality and future growth and sustainable communities.

**Table 2.16 Challenges and Opportunities**

Challenges	Opportunities
<b>Pandemic and economic recovery</b>	
1) Inflation from driver and fuel cost increases with driver costs the highest outside London. This is increasing costs of services and making viability more difficult.	1) Passenger demand returns and stabilises after the pandemic with services returning to a pre pandemic levels.
2) Bus driver shortages causing buses to be cancelled and services become less reliable. This is especially a problem for Thames Valley Buses and relates to the above driver cost inflation.	2) The BSIP presents an opportunity to reconsider the current public transport provision and how the network can be revised and simplified to better meet the needs of existing and future communities.
3) Changes in travel patterns post pandemic, with more people working from home. The Borough has a high proportion of professionals who are able to work from home 2-3 days per week. This reduces peak hour travel demand, less bus travel and reduced fares income.	3) Through the Customer Charter and the annual review of the BSIP, bus passengers in the Borough will be given more of a voice in the way that local bus services are delivered.
<b>Travel choices and alternatives</b>	
4) There is a lack of ticket integration between Arriva and Reading Transport’s services. Otherwise, this is not much of a problem as so many of the services by run by Reading Buses or Thames Valley Buses.	4) Potential to develop more integrated inter ticketing schemes, although there is already a joint Reading and Wokingham area travel card.
5) The cost of travel and journey times for rail passengers is increased by poor accessibility to local stations. The lack of seamless ticketing and through fares between bus services and between bus and rail (other than the PlusBus offer which is not sufficiently comprehensive).	5) Increases in fuel costs, cars and general cost of living will increase the attractiveness of buses.
6) Some corridors and local routes have low frequency which is not sufficiently attractive to non-public transport users or occasional users.	6) An increase in the Borough’s parking charges will make bus travel more price competitive.
7) The rise of Uber and other private hire schemes are able to compete with bus fares especially if in a shared vehicle.	7) Providing bus priority measures to reduce journey times and variations in times will make buses more efficient and attractive.
8) By providing segregated cycle routes in line with LTN1/20 road space may be allocated to cycles in preference to bus lanes. The Council will need to carefully consider the use of road space for local bus services and balance the needs of all road users.	8) By co-ordinating the approach of the BSIP with the Local Walking and Cycling Implementation Plan (LCWIP) the Council can ensure direct and convenient points of access to the bus network for people who walk and cycle, so allowing walking and cycling to form parts of longer active journeys utilising the bus network.
<b>Carbonisation and air quality</b>	
9) Lack of availability of a clean and quiet bus rolling stock, which is largely assumed to be Ebuses. There are practical operational challenges with using Ebuses associated with a limited range, charging points, long order times and high capital prices. Initially there is most potential for P & R services where they can recharge and smaller buses.	10) Supporting operators to migrate to electric vehicles there is an opportunity to improve outcomes of the Air Quality Action Plan.
10) Lack of Ebus charging locations, either on the journey or at the depots.	11) Increased bus usage is an important component of the Borough Air Quality Action Plan and Climate Change Emergency Plan.
11) Walking for short trips and cycling for longer ones are being encouraged and more attractive, as the cycle network expands. Ebikes in particular offer an excellent way to travel bus distances.	12) Expanding the success of the My Journey programme to target areas other areas of the Borough to replicate the successes since pre-pandemic
12) Bus Emissions from diesel vehicles negatively impact on the levels of air quality, and this presents a particular challenge for buses with the stop, start nature of bus services.	

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Challenges	Opportunities
<b>Future growth and sustainable communities</b>	
13) High levels of car ownership and lack of regular bus services especially in the lower density areas, means that buses are not attractive to car drivers.	13) Connecting to new demand from the Strategic Development Locations at the south of M4, Arborfield, South Wokingham and North Wokingham.
14) New housing areas are not always able to provide frequent and reliable bus services. This in is part due to some areas being of relative low density with high car ownership and 2 parking spaces per dwelling.	14) Potential to improve accessibility to lower density and rural areas.
15) Population growth is expected to be greatest amongst the over 85 age group, as residents live longer and are active for longer. With more residents becoming eligible for concessionary bus travel this presents increasing financial pressures for the Council through increased concessionary fare payments	15) With more residents becoming eligible for concessionary travel passenger trips will increase.
	16) Hospital shuttle Park and Ride bus has the potential to be developed into a local bus service.
	17) Continued house building and new home occupations has the potential to change behaviours and increase bus travel.

### 3. TARGETS

The targets set out in this section are subject to sufficient funding being made available to implement the Action Plan in Section 4. The targets have been identified based on the performance of the existing network described in Section 2 and in consultation with stakeholder. Each target is set against the eight objectives, and will measure the progress of each objective.

**Objective 1: Grow passenger numbers to pre-pandemic levels and to continue that growth.**

Target 1: Annual Passenger Numbers to increase as set out in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1 Target for Number of Passengers**

	2018/19	2019/20	2024/25	2029/30	2039/40	BSIP Proposals	How measured
T1: Annual Number of Passengers in millions	2.80	2.80	3.08	4.2	5.6	All proposals and especially 1A-F, 2A-E & 3A-H	operator passenger data reported to DfT
Growth % from 2019/20	Base	Base	10%	50%	100%		

The Council will use the figures issued by the Department for Transport for total passengers carried per annum in Wokingham Borough, based bus operator’s data. Passenger recovery is currently at 81%. By 2024/25, 10% on pre-pandemic passenger levels is aim for, increasing to 50% by 2029/30 and 100% by 2039/40.

**Objective 2: Return bus services to pre-pandemic levels, improve levels of service and extend to new areas of travel demand.**

Target 2: Annual bus kms to increase, as set out in Table 3.2.

**Table 3.2 Target for Bus Vehicle Kms**

	2018/19	2019/20	2024/25	2029/30	2039/40	BSIP Proposals	How measured
T2: Annual Bus Vehicle Kms	TBC	1.851	1.94355	2.49885	3.1467	Proposals 1A-F & 2A-E	operator mileage data submitted to DfT
Growth % from 2019/20		Base	5%	35%	70%		

As vehicle loadings increase, there will then be a need to increase vehicle kilometres either through increasing the frequencies of existing services or through implementing a revised network which will match an increasing demand for bus travel with capacity on the network.

**Objective 3: Improve bus journey times, reliability and punctuality along key transport corridors.**

Target 3A: Bus journey times on key corridors to reduce as stated in Table 3.3.

Target 3B: To improve bus punctuality as set out in Table 3.3.

Bus operator data collected by the DfT, and available through their Bus Open Data Service (BODs), has been reviewed for the main corridors to identify the main stops and route sections with delays. The data was reviewed over a 4-week period, for weekdays in September 2022.

Target 3C: Improve passenger perceived punctuality and journey times as shown in Table 3.3. The survey data is from passenger surveys.

**Table 3.3 Targets for Bus Journey Time Savings, Reliability and Punctuality on Key Corridors**

	2018/19	2019/20	2024/25	2029/30	2039/40	BSIP Proposals	How measured
T3A: Average daily (weekday) journey time on 5 key corridors	No data	75.3 Mins	72 Mins	68 Mins	61 Mins	Proposals 3A-H	Analysis of Real Time Information Data on 5 key corridors: A327, A329, A329M, A4, A33 from DfT BODS data 05/09/2022-30/09/22
T3B: Bus punctuality / Reliability	No data	74.94%	80%	85%	90%	Proposals 3A-H	Analysis of Real Time Information using DfT BODS data for the Wokingham area. 12 months average of 'on-time' buses. For 2019/20 applied 2021/22.
T3C: Passenger perceived punctuality and journey time	85%	84%	88%	90%	95%	Proposals 3A-H	Analysis of operator bus satisfaction surveys from Reading Buses & Thames Valley Buses (expect to be shortened)

**Objective 4: Make fares affordable and simpler.**

Targets 4A and 4B set out targets on fares and ticketing from the passengers’ perspective using on-bus surveys relating to Reading Buses and Thames Valley Buses services.

**Table 3.4 Targets for Fares & Ticketing**

	2018/19	2019/20	2024/25	2029/30	2039/40	BSIP Proposals	How measured
T4A: Reading Buses – Passenger view on fares & ticketing	71%	67%	70%	74%	81%	Proposals 4A-D, 5A-D, 6A-D	Analysis of Reading Bus satisfaction surveys (expect to be shortened): All satisfied value for money by fare paying passengers
T4B: Thames Valley Buses – Passenger views on fares and ticketing	no data	62%	65%	68%	75%	Proposals 4A-D, 5A-D, 6A-D	Analysis of Thames Valley Bus satisfaction surveys (expect to be shortened): All satisfied value for money by fare paying passengers

**Objective 5: Deliver a greener bus network by reducing carbon emissions and provide residents with attractive greener travel alternatives.**

Targets 5A: Transition the bus fleet towards E-buses as indicated on Table 3.5. Currently there are no electric buses in the fleet, but the targets identify a steady shift towards them, 60% by 2030 and 100% by 2040.

Target 5B: Passenger comfort to meet targets in Table 3.5. This data would be obtained from passenger surveys at Reading Buses and Thames Valley Buses, which are currently high at 88%.

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**Table 3.5 Targets Bus Vehicle Types**

T5A: Bus Type	Total Vehicles 2022/23	2022/3 % *	2024/25 %	2029/30 %	2039/40 %	BSIP Proposals	How measured
Euro 5	3	7	0	0	0	Proposals 7A-F	data from operators
Euro 6	33	73	70	20	0		
Bio-methane	9	20	20	20	0		
E-bus	0	0	10	60	100		
<b>total:</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>		
T5B: Passenger satisfaction with bus		88%	90%	93%	95%	Proposals 7A-F	Analysis of operator bus satisfaction surveys (expect to be shortened)

\* The base 2022/3 passenger survey data uses the latest survey from 2019

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**Objective 6: Improve bus integration with rail passengers, cyclists, pedestrians and car users.**

Target 6A: Grow the volume of Park & Ride ticket sales as shown in Table 3.6. Data to be obtained from the operators.

**Table 3.6 Target Park & Ride Ticket Sales**

	2018/19	2019/20	2024/25	2029/30	2039/40	BSIP Proposals	How measured
T6A: Annual usage of Park & Ride sites	152,800	145,369	152,800	202,023	353,147	Proposals 10A-E	P & R sites passengers from operator

Park and ride services have been the slowest to recover post-pandemic, which is reflected in the target for 2024/25. The borough is working to expand capacity at Winnersh Triangle and has further sites to bring into operating, therefore beyond 2024/25, there is expected to be growth in the number of passengers travelling on park and ride services.

**Objective 7: Improve passenger engagement and satisfaction of bus services.**

Targets 7A-7B review bus passenger satisfaction and are taken from the results of the annual National Highways and Transportation (NHT) survey for Wokingham Borough. These surveys cover a sample of all residents of the Borough, so providing an indication of how bus services are perceived by residents who do not use the bus. Two indices have been selected from the NHT surveys:

- KBI 07 – Local Bus Services Satisfaction (BVPI 104)
- KBI 08 – Public Transport Information (BVPI 103)

Targets 7C & 7D: Targets 7C & 7D use the Transport Focus results for overall satisfaction for the two main operators in Wokingham Borough (Reading Transport and Thames Valley Buses). The main operators constitute at least 95% of service mileage operated. Increasing bus usage will depend on persuading non-bus users of the attractiveness of the services offered so are a useful additional view to that of regular passengers. Typically, the satisfaction levels are lower in the NHT surveys than the figures provided by Transport Focus surveys.

**Table 3.7 Targets for Passenger Satisfaction**

Measure	2018/19	2019/20	2024/25	2029/30	2039/40	BSIP Proposals	How measured
T7A: NHT Local Bus Satisfaction	64%	67%	70%	75%	80%	All proposals	NHT Local Bus Satisfaction (KBI 104)
T7B: NHT Public Transport Information	48%	53%	58%	63%	68%	All proposals	NHT Public Transport Information (KBI 103)
T7C: Reading Buses – Transport Focus Satisfaction	94%	92%	95%	96%	97%	All proposals	Analysis of Thames Valley Buses surveys (to be shortened) 'overall journey satisfaction of all passengers': 'all satisfied')
T7D: Thames Valley Buses – Transport Focus Satisfaction	-	94%	95%	96%	97%	All proposals	Analysis of Reading Buses surveys (to be shortened) 'overall journey satisfaction of all passengers': 'all satisfied')

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**Objective 8: Improve accessibility to transport services and the local bus network for communities in more rural and low-density areas.**

Target T8: Annual bus kms in rural areas to increase, as set out in Table 3.8.

**Table 3.8 Target Rural Accessibility Bus Vehicle Kms**

	2022/23	2024/25	2029/30	2039/40	BSIP Proposals	How measured
T8: Annual Bus Vehicle Kms in Rural Areas	119197	143037	166876	202635	Proposals 14A-C, 15A-B	Operator mileage data for % of routes in rural areas for routes 3 (5%), 600 (20%), 125/A/B (100%) & 127/8/9 (20%)
Growth % from 2022/23	Base	20%	40%	70%		

**Objective 9: Ensure bus travel is a safe means of travel.**

Target 9A: Personal safety on bus to meet those set out in Table 3.9.

Target 9B: Personal safety at bus stops to meet those set out in Table 3.9.

Perceptions of personal safety on board local bus services and whilst waiting at bus stops in the borough are collected as part of the NHT survey. For the latest data in summer 2022, the Borough performs above the national average by 7% on bus and 4% at bus stops.

**Table 3.9 Targets for Safety**

Measure	2018/19	2019/20 *	2024/25	2029/30	2039/40	BSIP Proposals	How measured
T9A: Personal Safety on Bus	No data	72%	76%	79%	83%	Proposals 16A-C, 17A	From National Highways & Transportation Survey (IHT) Survey PTBI10
T9B: Personal Safety at Bus Stop	No data	64%	67%	71%	74%	Proposals 16A-C, 17A	From National Highways & Transportation Survey (IHT) Survey PTBI11
* Latest data Summer 2022							

#### 4. DELIVERY ACTION PLAN

This section sets out the BSIP proposals for delivering better bus services, which meet the Council’s vision and objectives, as set out in sections 1.3-4 of this document. The BSIP proposals aim to deliver our objectives which are based on the National Bus Strategy. All proposals are subject to Department for Transport funding being available to fund them.

The delivery of the action plan is set out below in a series of tables corresponding to the National Bus Strategy and Borough objectives. All actions are subject to the availability of appropriate funding. Each of the individual elements of the action plan has been developed with a view to being financially sustainable in the medium-term. In some instances, capital funding will be required for the delivery of bus priority measures so that operational efficiencies can be achieved. Revenue funding will aim to pump-prime service enhancements in the short-term, so to attract new passengers who continue to travel and help sustain the services in the longer term. This approach will provide time for the priority measures to be implemented and passenger numbers to grow, with the view to enabling services to be run commercially after this initial period. The proposals and actions have been developed by the Council working in partnership with local operators and taking account of feedback from passengers and other key stakeholders.

##### 4.1 More Frequent & Reliable Services

The first main group of proposals focuses on the National Bus Strategy objective for more frequent and reliable services which are summarised in Table 4.1. This corresponds into the delivery of the first three Council objectives which are:

- Objective 1: Grow passenger numbers to pre-pandemic levels and to continue that growth.
- Objective 2: Return bus services to pre-pandemic levels, improve levels of service and extend to new areas of travel demand.
- Objective 3: Improve bus journey times, reliability and punctuality along key transport corridors.

The proposals aim to improve service frequencies and introducing more bus priority along the five bus corridors. These corridors and areas are identified in Table 4.1. It will also be important to work with Reading Borough Council as the corridors extend into Reading Borough.

##### **CASE STUDY: Bus Gate & Sustainable Link Road in New Development**



Bus Gate and Sustainable Link between Shinfield and Spencers Wood. As part of a major new development with 2,500 dwellings is a sustainable link for buses, cycles and pedestrians only. Delivered is part of the development proposals and has encouraged more bus use in the area. The photo shows the gate, just completed and is now in full operation.



**Table 4.1 More Frequent & Reliable Services (NBS), WBC Objectives 1, 2 & 3**

Proposal	Existing Situation	Action	Timescale	Key Partners
BSIP Proposal 1: Review and increase service frequency on key corridors	Some corridors and local routes have low frequency which is not sufficiently attractive to non-public transport users or occasional users. Providing bus priority measures to reduce journey times and variations in times will make buses more efficient and attractive. Increased bus usage is an important component of the Borough Air Quality Action Plan and Climate Change Emergency Plan.	1A: Work with operators on the key corridors to improve service frequency through the Enhanced Partnership.	From April 2023	Bus operators, Reading BC, Bracknell BC, Hospital, Town & Parish Councils
		1B: A329 Corridor: Bracknell - Wokingham - Winnersh - Reading, the 4 & X4 Lion route increase to 15 minute service	From Sept 2023 subject to funding	Bus operators, Reading BC, Bracknell BC, Town & Parish Clls
		1C: A327 Corridor: Wokingham - Finchampstead - Arborfield/Spencers Wood - Shinfield - Reading, the Leopard Route 3. Increase frequencies: Reading to Shinfield & Arborfield to 15min, Arborfield to Wokingham to 30min.	From Sept 2023 subject to funding	Bus operators, Reading BC, Bracknell BC, Town & Parish Clls
		1D: A4/A321 Corridor: Reading - Woodley - Twyford - Henley - Wokingham routes 128 & 129. Frequency to 30min.	From Aug 2023 subject to funding	Bus operators, Reading BC, Town & Parish Clls
		1E: A329(M) Corridor. Reading - Thames Valley Park - Winnersh Park & Rides. Re-establish the bus services to the Park & Ride sites.	From Sept 2023 subject to funding	Bus operators, Reading BC
		1F: The A33 corridor Reading - Mere oak P & R - Spencers Wood - Swallowfield. Route 600. Increase to 30min frequency to Spencers Wood & Swallowfield.	From Sept 2023 subject to funding	Bus operators, Reading BC, Town & Parish Clls
BSIP Proposal 2: Review and improve service frequency to urban areas of Earley, Woodley, Wokingham Town and new development areas.		2A: Improve the frequencies to North Wokingham, Woosehill and Emmbrook.	From Aug 2023 subject to funding	Bus operators, Town & Parish Clls
		2B: Reading - Earley - Lower Earley/ Maiden Earleigh Area. Claret route 21 and Little Oranges routes 19a/19b/19c. Review the patterns of services and increase frequencies.	From Sept 2023 subject to funding	Bus operators, Reading BC, Town & Parish Clls
		2C: Reading - Woodley - North Earley. Oranges route 13 & 14 improve frequencies.	From Sept 2023 subject to funding	Bus operators, Reading BC, Town & Parish Clls
		2D: Plan a new south of railway route between Wokingham and Bracknell via the South Wokingham development area.	From 2025, subject to funding from developers	Bus operators, Bracknell BC, developers, Town & Parish Clls
		2E: Plan other bus routes accessing new development areas that emerge from the Local Plan.	To coincide with development occupations	Bus operators, developers Town & Parish Clls

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Proposal	Existing Situation	Action	Timescale	Key Partners
BSIP Proposal 3: Increase bus priority measures on key corridors. Identify bus priority that includes additional bus lanes,	Bus journeys are delayed in traffic on most of the corridors. Providing bus priority measures to reduce journey times and	3A: Develop a detailed delivery programme of bus priority measures for all corridors based on level of funding available.	From April 2023 subject to funding	Bus operators, Reading BC, Bracknell BC
		3B: A329 Corridor: Bracknell - Wokingham - Winnersh - Reading. Identify bus delay locations and deliver bus priority measures. To include Winnersh crossroads, Station Approach & Coppid Beach junctions. Ties in with Reading BC Red Route in 2017 from the Borough Boundary.	From April 2024 subject to funding	Bus operators, Reading BC, Bracknell BC
		3C: A327 Corridor: Wokingham - Finchampsstead - Arborfield - Shinfield - Reading, the 3 Leopard Route. Identify bus delay locations, mainly on Shinfield Road between the M4 and Reading Borough boundary near the University. Also working with Reading Borough who are introducing bus priority at signalised junctions	From April 2024 subject to funding	Bus operators, Reading BC
		3D: A4/A321 Corridor: Reading - Woodley - Twyford - Henley - Wokingham. Construct bus lane on A4 from Reading Borough boundary towards Earley. This will tie in with Reading BC, who are delivering a bus lane from the Borough boundary to Cemetery Junction.	From April 2024 subject to funding	Bus operators, Reading BC
		3E: A329(M) Corridor. Reading - Thames Valley Park - Winnersh. To tie in with the Reading Borough proposals for the corridor. These also connect with the Reading BC A4 corridor improvements.	From April 2024 subject to funding	Bus operators, Reading BC
		3F: The A33 corridor Reading - Mereok P & R - Spencers Wood - Swallowfield. Route 600. The A33 north of the M4 is being extensively addressed by Reading Borough as part of a Superbus route with additional bus lanes southbound around the Matalan junction and northbound near to the Tesco depot and Bennet Rd gyratory. Support Reading BC improvements in and around the Mereok P & R and work with RBC to deliver more extensive measures as the site, as it is within WBC.	From April 2024 subject to funding	Bus operators, Reading BC
		3G: Localised bus priority measures at key junctions. To include yellow box junctions in urban areas and traffic signal bus priority.	From April 2024 subject to funding	Bus operators, Reading BC
		3H: Localised bus priority traffic management measures. To include changing parking restrictions to improve bus access and convert some speed humps to speed cushions.	From April 2024 subject to funding	Bus operators, Reading BC

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4.2 Make fares affordable and simpler

Lower fares will attract more passengers. Fares currently in the area are reckoned to be reasonable and given the inflationary pressures in the industry, even retaining at existing levels is an achievement. Subject to funding, there are a series of proposals in Table 4.2 that aim to reduce and simplify fares. In terms of having consistent fares and fares structures a dominant operator is helpful. Some of the proposals are relying on the Reading BC BSIP which is applying subsidies to the ‘Simply Reading Zone’. These include parts of Wokingham that cover the University, Woodley, Earley, Mere oak and Sonning.

**Table 4.2 Making Fares Lower and Simpler (NBS), WBC Objective 4**

Proposal	Existing Situation	Action	Timescale	Key Partners
BSIP Proposal 4: Keep fares at an affordable level and reduce where possible.	Fares are generally considered to be set at reasonable levels in the Borough, but reductions in prices would help to attract more passengers. Increases in fuel costs, cars and general cost of living will increase the attractiveness of buses.	4A: Work with operators to develop proposals for a consistent, lower fares structure through the Enhanced Partnership arrangements.	From April 2023	Bus operators, Reading BC, Bracknell BC
		4B: We will work with all operators to ensure low fares are offered to all teenagers under the age of 18 on all services.	From April 2023 subject to funding	
		4C: Introducing a flat fare regardless of age between Reading town centre and the University of Reading.	From April 2023 subject to funding	
		4D: Work with operators to introduce a capped daily fare. Areas in the 'Simply Reading Zone' that include Woodley Earley and the A4 corridor to Sonning to benefit from the Reading BC scheme.	From Feb 2023 subject to funding	

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Proposal	Existing Situation	Action	Timescale	Key Partners
BSIP Proposal 5: Simplify fares	There is a lack of ticket integration between Arriva and Reading Transport’s services. Otherwise, this is not much of a problem as so many of the services by run by Reading Buses or Thames Valley Buses. There is potential to develop more integrated inter ticketing schemes, although there is already a joint Reading and Wokingham area travel card.	5A: Work with operators to develop proposals for a simpler fares structure through the Enhanced Partnership arrangements.	From April 2023 subject to funding	Bus operators, Reading BC, Bracknell BC
		5B: For the Reading & Wokingham Fares zone introduce a daily discounted / capped fare.	DONE	
		5C: Work with operators on the introduction of ‘touch on’ and ‘touch off’ technology. (Needed for the discounted day ticket in the Simply Reading Zone)	From Feb 2023	
		5D: Simplify fares where multi-operators service exist, currently only an issue on the A4 corridor in Wokingham BC.	From April 2023 subject to funding	
BSIP Proposal 6: Integrate ticketing between operators and other sustainable modes	The cost of travel and journey times for rail passengers is increased by poor accessibility to local stations. The lack of seamless ticketing and through fares between bus services and between bus and rail (other than the PlusBus offer which is not sufficiently comprehensive).	6A: Work with operators to agree principles for multi-operator ticketing where more than one operator’s services are available through the Enhanced Partnership arrangements.	From April 2023 subject to funding	Bus operators Reading BC, Bracknell BC, Network Rail, Great Western Railway, South Western Rail, Co-Wheels, Thames Valley Berkshire LEP, Town & Parish Clls
		6B: Work with the two main operators, Reading Buses & Thames Valley Buses so tickets are interchangeable.	DONE	
		6C: Become part of a wider Reading Scheme (potentially using DfT back-office functionality) to allow weekly and longer-term multi-operator ticketing to be made available.	From April 2023 subject to funding	
		6D: Integrate bus tickets with rail and other transport services such as car share and bike hire. Support the development of Mobility as a Service (MaaS) both within Wokingham, Reading and across the wider Thames Valley area.	From April 2023 subject to funding	

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4.3 Deliver a greener bus network by reducing carbon emissions and provide residents with attractive greener travel alternatives

A clean and green bus fleet is essential for the network. The targets for transitioning the bus fleet were shown in Table 3.5. Much of the funding for this is done via the Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas Scheme 9 (ZEBRAS) which includes grants for the rolling stock and charging infrastructure. Table 4.3 below sets out the proposals for decarbonising the bus fleet with Actions 7A-E.

**Table 4.3 Modern Buses and Decarbonisation (NBS), WBC Objective 5**

Proposal	Existing Situation	Action	Timescale	Key Partners
BSIP Proposal 7: Invest in improved bus vehicles and transition buses to zero carbon.	Lack of availability of a clean and quiet bus rolling stock, which is largely assumed to be Ebuses. There are practical operational	7A: Work with operators to ensure buses are a high specification through the Enhanced Partnership arrangements.	From April 2023	Bus operators, Reading BC
		7B: Work with operators to implement accessibility improvements to further cater for wheel chair users and for parents and carers with push chairs.	From April 2023	Bus operators, Reading BC
		7C: Rolling programme to introduce zero-emission electric vehicles in line with Wokingham BC's carbon strategy. Part of ZEBRAS scheme.	From April 2023 subject to funding	Bus operators, Reading BC
		7D: Work with operators to install the required infrastructure for eclectic vehicles at garages and bus stops. Part of ZEBRAS scheme.	From Feb 2023 subject to funding	Bus operators, Reading BC
		7E: Investigate and deliver a Green Bus Hub. To include a vehicle maintenance building, small office, EV charging facilities and bus priority access.	From Feb 2023 subject to funding	Bus operators, Reading BC
		7F: Work with operators in the longer term to trial and if successful roll out driverless buses where appropriate.	2030 onwards	Bus operators, Reading BC

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4.4 Improve bus integration with rail passengers, cyclists, pedestrians and car drivers

Greater integration of buses with all other modes of transport is an important aspect of delivering a seamless public transport network. Table 4.4 below lists a series of actions that are split into the different modes of transport. The Borough has done much work in recent years on the Park and Ride sites and includes the new one at Coppid Beech. Demand for them has reduced, but it is returning slowly and more flexible ways of using the sites is being identified. The borough is also looking to develop a differential car parking charging system which should result in greater demand at the P & R sites.

**CASE STUDY: Bus interchange at Wokingham rail station**



The rail station at Wokingham was renewed and included an excellent bus interchange as shown in the photo. There are two full length stops, shelters with Real Time Information. Buses can also use the facility as a layover location.

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**Table 4.4 Better Bus Integration with Other Modes (NBS), WBC Objective 6**

Proposal	Existing Situation	Action	Timescale	Key Partners
BSIP Proposal 8: Integrate with walking and cycling networks	By co-ordinating the approach of the BSIP with the Local Walking and Cycling Implementation Plan (LCWIP) the Council can ensure direct and convenient points of access to the bus network for people who walk and cycle, so allowing walking and cycling to form parts of longer active journeys utilising the bus network.	8A: Access to bus stops will be part of the Local Walking and Cycling Implementation Plan. This will take into account wayfinding, connectivity, permeability, safety and security and new and improved transport hubs.	From April 2023	Bus operators, Reading BC, Town & Parish Clls
		8B: New development areas to be set out with safe, secure route to regularly spaced bus stops and housing to be within a maximum walking distance of 400m to a stop.	From April 2023	Bus operators, Reading BC, Town & Parish Clls
BSIP Proposal 9: Integrate with the rail network	The cost of travel and journey times for rail passengers is increased by poor accessibility to local stations. The lack of seamless ticketing and through fares between bus services and between bus and rail (other than the PlusBus offer which is not sufficiently comprehensive).	9A: The Council will work with stakeholders to improve bus/rail infrastructure. To include high quality waiting facilities, information boards and bus overlays, e.g. at Twyford station.	From April 2023 subject to funding	Bus & rail operators, Reading BC
		9B: Increase bus services to rail stations. This is needed at Twyford and Crowthorne. Also required at Green Park station which is due to open in 2023.	From Aug 2023 subject to funding	Bus & Rail operators, Reading BC, Town & Parish Clls
		9C: Expand the PlusBus ticketing arrangements for areas outside of existing zones.	From April 2023	Bus operators, Reading BC
		9D: Provide greater promotion and publicity of bus /rail services through My Journey.	ONGOING	Bus & rail operators, Reading BC
BSIP Proposal 10: Continue to develop the Park & Ride sites so they become effective transport interchanges	Park & Ride has seen demand reduce during and after the pandemic with travel patterns changing. But there is a steady growth returning and potential to extend and integrate the Park and Ride services with other operations. Difficulty of best fare being available for park & ride users.	10A: Winnersh Triangle P & R: Complete the expansion and improvement works. Establish usage and a differential charging scheme (Ref 10E).	ONGOING	Bus operators, Reading BC
		10B: Thames Valley Park: Encourage greater usage and expand the Hospital bus service to all users. Develop differential charging as referred in 10E below.	From Feb 2023 subject to funding	Bus operators, Hospital, Reading BC
		10C: Mereok P & R: Improve access for cycles and pedestrians.	From April 2023 subject to funding	Bus operators, Reading BC, Town & Parish Clls
		10D: Coppid Beach P & R: Establish patronage and a connecting bus route.	From Feb 2023 subject to funding	Bus operators, Town & Parish Clls
		10E: Investigate and potentially develop a differential parking charging system, so those using P & R buses pay less (best fare) than non P & R users. (required at TVP and Winnersh)	From April 2023 subject to funding	Bus operators, Ticketer, Flowbird

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4.5 Improve passenger engagement and satisfaction of bus services

There are several groups and organisations in the Borough that are consulted on regarding any proposed changes to bus services. These include community groups in Earley and Woodley and a number of parish councils, but there is no overarching representation of bus users. There are a series of proposals including a charter and a user group should help to involve the public to a greater extent in services.

The borough is also looking to extend marketing where they can and the My Journey scheme is being extended (see case study below)

**CASE STUDY: My Journey Travel Planning**

	<p>My journey has been developed by the Borough for almost 10 years and provides an excellent web site and 'App'. It is developer funded with a contribution per dwelling and allows a coordinated and consistent approach across all sites. Each new house has a travel pack with vouchers and includes some personalised travel planning. It builds on the success as outlined in Section 2.8.</p>
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**Table 4.5 Passenger Engagement and More of a Say (NBS), WBC Objective 7**

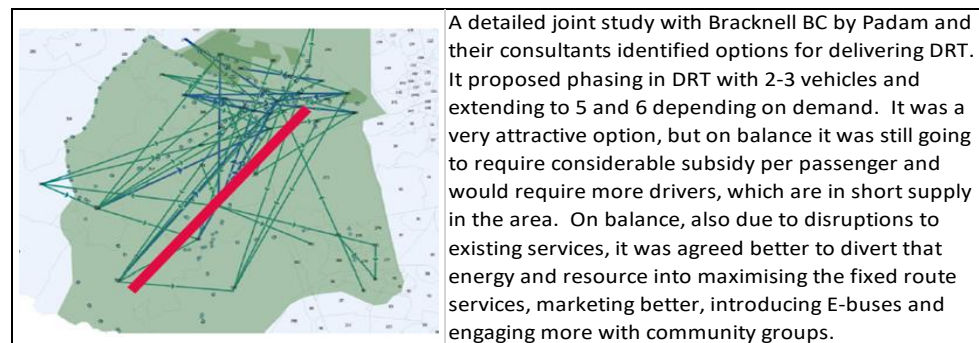
Proposal	Existing Situation	Action	Timescale	Key Partners
BSIP Proposal 11: Develop a Passenger Charter	While working closely with the bus operators is generally excellent, community groups and passengers are not engaged enough in the delivery of services. The Customer Charter offers a more formal way of greater engagement with the community.	11A: Develop and introduce a Passenger Charter alongside establishing the Enhanced Partnership arrangements.	From April 2023	Bus operators, community groups. Town & Parish Clls, Reading BC, Bracknell BC & West Berks Council.
		11B: Work with neighbouring Authorities to ensure consistency of our Passenger Charters	From April 2023	
		11C: Establish a bus user group and bus operator forum.	From April 2024	
		11D: Regularly review progress on the targets set out in the BSIP and publish the results.	From April 2025	
BSIP Proposal 12: Strengthen network identity	Most services have a good network identify mainly through a consistent colouring of corridor routes.	12A: Continue to promote a strong network identity for services running in the borough including providing a network map showing all operators services.	From April 2023	Bus operators, Reading BC
		12B: Work with operators and neighbouring authorities to strengthen and co- ordinate a consistent public branding of bus services.	ONGOING	Bus operators, community groups. Town & Parish Clls, Reading BC, Bracknell BC & West Berks Council.
BSIP Proposal 13: Improve passenger information	Passenger information is of a high standard with timetables, on line information and apps. There is also the My Journey web site that provides a one stop for all information.	13A: Continue to work in co-operation with bus operators to provide easy to understand bus information to existing and potential bus passengers.	ONGOING	Bus operators, community groups. Town & Parish Clls, Reading BC, Bracknell BC & West Berks Council.
		13B: Expand the My Journey web site and 'App'. To include provision of a 'one stop shop' for all passenger journeys, encourage sustainable modes of transport and expand personalised travel planning.	ONGOING	Bus operators, Reading BC
		13C: Review Real Time Information locations displays to ensure that information is supplied at the most useful locations such as busy town centre stops, park and ride sites and rail stations.	ONGOING	Bus operators, Reading BC

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4.6 Improve accessibility to transport services and the local bus network for communities in more rural and low-density areas

Bus services in rural areas are generally infrequent and lack accessibility for many residents. In the north and the east of the Borough this is a particular problem. There are similar rural and low-density areas in nearby authorities such as Windsor & Maidenhead, West Berkshire and Bracknell Forest. The Council has discussed with neighbouring authorities the potential for a joint Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) operation, subject to suitable funding being made available. By sharing resources such as control centre, software and reservations process it maybe more cost-effective.

**CASE STUDY: Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) study carried out**



**Table 4.6 Improve Accessibility to Lower Density Areas, WBC Objective 8**

Proposal	Existing Situation	Action	Timescale	Key Partners
BSIP Proposal 14: Improve service quality and accessibility in low density areas.	High levels of car ownership and lack of regular bus services especially in the lower density areas, means that buses are not attractive to car drivers. Bus driver shortages are causing buses to be cancelled and services become less reliable. This is especially a problem for Thames Valley Buses and relates to the above driver cost inflation.	14A: Work with operators in low density areas to improve service frequency through the Enhanced Partnership.	From Aug 2023 subject to funding	Bus operators, Reading BC
		14B: Extend marketing of services as the 'green alternative' combined with conversion of rural buses to E-buses.	From April 2024 subject to funding	Bus operators, Reading BC
		14C: Where regular services are unviable, work with communities to deliver alternatives such as community buses or shared taxis.	From Aug 2023 subject to funding	Bus operators, Reading BC, Town & Parish Clls & community groups
BSIP Proposal 15: Invest in accessible and inclusive bus services	In some low density areas fixed routes are not viable. But there are opportunities to work with the parishes to provide community bus and /or taxi services.	15A: Continue to fund the provision of community transport dial-a-ride services.	ONGOING	
		15B: Where possible integrate dial-a-ride with rural community services	From Aug 2023 subject to funding	

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4.7 Ensure bus travel is a safe means of transport

Wokingham’s bus network has low levels of crime and anti-social behaviour, but perception is important, and the Council wants the bus network to feel welcoming and safe. Table 4.7 sets out the main proposals and actions.

**Table 4.7 Improve Passenger Safety and Security, WBC Objective 9**

Proposal	Existing Situation	Action	Timescale	Key Partners
BSIP Proposal 16: Protect the personal safety of bus passengers.	Some passengers feel unsafe walking to and waiting at bus stops.	16A: Audit bus stops to ensure that they provide an environment that feels welcoming, accessible, clean, lit and secure for waiting passengers. Classify them according to a service specification.	From April 2023	Bus operators, Reading BC, Thames Valley Police, Town & Parish Clls
		16B: Deliver a running programme of enhancements to bus stops in line with the recommendations from the service specification.	From April 2023	Bus operators, Reading BC, Thames Valley Police, Town & Parish Clls
		16C: Set up a portal for central reporting of any issues at bus stops / shelters and on bus.	From April 2023	Bus operators, Reading BC, Thames Valley Police, Town & Parish Clls
BSIP Proposal 17: Minimise highway accidents involving buses	Buses can become involved in traffic accidents.	17A: Work with operators to ensure passenger journeys are safe and secure. Monitor any accidents and ensure risks are minimised in the future.	ONGOING	Bus operators, Reading BC, Thames Valley Police

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## 5. PASSENGER CHARTER

Wokingham Borough Council commits to publishing a full Passenger Charter by April 2023. The charter will cover all local bus services in the Borough. Given the high proportion of bus services which are cross-boundary, the Borough will work with neighbouring local authorities and all bus operators to provide a clear and consistent approach to the Passenger Charter.

The purpose of the Passenger Charter will be to set out a clear and consistent set of standards which all bus services operating within Wokingham Borough should meet. Where bus services do not meet these standards, the Council will promote accountability by providing information about how to complain. Where complaints are made, expected timeframes will be set for passengers to expect a response.

The key areas covered in the Passenger Charter will include but not be limited to:

- The Council's commitment to passengers
- Performance targets and where to find information on performance
- Annual monitoring on bus surveys which are expected to be a shorter version of the existing satisfaction surveys (as in Appendix A)
- How to plan journeys
- The standards passengers can expect
- How to complain when things go wrong
- How passengers can expect complaints to be dealt with
- Contact details for the Council and Local Transport Operators

BSIP targets, particularly on bus reliability and passenger satisfaction, will be cascaded down into the Passenger Charter along with information on where to find information on performance. Careful consideration will be given to setting a Passenger Charter which is inclusive, accessible and accompanied by an equalities impact assessment.

The Passenger Charter will be promoted on the Council's My Journey website as well as in the Council's printed publicity booklets. The Council will work with local bus operators to ensure the Passenger Charter is extended to their websites and potentially bus operators' publicity, including at stop publicity where appropriate.

The Passenger Charter will be reviewed every 12 months in consultation with local bus operators and local stakeholders. Revised versions of the Charter will be available to view on the My Journey website and sent to the Department for Transport if required.

## 6. PERFORMANCE MONITORING & REPORTING

This document is the second iteration of the Wokingham BSIP that is due for publication in April 2023. This is quite a significant rewrite in part because the October 2021 BSIP was unsuccessful in securing funding. The original BSIP covered a specific five-year period to 2026. This latest version extends to a longer period to 2040 to tie in with the Local Plan. It forms a fundamental part of delivering our ambitious plans as set out in the emerging Local Plan and LTP4. Also, with many of the proposals of a longer-term nature, the lengthier time horizon is considered more appropriate.

This BSIP is a 'living' document which will be kept under regular review, in partnership with all stakeholders. As such, the strategy will be updated as circumstances evolve, including to reflect new and emerging policy, guidance and best practice from across the UK and beyond, alongside any changes made to our local strategies.

The implementation of this strategy is subject to securing funding to enable the proposals set out in the Delivery Action Plan to be progressed. This plan provides a basis to inform future funding bids to Central Government and other relevant sources of funding. Once levels of funding have been confirmed, the BSIP will be updated to ensure it accurately reflects the funding available. In particular, the delivery timescales for individual proposals will be refined to ensure the strategy remains ambitious but also realistic.

The proposals set out in the strategy will be further developed through more detailed discussions with operators and neighbouring local authorities as part of the process of establishing Enhanced Partnership arrangements. They will also reflect feedback from passengers and other stakeholders set out in the Passenger Charter and other consultations and surveys relating to passenger satisfaction.

### Monitoring & Data Collection

Performance monitoring is essential to ensuring the successful delivery of this strategy and monitoring progress against our objectives, as set out in the targets. This will ensure that timely corrective action can be taken if needed and the availability of good quality data will be a key part of this process. Monitoring will also identify progress against delivery of the overall strategy and support the development of the proposals to ensure they represent value for money and help to achieve our overall vision for buses.

Section 3.3 sets out the targets and how these will be monitored. Tables 3.1 to 3.9 identifies the nine objectives and how each will be monitored. Much of the data comes from the operators and arrangements for them to provide data will be established through our Enhanced Partnership arrangements. We will work in partnership to develop reporting processes to ensure they are efficient and streamlined.

Operators have indicated that they will support the review process by the sharing of data and we will work with them to align network reviews with the BSIP review cycle to strengthen opportunities for the BSIP to act as the catalyst for positive change.

Reporting & Staff Resourcing

The borough is committed to providing clear, accurate and transparent data about how well the BSIP is delivering against its vision, objectives and targets. The results will be publicised widely including through arrangements put in place by the Passenger Charter.

Progress on the delivery of this strategy will be regularly reported to public meetings including the Council’s Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee, alongside other relevant forums of key stakeholders including the Berkshire Local Transport Body and Transport for the Southeast.

Reporting progress and seeking feedback will be an integral part of delivering this strategy. We will keep it under regular review to ensure it remains relevant and the proposals within it are working as intended.

The Borough is committed from 2023 to the monitoring and reporting set out on Table 6.1.

Governance arrangements will be established to oversee delivery of the strategy and to play an important part in future iterations of this strategy. The Borough has one full time member of staff working on passenger transport plus some ad-hoc consultancy assistance and are recruiting for another officer. As cross-boundary routes are significant, we are seeking to establish joint Governance arrangements with our neighbouring Local Authorities and all local bus operators.

**Table 6.1: Schedule for BSIP Monitoring, Reporting and Updates**

	BSIP Progress Report	BSIP Update	BSIP Full Revision
Frequency	every 6 months	every year	at least every 5 years
Progress reporting on each target	Yes	Yes	Yes
Progress reporting on each proposal		Yes	Yes
Proposals reviewed and updated		Yes	Yes
New targets established			Yes
New proposals established			Yes

Close partnership working will be critical to the successful delivery of the strategy and will be further developed through the establishment of the Enhanced Partnership arrangements.

## 7. OVERVIEW TABLE

This section summarises the key outputs of the BSIP and how it meets requirements set out in the National Bus Strategy based on the template table provided by the Department for Transport.

<b>Name of Authority or Authorities:</b>	<b>Wokingham Borough Council</b>
Franchising or Enhanced Partnership (or both):	Enhanced Partnership
Date of Publication:	April 2023
Date of next annual update:	April 2024
URL of published report:	<a href="https://www.myjourneywokingham.com/bus-travel/enhanced-partnership/">https://www.myjourneywokingham.com/bus-travel/enhanced-partnership/</a>

Target	2018/19	2019/20	Target for 2024/25	Target for 2029/30	Target for 2039/40	Description of how each will be measured (max 50 words)
Journey times on key corridors	No data	75.3 Mins	72 Mins	68 Mins	61 Mins	As per Table 3.3, average journey times for weekdays have been calculated for key corridor from BODS data 05/09/22-30/09/22. Target reductions for later years. This target represents the combined reduction across all services on corridors shown in Table 2.3 and referred in Table 3.3.
Reliability	No data	74.94%	80%	85%	90%	12 months 'on-time' services from BODS data (For 2019/20 data entered period 01/11/21-31/10/22)
Passenger numbers	2.8 million	2.8 million	3.08 million	4.2 million	5.6 million	Operator data for six monthly and annual reports as in Table 3.1
Average passenger satisfaction	64%	67%	70%	75%	80%	Using Transport Focus surveys and the National Highways and Transport survey.

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<b>Delivery – Does your BSIP detail policies to:</b>	<b>Yes/No</b>	<b>Explanation (max 50 words)</b>
<b>Make improvements to bus services and planning</b>		
<b>More frequent and reliable services</b>		
Review service frequency	Yes	BSIP Proposals 1A-F and 2A-E set out actions to improve frequency of services. Proposals 1A-F is directed at each of the main bus corridors. Proposals 2A-E look at the other services including those associated with new development areas.
Increase bus priority measures	Yes	BSIP Proposals 3A-F set out the proposed bus priority measures on the 5 main corridors. Action 3A identifies a detailed delivery programme to coordinate these. Proposals 3G-H identify localised junction and traffic management measures.
Increase demand responsive services	No	BSIP Proposals 14A-C will improve service quality and accessibility in low density areas, which is to be done via extending fixed route services rather than Demand Responsive Transport (DRT). Detailed modelling was carried out of DRT to confirm this approach was justified as referred is the Case Study in Section 4.7.
Consideration of bus rapid transport networks	Yes	Wokingham will work with Reading BC on their emerging bus rapid transit network. BSIP proposals 3D (A4), 3E (A329 corridor) and 3F (A33) to extend the Reading BRT corridors.
<b>Improvements to planning / integration with other modes</b>		
Integrate services with other transport modes	Yes	BSIP Proposals 8A-B, 9A-D and 10A-E set out improvements to integration between modes and buses. Action 8A-B is for walking and cycling, action 9A-D for rail and 10A-E for the park and ride sites.
Simplify services	Yes	BSIP Proposals 1A-F and 2A-C will include some simplification of routes. Journey times from Shinfield and Spencers Wood into Reading are longer than desired and have recently (2022), become direct and faster along the A33 corridor. Bus services in Wokingham Town and the surrounding area have a complex operating pattern resulting in uneven frequencies.
Review socially necessary services	Yes	BSIP Proposals 14A-C and 15A-B will improve services to low density areas and provide for socially necessary services. 15A is funding of dial-a-ride services and 15B integrating these with rural community services.
Invest in Superbus networks	Yes	BSIP Proposals 1A-F and 3A-H will involve working with Reading BC to support development of a Superbus network. Building on previous Quality Bus Corridor investment by introducing more bus priority, higher frequencies, reduced fares and high-quality vehicle specification and bus stop infrastructure.



<b>Improvements to fares and ticketing</b>		
Lower fares	Yes	BSIP Proposals 4A-D set out actions to keep fares at an affordable level and reduce where possible. Due to inflation and driver shortages, affordability is a preferred description, as lower fares in real terms are achieved if there is no increase.
Simplify fares	Yes	BSIP Proposals 5A-D set out actions to simplify fares. These include the extended 'Simply Reading' Zone which has already been applied. A 'tap-on/tap-off' technology is also proposed to be coordinated with Reading BC.
Integrate ticketing between operators and transport	Yes	BSIP Proposals 6A-D set out actions to integrate the ticketing between operators and other modes. This includes extending PlusBus zones, integrated ticketing between operators. For Park and Ride (Action 10E) we are proposing a new ticketing system which allows differentiate pricing.
<b>Make improvements to bus passenger experience</b>		
<b>Higher spec buses</b>		
Invest in improved bus specifications	Yes	BSIP Proposals 7A-F set out the investment proposals to improve bus vehicles.
Invest in accessible and inclusive bus services	Yes	BSIP Proposals 7B will work towards implementing accessibility improvements to all buses in the Borough. There is also improved bus stop infrastructure (Action 9A).
Protect personal safety of bus passengers	Yes	BSIP Proposals 16A-C set out actions to improved personal safety to passenger on buses and those waiting or walking to bus stops. Although, personal safety on the bus and at bus stops scores very well on customer satisfaction surveys.
Improve buses for tourists	Yes	There are not many tourists in the Borough. Hotels are mainly in business parks and for business purposes. Enhanced accessibility to and from rail stations will support access to hotels and for visiting London and other destinations at the weekend, as will enhanced bus services to Henley-on-Thames.
Invest in decarbonisation	Yes	BSIP Proposals 7C, 7D & 7E set out a rolling programme to deliver a zero carbon bus fleet and to ensure there is the charging infrastructure. Work with Reading BC on ZEBRAS scheme to help fund. This is an important proposal for the Borough as it works towards its zero carbon strategy. Proposal 7E proposes a Green Bus Hub.

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<b>Improvements to passenger engagement</b>		
Passenger charter	Yes	BSIP Proposals 11A-11D sets out the development of the Passenger Charter and associated actions. The Borough is committed to a Passenger Charter.
Strengthen network identity	Yes	BSIP Proposals 12A-B shows a desire to continue to develop a stronger network brand. It is proposed to work with operators and adjacent authorities on coordinating infrastructure, marketing and publicity.
Improve bus information	Yes	BSIP Proposals 13A-C supports improved bus information by working with local stakeholders, providing targeted information, and using the My Journey behaviour change programme to disseminate information to residents, employees, and students.

**APPENDIX A: CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEYS**

<b>Thames Valley Buses Customer Satisfaction 2019</b>							
	<b>Satisfaction (%)</b>	<b>all satisfied</b>	<b>very satisfied</b>	<b>fairly satisfied</b>	<b>neither/nor</b>	<b>all dissatisfied</b>	<b>base size</b>
<b>Overall journey satisfaction</b>	All passengers	94	59	36	4	2	272
	Fare-paying passengers	94	50	44	4	3	91
	Free pass holders	95	66	29	4	1	179
	Passengers not commuting	94	60	34	5	2	200
	Passengers saying they have a disability	94	57	37	4	2	87
<b>Value for money</b>	All fare-paying passengers	62	24	38	19	19	86
<b>Punctuality of the bus</b>	The length of time waited	83	44	39	12	5	257
<b>On-bus journey time</b>	Time journey on the bus took	90	61	29	7	3	269
<b>On the bus</b>	Route/destination information on the outside of the bus	92	66	26	6	2	252
	The cleanliness and condition of the outside of the bus	91	56	35	8	1	253
	The ease of getting onto the bus	97	70	27	2	1	257
	The length of time it took to board	96	72	24	3	1	252
	The cleanliness and condition of the inside of the bus	92	58	35	6	2	262
	The information provided inside the bus	67	37	31	27	6	262
	The availability of seating or space to stand	91	63	28	8	2	260
	The comfort of the seats	87	48	40	9	4	256
	The amount of personal space you had around you	90	53	37	6	4	254
	Provision of grab rails to stand/move within the bus	89	54	34	8	2	250
	The temperature inside the bus	87	51	36	10	3	255
	Your personal security whilst on the bus	91	60	31	8	1	256
Ease of getting off the bus	95	65	30	4	1	260	
<b>The bus driver</b>	How near to the kerb the driver stopped	96	71	25	4	0	265
	The driver's appearance	94	70	24	5	1	261
	The greeting/welcome you got from the driver	86	59	27	10	3	262
	The helpfulness and attitude of the driver	86	59	27	11	3	258
	The time the driver gave you to get to your seat	92	65	26	5	3	262
	Smoothness/freedom from jolting during the journey	80	48	32	11	9	266
	Safety of the driving (i.e. speed, driver concentrating)	92	65	27	6	2	263

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Reading Buses Customer Satisfaction 2019 & Comparison with 2016, 2017 & 2018										
	Satisfaction (%)	all satisfied 2016	all satisfied 2017	all satisfied 2018	all satisfied 2019	very satisfied	fairly satisfied	neither/nor	all dissatisfied	base size
<b>Overall journey satisfaction</b>	All passengers	93	88	94	92	53	38	7	2	844
	Fare-paying passengers	92	86	93	91	50	41	8	1	471
	Free pass holders	96	93	96	94	62	31	4	2	364
	Aged 16 to 34	91	86	92	88	46	42	10	2	161
	Aged 35 to 59	94	85	94	93	50	43	5	1	254
	Passengers commuting	94	84	92	93	52	41	5	2	335
	Passengers not commuting	93	92	95	91	54	37	8	1	475
	Passengers saying they have a disability	94	90	91	90	56	34	7	2	216
<b>Value for money</b>	All Fare-paying passengers	63	66	71	67	34	33	18	15	459
	Free pass holders	58	63	69	61	33	28	19	20	151
	Aged 16 to 34	68	67	70	74	33	41	17	9	223
	Aged 35 to 59	64	64	64	65	34	31	18	17	299
	Passengers commuting	60	69	81	71	34	37	16	12	156
<b>Punctuality of the bus</b>	Punctuality of the bus	79	73	81	78	51	27	11	12	770
	The length of time waited	80	74	80	75	47	28	13	11	820
<b>On-bus journey time</b>	Time journey on the bus took	87	82	89	86	53	33	11	4	845
<b>On the bus</b>	Route/destination information on the outside of the bus	90	85	89	88	58	29	11	1	810
	The cleanliness and condition of the outside of the bus	88	86	84	86	47	38	12	3	800
	The ease of getting onto the bus	-	-	91	94	65	29	5	1	827
	The length of time it took to board	93	90	91	91	64	27	6	3	817
	The cleanliness and condition of the inside of the bus	84	84	83	84	38	46	10	6	832
	The information provided inside the bus	85	81	80	76	43	34	20	3	773
	The availability of seating or space to stand	92	84	86	91	58	33	6	4	821
	The comfort of the seats	84	83	82	85	42	42	12	4	825
	The amount of personal space you had around you	84	76	80	79	41	38	13	8	819
	Provision of grab rails to stand/move within the bus	89	83	85	87	46	42	11	2	800
	The temperature inside the bus	85	79	82	85	44	41	10	5	811
	Your personal security whilst on the bus	89	88	84	89	54	35	10	0	814
	Ease of getting off the bus	-	-	88	92	57	35	5	2	825
<b>The bus driver</b>	How near to the kerb the driver stopped	94	95	94	94	68	27	4	1	824
	The driver's appearance	92	94	91	90	66	24	9	1	808
	The greeting/welcome you got from the driver	84	86	82	85	57	28	11	3	825
	The helpfulness and attitude of the driver	84	85	82	84	56	28	13	3	805
	The time the driver gave you to get to your seat	85	86	84	85	53	32	11	4	810
	Smoothness/freedom from jolting during the journey	84	80	83	83	47	36	11	5	811
	Safety of the driving (i.e. speed, driver concentrating)	92	92	90	93	63	30	6	1	818

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Wokingham Borough Council – National Highways and Transportation (NHT) Survey Summer 2022

## Individual Indicator Results

The table below shows how Wokingham's scores within the theme compare with the average of all other Authorities (Gap), how their scores have changed from last year (Trend), which quartile they are in and where they rank for each indicator.

Reference	Indicator	Result	Trend	NHT Average	Gap	Quartile	Rank
<b>KBI</b>							
KBI06	Local bus services (overall)	59%	-2%	55%	4%	2	30
KBI07	Local bus services (aspects)	55%	-6%	48%	7%	1	22
KBI08	Public transport information	38%	-4%	34%	4%	2	33
KBI09	Taxi/mini cab services	61%	-1%	61%	0%	2	52
KBI10	Community transport	56%	1%	55%	1%	2	34
<b>KQI</b>							
KQI03	Responsive transport	50%	-3%	52%	-2%	4	84
KQI05	Public transport information (aspects)	56%	0%	50%	6%	1	7

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BI							
PTBI01	Frequency of bus services	56%	-5%	52%	4%	2	34
PTBI02	Number of bus stops	66%	-4%	65%	1%	2	44
PTBI03	The state of bus stops	59%	-4%	55%	4%	1	22
PTBI04	Whether buses arrive on time	59%	-5%	51%	8%	1	10
PTBI05	How easy buses are to get on/off	73%	-3%	70%	3%	1	19
PTBI06	The local bus service overall	61%	-3%	55%	6%	1	13
PTBI07	Bus fares	53%	0%	46%	7%	1	10
PTBI08	Quality and cleanliness of buses	66%	-2%	61%	5%	1	13
PTBI09	Helpfulness of drivers	74%	3%	66%	8%	1	2
PTBI10	Personal safety on the bus	72%	1%	65%	7%	1	5
PTBI11	Personal safety at bus stops	64%	-2%	60%	4%	1	23
PTBI12	Raised kerbs at bus stops	66%	-3%	63%	3%	1	25
PTBI13	The amount of information	54%	-1%	51%	3%	1	21
PTBI14	The clarity of information	57%	-1%	52%	5%	1	9
PTBI15	The accuracy of information	58%	-2%	52%	6%	1	9
PTBI16	Ease of finding the right information	54%	0%	49%	5%	1	8
PTBI17	Information about accessible buses	54%	4%	47%	7%	1	5
PTBI18	Info to help people plan journeys	59%	1%	54%	5%	1	7
PTBI19	Reliability of electronic display info	55%	-1%	49%	6%	1	14
PTBI20	Provision of public transport info	54%	-2%	50%	4%	1	20
QI							
PTQI08	Provision of bus stops	85%	-1%	85%	0%	2	53

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>NEC Systems - Contract Renewal</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	The Executive on Thursday, 26 January 2023
<b>WARD</b>	(All Wards);
<b>LEAD OFFICER</b>	Chief Executive - Susan Parsonage
<b>LEAD MEMBER</b>	Executive Member for Climate Emergency and Resident Services - Sarah Kerr

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

Executive approval is required as the total value of the contract exceeds 500k for the five year duration.

The report sets out the proposal for Executive consideration to procure all systems currently provided by NEC to the Council for five year period under as single contract. The Systems include:

- NEC iWorld – used by Council Tax and Revenue and Benefits.
- NEC Housing – used by the Housing service
- NEX Information at Work - Electronic Document Management System used corporately across the Council.

Entering into a five year contract protects the Council from year on year inflation increase, and enables the Council to know the total cost of ownership for the next five years.

Based on an assumed inflation of 12.5% for the next five years this procurement will avoid the need to pay a total of £262k in inflation costs. The total contract value over five years is £1,231,415.

The continuity of the systems listed above provides savings as a result of no cost of change. Procurement of these systems will therefore not incur any implementation costs. It is estimated this results in cost avoidance of £1.49m.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The Executive is asked to approve the compliant direct award via the **Crown Commercial Services: Data and Applications RM3821** framework on a five year basis to NEC for the provision of the following systems

- NEC iWORLD
- NEC Housing
- NEC Information at work.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Summary of the of the objectives of this decision:

- NEC systems provided to the Council current consist of 20 individual contracts for each of the component part, in order to drive efficiency these contracts would be amalgamated into a single contract for all NEC systems.
- To ensure the Council is on a termed contract and so the Council can control inflation in accordance with any fluctuations with RPi and CPi.
- Ensuring total costs of systems are in line with total cost of budgets as set out within MTFP.
- NEC will apply a 10% uplift on existing costs in year 1 of the contract, followed by a fixed price in years 2-5. Based on an assumed inflation of 12.5% for the next 5 years this procurement will avoid the need to pay a total of £262k in inflation costs.
- Software provided by the supplier is critical to the delivery of front line statutory services. This therefore assists in the Council's Corporate Delivery Plan and Community Vision in the following areas:
  - o Equality Impact
  - o Social Value
  - o Sustainability
  - o Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP)
- Procurement will not result in the implementation of any new technology or systems, therefore will not incur any cost of change. It is estimated this results in cost avoidance of £1.49m
- Subject to Executive approval contract will be awarded in February 2023 via a direct award through **Crown Commercial Services: Data and Applications RM3821**
- Total contract value over 5 years = £1,231,415



## BACKGROUND

Procurement business approved by the Strategic Procurement Board on 13<sup>th</sup> October 2022, demonstrating options considered to reach recommendation for Executive approval.

## BUSINESS CASE

### Appraisal of current options:

#### Option 1 | Remain with current provider – NEC

- This would have the least business impact due to removing the need to migrate to new systems
- Fixed indexation rate in a time of uncertainty that would not be guaranteed in competition in current climate
- Amalgamation of all contracts into one neat and tidy contract
- Stakeholders happy with the current provider
- ICT have approved current model to be working with long term WBC plan
- Total contract value over 5 years = £1,231,415

### Cost Benefit Analysis

For the Organisation Foundation Programme exercise, the below figures are the ones presented by NEC for the support and maintenance element of the systems. The below table also evidences the savings of the negotiated fixed term of RPI versus a year on year uplift based on 5 separate examples

Yr	Proposed Charges	Annual Indexation to apply from Year 2 of contract			
	10% uplift then no indexation	7%	12.50%	15%	20%
1	£246,283	£232,846	£232,846	£232,846	£232,846
2	£246,283	£249,145	£261,952	£267,773	£279,415
3	£246,283	£266,585	£294,696	£307,939	£335,298
4	£246,283	£285,246	£331,533	£354,130	£402,358
5	£246,283	£305,214	£372,974	£407,249	£482,829
<b>Total</b>	<b>£1,231,415</b>	<b>£1,339,037</b>	<b>£1,494,000</b>	<b>£1,569,937</b>	<b>£1,732,747</b>
	<b>Savings over 5 years</b>	£107,622	£262,585	£338,522	£501,332

#### Option 2 | Run a tender process for all systems

- Resource heavy at a time when all technical resource and service subject matter experts have a full remit of work and tasks already
- Costs could come in higher due to RPi uncertainty
- Slow and laborious deployment time for new services that would have to be implemented
- Risk that stakeholders will have reduced services at a time when public need them most. Services would also have to resource large implementation projects for systems procured.

### Total Cost of changing a system after a full procurement commencing in 2023:

#### Assumptions

- Full Procurement will take 12 months
- A new supplier other than the incumbent will be awarded a contract
- Commercial offering will be equivalent to NECs best offer and frozen for duration
- Implementation will take 24 months from 2024-2025
- New Provider Contract length to be 5 years 2024-2028
- Salaries of external resources to be frozen during work carried out

Year	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028
<b>Resources for Implementation of New Provision</b>						
Project Manager - Grade 9	£0	£44,000	£44,000	£0	£0	£0
Technical Lead - Grade 10	£0	£50,000	£50,000	£0	£0	£0
Data Migration Staff - Grade 8	£0	£38,000	£38,000	£0	£0	£0
SMEs from Service Area	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>£0</b>	<b>£132,000</b>	<b>£132,000</b>	<b>£0</b>	<b>£0</b>	<b>£0</b>
<b>Resources for Procurement</b>						
Project Manager - Grade 9	£44,000	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0
Technical Lead - Grade 10	£50,000	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0
SMEs from Service Area	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>£94,000</b>	<b>£0</b>	<b>£0</b>	<b>£0</b>	<b>£0</b>	<b>£0</b>
<b>Exit Costs</b>						
Ongoing Provision - NEC	£246,283	£246,283	£246,283	£0	£0	£0
<b>New Supplier After Competition Costs</b>						
Implementation	£0	£200,000	£200,000	£0	£0	£0
Ongoing Costs for Provision	£0	£246,846	£246,846	£246,846	£246,846	£246,846
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>£0</b>	<b>£446,846</b>	<b>£446,846</b>	<b>£246,846</b>	<b>£246,846</b>	<b>£246,846</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>£340,283</b>	<b>£825,129</b>	<b>£825,129</b>	<b>£246,846</b>	<b>£246,846</b>	<b>£246,846</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>						<b>£2,731,079</b>

**Cost Avoidance = £1,499,664**

As part of putting this paper together consideration has been given to the longevity of each of the systems that would fall under a single NEC contract. The systems provided are complex and vital for front line delivery. Based on the project costs in 2014/15 when NEC Housing was implemented the implementation project costs were circa 600k and took 24 months. Therefore, it is considered that the cost to change systems would be cost prohibitive when extrapolated across the Northgate products.

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

***The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and 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)	246,283	Yes – already a funded provision	Revenue

Next Financial Year (Year 2)	246,283	Yes – already a funded provision	Revenue
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	246,283	Yes – already a funded provision	Revenue

Entering into a 5 year contract protects the Council from year on year inflation increase, and enables the Council to know the total cost of ownership for the next 5 years.

Based on an assumed inflation of 12.5% for the next 5 years this procurement **will avoid the need to pay a total of £262k** in inflation costs. Providing the Council with greater certainty of the cost of ownership of these key systems for the next 5 years.

<b>Other Financial Information</b>
Remaining on a rolling contract means the Council will not have certainty of cost of ownership and will be subject to year on year inflation increases.

<b>Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation</b>
No formal consultations.
Appraisal with service areas completed to ensure systems are required for the next 5 year period.

<b>Public Sector Equality Duty</b>
Public sector equality duty completed.

<b>Climate Emergency – <i>This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030</i></b>
Provision of Digital services that act as an enabler for reducing travel to offices.

<b>Reasons for considering the report in Part 2</b>
N/A

<b>List of Background Papers</b>
N/A

<b>Contact</b> Glynn Davies	<b>Service</b> Digital and Design
<b>Telephone</b> 0118 2378052	<b>Email</b> glynn.davies@wokingham.gov.uk

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<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Temporary Closure Remenham Footpath No 4 Henley Festival</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	The Executive on Thursday, 26 January 2023
<b>WARD</b>	Remenham, Wargrave and Ruscombe;
<b>LEAD OFFICER</b>	Director, Place and Growth - Steve Moore
<b>LEAD MEMBER</b>	Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure - Ian Shenton

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

The Council agreed at Executive on June 25<sup>th</sup> 2015, that for applications for temporary closures on rights of way affecting the Thames Path and the Blackwater Valley Footpath, (for special events) the following policy will be adopted:

- 1) prior consultation will be carried out with the following groups: The Ramblers' Association, The Open Spaces Society, Natural England, the relevant Parish Council and the ward member for the area through which the path is situated; and
- 2) the decision as to whether a closure will be made will be taken by the Executive unless it is agreed by the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure that such referral to the Executive is not required.

The temporary closure will allow the Henley Festival to be organised and run in a safe manner whilst enabling residents and visitors to continue to use Remenham Footpath 4 via a short detour. The Festival Trust applies annually for this closure to enable the safe management and execution of a locally and regionally enjoyed festival.

As the Henley festival is an annual event it is also proposed that the process for the closure of the paths is changed to delegate the decision to the Director of Place & Growth to streamline the process, reduce the administrative overhead for processing the application and bring it in line with the established procedures used for other Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders.

**RECOMMENDATION**

The Executive is recommended to:

- 1) approve the making of an order for the closure of Footpath Remenham No 4, for a closure of an 80m section of the footpath for the set up and de rig of the Festival stage from Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> to Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> July 2023 inclusive and from Monday 10<sup>th</sup> July to Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> July 2023 inclusive;
- 2) include within the closure a 620m section for evening performances from Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> July to Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> July 2023 inclusive and day time performances on Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> July and Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> July 2023, under Section 16A of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, subject to the receipt of the requisite consent of the Secretary of State for Transport.
- 3) approve a change to the process for any future applications for the closure of the Thames Path and the Blackwater Valley footpath to delegate the decision as to

whether a closure will be made to the Director of Place and Growth in consultation with the Executive Member for Environment.

#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

A request has been received from the organisers of the Henley Festival of Music and the Arts for the closure of part of the Thames Path National Trail at Remenham (Remenham Footpath 4). The Festival Trust applies annually for this closure to enable the safe management and execution of a locally and regionally enjoyed festival.

The Trust has stated that it is necessary to restrict traffic for the holding of the event and that it is not reasonable for the organisers to hold the event other than on the road in question.

The Authority is required to consider whether it is necessary for traffic to be restricted for the purpose of facilitating the holding of a relevant event and whether it is reasonably practical to hold the event otherwise than on the highway (in this case a footpath).

The applicant has stated that it is necessary to restrict traffic for the holding of the event and that it is not reasonable for the organisers to hold the event other than on the road in question.

Therefore, a decision is needed on whether to approve the making of the closure order if the event is to proceed. The duration of the closure is also required to be approved by the Secretary of State for Transport.

## BACKGROUND

A request has been received from the organisers of the Henley Festival of Music and the Arts for the closure of part of Footpath No.4 Remenham between the hours of:

Day (2023)	Times	Length of closure (metres approx)
Monday 3rd July	00:01- midnight	80m
Tuesday 4th July	00:01- midnight	80m
Wednesday 5 <sup>th</sup> July	00:01- 17:45pm	80m
Wednesday 5 <sup>th</sup> July	17:45 - midnight	620m
Thursday 6 <sup>th</sup> July	17:45 - midnight	620m
Friday 7 <sup>th</sup> July	17:45 - 01:00	620m
Saturday 8 <sup>th</sup> July	10:45 - 14:45	620m
Saturday 8 <sup>th</sup> July	17:45 – 02:00	620m
Sunday 9 <sup>th</sup> July	10:00 – 14:15	620m
Sunday 9 <sup>th</sup> July	17:00 - 23:30	620m
Monday 10 <sup>th</sup> July	06:00 - midnight	80m
Tuesday 11 <sup>th</sup> July	00:01- 23:59	80m

The closure periods from Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> July to Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> July 2022 and from Monday 10<sup>th</sup> July to Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> July 2023 are for the build and dismantling periods when there will be movement of equipment and vehicles on the footpath. The closures required for the set up and dismantling of the stage will be for the shorter length of footpath approximately 80m. An alternative route will run parallel to the closed section of the right of way at a distance of approximately 15m from the footpath. Henley Festival will make every effort to re-open the towpath sooner on Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> July, as long as it is safe to do so.

The Festival takes place after the Henley Regatta. The Festival's organisers make use of the Regatta's infrastructure such as marquees and stands, which are already in situ. The main Festival events are held on a large 'floating stage' constructed in the river bed, the building of which takes place on and adjacent to Footpath No.4.

As Highway Authority, this Council has a statutory duty under the Highways Act 1980 to assert and protect the rights of the public to the use and enjoyment of any highway for which they are the Highway Authority. As such, it is for the Council to consider any application for the closure of a highway, albeit on a temporary basis, in conjunction with this statutory duty.

Notwithstanding the above, in its capacity as a Traffic Authority, the Council is empowered by the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 to make an Order to regulate traffic on a temporary basis in order to facilitate the holding of certain events (a "relevant event") on the highway, provided that it is satisfied that the event cannot be held otherwise than on a road. At section 142(1) of the Act the term "road" is defined as any length of highway or any other road to which the public has access and therefore includes any footpath.

If the Order is made as recommended, it would continue in force for more than three days. Section 16B(1)(b) of the 1984 Act provides that, before the Order can be made, the consent of the Secretary of State for Transport would be required. Since 2009 the

Secretary of State, after detailed consideration of the material facts, approved the making of a similar length closure order annually.

Whilst there is no legal requirement to consult in respect of the application, the Council agreed at Executive on June 25<sup>th</sup> 2015, that for applications for temporary closures on rights of way affecting the Thames Path and the Blackwater Valley Footpath, (for special events) the following policy will be adopted:

- 1) prior consultation will be carried out with the following groups: The Ramblers' Association, The Open Spaces Society, Natural England, the relevant Parish Council and the ward member for the area through which the path is situated; and
- 2) the decision as to whether a closure will be made will be taken by the Executive unless it is agreed by the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure that such referral to the Executive is not required.

Consultations were sent out in September to the local Ward Members, Remenham Parish Council, The Thames Path National Trails Officer, Loddon Valley Ramblers and the Open Spaces Society as well as Henley Town Council, who had asked to be consulted in previous years. Natural England confirmed in 2018 that they do not need to be consulted on application provided that the Thames Path National Trails Office are included.

Councillors John Halsall and Graham Howe as the local Ward Members, and Councillor Ian Shenton as the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure have raised no objections to the temporary closure.

The Ramblers' Association, Thames Path National Trails Officer, Remenham Parish Council and Henley Town Council have raised no objection to the temporary closure.

The Open Spaces Society has objected to the closure and the points raised in their letter are considered below.

Details of the responses to the consultation and details of permission granted for the alternative paths by the landowner are included in the accompanying documents.

Over the past 6 years there have been no complaints or objections to the Temporary Closure of part of footpath Remenham 4 during the Festival in July, from members of the public, local clubs or Remenham residents.

### **Analysis of Issues**

<b>Open Space Society issues</b>	<b>WBC response</b>
The event could be held elsewhere.	The event uses the same infrastructure as used during the Henley Regatta. It is not a matter for the Authority to specify where the organisers should hold the Festival but whether or not it is necessary to close the footpath at the point where they chose to hold the event.



<p>The council must satisfy itself that it is not reasonably practicable for the event to be held otherwise than on a road. The OSS believes that there is nothing about the Festival which requires the use of a road.</p>	<p>The stage is next to the footpath where ticket holders watch the performances. Access needs to be limited to satisfy the licensing requirements and because electrical cabling etc. is placed across the footpath. It is therefore considered that it is necessary that the relevant event encompasses the use of the adjoining footpath.</p>
<p>The council needs to be aware of its statutory duty, under section 130 of the Highways Act 1980, 'to assert and protect the rights of the public to the use and enjoyment of the highway'.</p>	<p>The duty is effectively suspended during such times as the Council uses its available statutory powers to close the path by legal order.</p>
<p>This is the Thames Path National Trail, a route of international importance, which should not be interfered with merely for a private event.</p>	<p>The legislation does not preclude the making of orders for commercial events or on national trails.</p>
<p>The council needs to 'have regard to the safety and convenience of alternative routes suitable for traffic which will be affected by the order.</p>	<p>The alternative routes identified for use by the public during the closure period is considered to be appropriate for this relatively short term diversion.</p>
<p>The OSS states that the alternative route needs to be a public highway.</p>	<p>This is not the case. WBC should only have regard to the suitability and convenience of the alternative route for the traffic affected by the order. The owner of the land agrees annually to the use of their land as an alternative footpath during the closure period and to date the alternative route has been provided for the duration of the closure periods so there is no reason to suggest that this would not be the case for the 2022 closure.</p>

**Closures in future years**

As the Henley festival is an annual event it is proposed that the process for the closure of the paths is changed to streamline the process and reduce the administrative overhead for processing the application. For other Temporary Traffic Regulation Order (TTRO) applications the decision is delegated to an Officer and does not require a special report to the Executive. Whilst historically the closure of this path has been political sensitive, the situation and approach to the path closure has moved on and currently the issue of the path closure is a much more settled process.

It is therefore recommended that for future years the decision for any applications for temporary closures on rights of way affecting the Thames Path and the Blackwater

Valley Footpath, (for special events) should be delegated to the Director of Place and Growth, in consultation with the Executive Member. This would streamline the process and bring it closer to that under which ordinary TTROs are decided, whilst still retaining executive member oversight.

### **BUSINESS CASE**

Not applicable as the organisers of the Henley Festival pay all legal and advertising fees.

### **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)	nil	Yes	N/A
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	nil	Yes	N/A
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	nil	Yes	N/A

### **Other Financial Information**

The organisers of the Henley Festival pay all legal, advertising costs of the Closure Order.

### **Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation**

The local Members have been consulted together with the Parish Council, the Ramblers' Association, the Open Spaces Society, Thames Path National Trails Officer and Henley Town Council.

An objection to the closure is usually received from the OSS annually. Whilst the Authority must have regard for objections, the Temporary Closure Order can still be made by the Executive if it considers that the requirements of the legislation have been met. Any objections are sent to the Secretary of State so that they are aware of them to consider alongside the application for consent under section 16B(i)(b).

### **Public Sector Equality Duty**

An initial equality impact assessment has been carried out and has not identified any negative impact to the proposal.

### **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 temporary closure of the path in itself will not cause any negative impact to the carbon neutral targets..

### **List of Background Papers**

Application from the organisers of the Henley Festival  
Map of the proposed temporary closure and alternative paths

Details of responses from consultees Initial Equality Impact Assessment
--

<b>Contact</b> Andrew Fletcher	<b>Service Place</b>
<b>Telephone</b> 07789 032544	<b>Email</b> <a href="mailto:andrew.fletcher@wokingham.gov.uk">andrew.fletcher@wokingham.gov.uk</a>

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## **APPLICATION FOR TOWPATH DIVERSION FOR HENLEY FESTIVAL 2023**

**STAGE BUILD - short diversion taking walkers approx 15m off the towpath for a length of approx 80m around the stage construction site.**

Mon 3rd July 00:01 - Wed 5<sup>th</sup> July 17:45

Henley Festival will make every effort to re-open the towpath sooner, so long as it is safe to do so.

**SHOW NIGHTS – full diversion with diverted route to rear of the site**

Wed 5<sup>th</sup> July 2023 17:45 - midnight

Thurs 6<sup>th</sup> July 2023 17:45 – midnight

Friday 7<sup>th</sup> July 2023 17:45 – 01:00

Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> July 2023 10:45 – 14:45

Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> July 2023 17:45 – 02:00

Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> July 2023 10:00 – 14:15

Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> July 2023 17:00 – 23:30

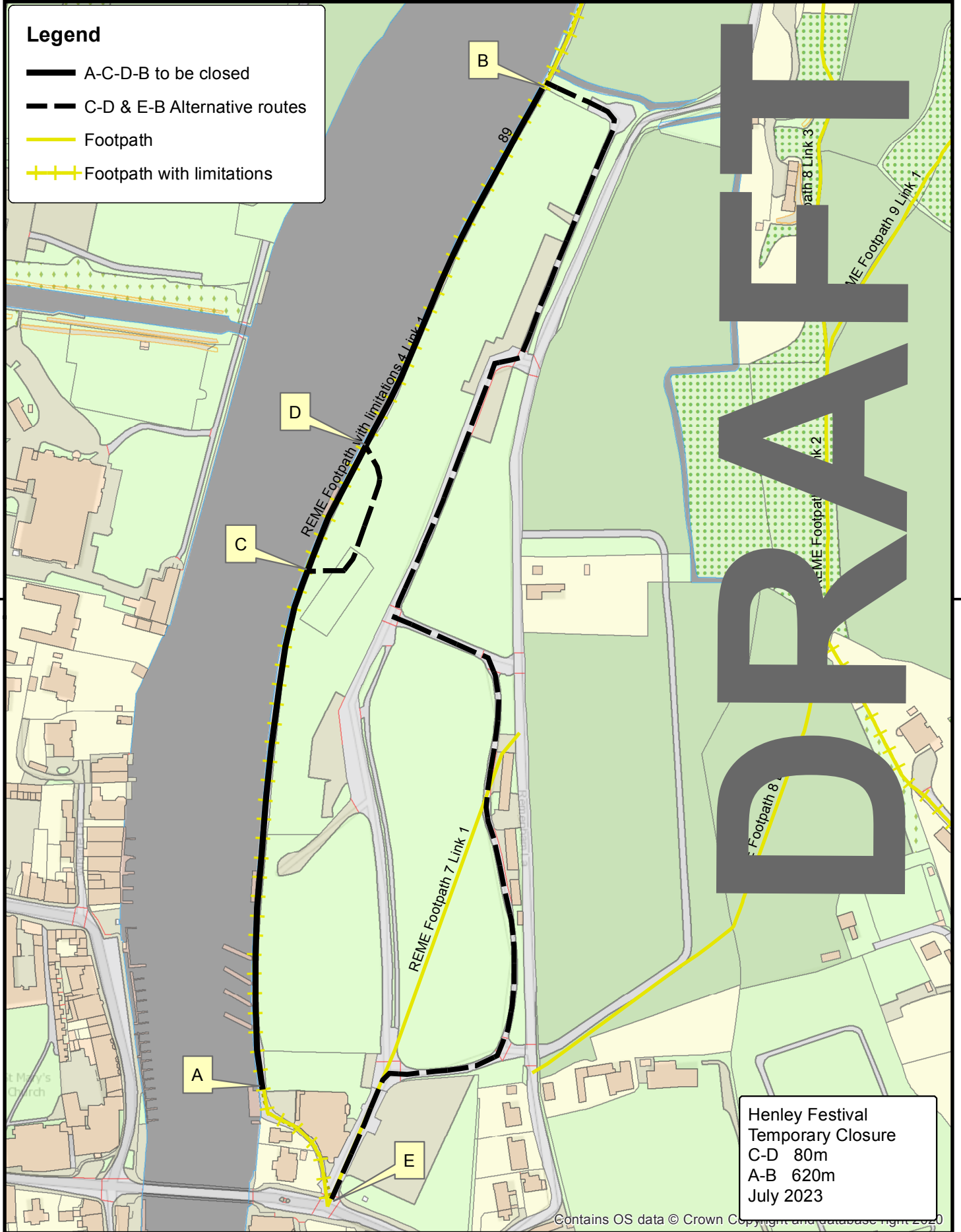
**STAGE DE-RIG - short diversion taking walkers approx 15m off the towpath for a length of approx 80m around the stage construction site.**

Mon 10<sup>th</sup> July 2023 06:00 – Tues 11<sup>th</sup> July 2023 23:59

Henley Festival will make every effort to re-open the towpath sooner, so long as it is safe to do so.

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WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL  
 ROAD TRAFFIC REGULATION ACT 1984 SECTION 16A  
 TRAFFIC REGULATION ORDER  
 REMENHAM FOOTPATH 4 (PART) 2023



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**Temporary Closure Remenham Footpath 4 Henley Festival 2023**  
**Details of responses to stakeholder consultation and permission from landowner**

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Date Received</b>	<b>Details of response</b>
Open Spaces Society	6 <sup>th</sup> Oct 2021	Objects to the order on numerous grounds which have been considered and responded to in detail in the main report
Remenham Parish Council		No response received
Henley Town Council		No response received
Loddon Valley Ramblers (LVR)	27 <sup>th</sup> Sept 2021	No objection
Thames Path National Trail		No response received
Henley Royal Regatta	1 <sup>st</sup> Nov 2021	Confirms that the alternative route will be made available and kept open for the use of members of the public during the closure period.  Confirms that no other party is required to give consent.

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## Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) form: the initial impact assessment

### 1. Process and guidance

The purpose of an EqIA is to make sure that the council is meeting the needs of all our residents by ensuring we consider how different groups of people may be affected by or experience a proposal in different ways. EqIAs help us to meet our [Public Sector Equality Duty](#) and where applicable the [Armed Forces Duty](#)

The council has a two stage EqIA process:

- Stage 1 - the initial impact assessment
- Stage 2 - the full impact assessment.

This form is for use at Stage 1 of the process. This must be completed when undertaking a project, policy change, or service change. It can form part of a business case for change and must be completed and attached to a Project Initiation Document. The findings of the initial impact assessment will determine whether a full impact assessment is needed.

Guidance and tools for council officers can be accessed on the council's Tackling Inequality Together intranet pages.

Date started:	31/10/2022	
Completed by:	Andrew Fletcher	
Service:	Green & Blue Infrastructure	
Project or policy EqIA relates to:	Temporary closure of Remenham Footpath 4	
Date EqIA discussed at service team meeting:	3 <sup>rd</sup> November 2022	

Conclusion (is a full assessment needed?):	No full assessment required.	
Signed off by (AD):	Fran Hobson	
Sign off date:	25/11/2022	

## 2. Summary of the policy, project, or service

This section should be used to summarise the project, policy, or service change (the proposal).

### **What is the purpose of the proposal, what are the aims and expected outcomes, and how does it relate to service plans and the corporate plan?**

A request has been received from the organisers of the Henley Festival of Music and the Arts for the closure of part of Footpath No.4 Remenham to allow for the land to be used to host the Henley Festival between 3<sup>rd</sup> 11<sup>th</sup> July 2023. During this time an alternative route will be available for the public to use.

### **How will the proposal be delivered, what governance arrangements are in place and who are the key internal stakeholders?**

The Council have powers to approve the temporary closure of public rights of way to allow for events to take place under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984.

Whilst there is no legal requirement to consult in respect of the application, the Council agreed at Executive on June 25th 2015, that for applications for temporary closures on rights of way affecting the Thames Path and the Blackwater Valley Footpath, (for special events) the following policy will be adopted:

- 1) prior consultation will be carried out with the following groups: The Ramblers' Association, The Open Spaces Society, Natural England, the relevant Parish Council and the ward member for the area through which the path is situated; and

2) the decision as to whether a closure will be made will be taken by the Executive unless it is agreed by the Executive Member for Environment that such referral to the Executive is not required.

Once the informal consultation has been conducted, a report will be prepared for the Executive which will be sent to Andy Glencross (Service Manager) and Fran Hobson (AD – Environment & Safety) for approval.

**Who will be affected by the proposal? Think about who it is aimed at and who will deliver it.**

Footpath users will be affected by the proposal. The proposal will be delivered by Henley Festival as part of their set-up arrangements.

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### 3. Data & Protected Characteristics

This section should be used to set out what data you have gathered to support the initial impact assessment.

The table below sets out the equality groups that need to be considered in the impact assessment. These comprise the nine protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act 2010 and other priority areas defined by the council.

Age	Disability	Gender reassignment	Marriage and Civil Partnership	Pregnancy/Maternity
Religious belief	Race	Sex	Sexual Orientation	Socio-economic disadvantage

The Armed Forces Act 2021 also requires consideration of the [impact on Armed Forces Communities](#) when exercising certain housing, education or healthcare functions (excluding social care). Further guidance can be found [here](#).

**What data and information will be used to help assess the impact of the proposal on different groups of people? A list of useful resources is available for officers on the Council’s Tackling Inequality Together intranet pages.**

This diversion has been undertaken for many years without any complaints or issues raised by any protected groups. It is the opinion of officers that the diversion route is as suitable for all groups as the original route.

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#### 4. Assessing & Scoring Impact

This section should be used to assess the likely impact on each equality group, consider how significant any impacts could be and explain how the data gathered supports the conclusions made.

Scoring impact for equality groups	
Positive impact	The proposal promotes equality of opportunity by meeting needs or addressing existing barriers to participation and/or promotes good community relations
Neutral or no impact	The proposal has no impact or no disproportionate impact.
Low negative	The proposal is likely to negatively impact a small number of people, be of short duration and can easily be resolved.
High negative	The proposal is likely to have a significant negative impact on many people or a severe impact on a smaller number of people.

Referring to the Scoring table above, please give an impact score for each group, explain what the likely impact will be, and briefly set out how the data supports this conclusion.

Equality group	Impact score	Impact and supporting data
Age	No impact	
Disability	No impact	
Gender reassignment	No impact	
Marriage and Civil Partnership	No impact	
Pregnancy/Maternity	No impact	
Religious belief	No impact	
Race	No impact	
Sex	No impact	
Sexual Orientation	No impact	
Socio-economic disadvantage	No impact	
Armed Forces Communities	No impact	

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## 5. Conclusion and next steps.

Based on your findings from your initial impact assessment, you must complete a full impact assessment if you have identified any groups as having a low or high negative impact.

If no impact, or a positive impact has been identified, you do not need to complete a full assessment. However, you must include reference to the initial assessment in any associated reports, and it must receive formal approval from the Assistant Director responsible for the project, policy, or service change.



<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Chief Financial Officer's Report</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	The Executive on Thursday 26 <sup>th</sup> January 2023
<b>WARD</b>	None specific;
<b>LEAD OFFICER</b>	Deputy Chief Executive – Graham Ebers
<b>LEAD MEMBER</b>	Executive Member for Finance – Imogen Shepherd/DuBey

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

The Local Government Act 2003 requires the Chief Finance Officer (Deputy Chief Executive and CFO) to report to Members, when setting the level of Council Tax, on the robustness of the budget presented and adequacy of reserves. The CFO report highlights the strong financial management the Council. It also outlines the major financial issues facing the Council in the medium-term period, which without the Council taking a commercial approach could increase the reliance on council tax income as well as impact on the future delivery of Council services.

**RECOMMENDATION**

The Executive is asked to:

- 1) note the Chief Finance Officer (CFO) report (**Appendix A**) and the issues contained within, including the local government finance settlement and the sections on key risks, and that they consider these when setting the council tax for 2023/24 and agreeing the Council's medium term financial plan (MTFP);
- 2) support the Council's response to the local government finance settlement as set out in **Appendix 6 of the Chief Finance Officer report**.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Local Government Act 2003 requires the Chief Financial Officer (Deputy Chief Executive) to report to Members as part of the budget setting process. A major influence on the budget is the local government finance settlement. It is important to note that the current finance settlement is again for one year only. A 3-year funding settlement has been expected and requested across Local Government for a number of years but only a 1 year settlement was announced, again leaving considerable uncertainty over the Council's funding from 2024/25 onwards. Wokingham still face major ambiguity on future funding levels in the face of unprecedented risk and increases in demand and await the outcome from the delayed Government's comprehensive spending review.

The report seeks to explain the Council's finances, including its financial challenges and risks, to provide an important context to the 2023/24 budget proposals. The final version of this report will be presented to Council in February and will provide an opinion on how safe the 2023/24 proposals are considered to be.

## BACKGROUND

The Local Government Act 2003 requires the Chief Finance Officer (Deputy Chief Executive and CFO) to report to Members, when setting the level of Council Tax, on the robustness of the budget presented and adequacy of reserves. The report outlines the major financial issues facing the Council.

The Chief Financial Officer's report contains issues, risks and strategic considerations in respect of revenue and capital. Key issues are also highlighted in the report.

The provisional local government finance settlement was released on 19 December 2022, outlining Wokingham's funding levels for 2023/24. A response to the consultation on the settlement has been prepared and is attached as appendix two. The final settlement will be ratified by Parliament in February.

### Corporate Implications

The Medium Term Financial Plan covers both the revenue and capital budgets required to deliver the priorities of the Council over the next three years. The proposed net revenue budget for 2023/24 is approximately £154m (excluding depreciation) (£145m in 2022/23).

The Council needs to set a balanced budget in the context of this. The budget requirements for 2023/24 and 2024/25 are also shown in the plan as indicative figures only

### FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

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

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

#### Other Financial Information

Included in MTFP

#### Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

The budget setting process starts early in the previous financial year with a focus on areas which require budget growth to meet growing demands and areas which can deliver savings through efficiencies and additional income generation.

A budget submission process is undertaken to ensure budget bids can be challenged in the context of the Council's aims and objectives. To enhance transparency and budget setting engagement this year's process (similar to last year) has included consultation

with the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee (CCOSC). Information provided at CCOSC is also available to the Public.

### **Public Sector Equality Duty**

Public Sector Equality Duty was considered throughout the budget bid process

**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 MTFP sets out the Councils planned investment to support Climate Change and individual service changes will also consider environmental impacts as part of business case and decision making process.

### **List of Background Papers**

CFO Section for Medium Term Financial Plan

Appendix Two – WBC Consultation response letter to draft settlement

<b>Contact</b> Graham Cadle	<b>Service</b> Finance
<b>Telephone</b> 0118 974 6555	<b>Email</b> <a href="mailto:Graham.cadle@wokingham.gov.uk">Graham.cadle@wokingham.gov.uk</a>

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## Appendix A

### CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER'S STATUTORY REPORT

#### 1. Introduction

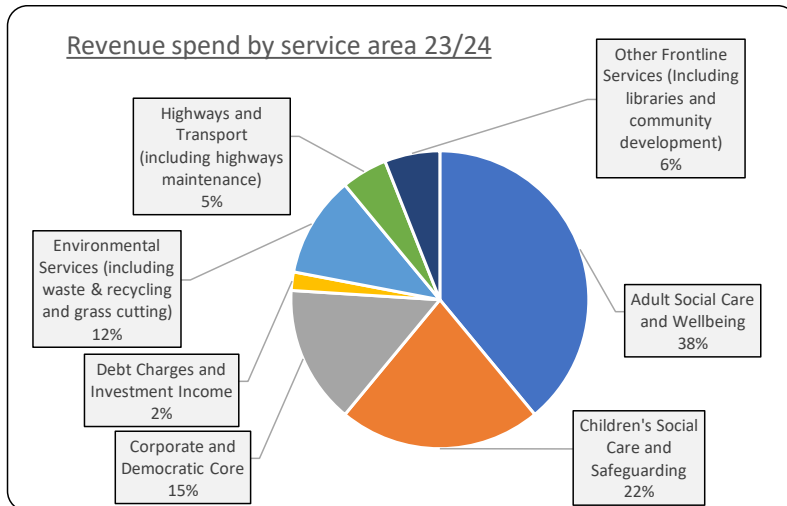
The Local Government Act 2003 requires the Chief Finance Officer (CFO) to report to Members (Councillors), when setting the council tax charges. The CFO must state if the budget is robust and if it has enough reserves. The report is intended to discharge this responsibility and provides an overview of the Council's financial position as a context before making specific recommendations on the 2023/24 budget.

The budget setting process started early in 2022/23 ensuring spend supports delivery of the Council's priorities (below) and are further detailed in the Council Plan (<https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/council-and-meetings/open-data/community-vision-and-council-plan/>). Budget proposals are put forward to invest in areas that require more spend to meet increasing demands, to reflect where services can be more efficient or where they can generate more income. The budget is also set to try to meet changing need, such as with the cost of living crisis.



A thorough and detailed budget setting process (where appropriate including impact assessments such as for Equalities) is undertaken to ensure spend is challenged against the Council's aims and objectives. To enhance transparency and engagement, this year's process has again included consultation with the Community & Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Committee (CCOSC) which is made up of Councillors from all parties and independent councillors. Information provided at CCOSC is also available to the Public.

A robust budget must be a balanced budget whereby total expenditure is matched by total income. Any change in the annual budget in relation to increased spend must be balanced by service efficiencies and/or additional income or council tax increases.



## 2. The financial standing of the Council

Heading into the 2023/24 financial year, the financial standing of the Council remains robust but with a number of significant local and national challenges ahead. This position has been maintained despite the Borough facing some of the most acute challenges in many years; the pandemic, cost of living/inflation rises, migration and the impacts of Brexit. It has only been achieved through strong financial management.

The Council has established financial resilience and sustainability, despite years of austerity resulting in minimal real terms increases and often real terms decreases in Government funding. **Appendix 6** is a letter from the Leader of the Council, Executive Member for Finance and Housing and the Chief Finance Officer to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government in response to the latest Local Government Financial Settlement (2023/24) detailing the pressures and impacts locally from the current approach and allocation.

Further challenges currently outside of the main General Fund also continue to build, significantly the DSG deficit as with many councils continues to increase and requires intervention to develop a longer-term sustainable position.

Further information is provided in **Appendix 1** which details:

- The standing of Wokingham Borough Council as indicated by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy (CIPFA) Resilience index; which shows the Council in the top 20 of upper tier authorities for financial sustainability, when initially published;
- context of the position in relation to government grants;
  - Lowest funding level across Berkshire LA's
  - Lowest Settlement Funding Assessment per head of population (unitary authorities)
  - Percentage of Revenue Support Grant lost between 2017/18 and 2022/23 – 100%

In order to achieve such a strong financial position, despite the challenges from funding and local and national pressures, the Council has enacted and enhanced; an effective budget monitoring and management process, an ongoing improvement and efficiency programme, and a continual review of the allocation of resources to meet demand and local priorities.

Further details of the outcomes and impacts of the above approaches are detailed in **Appendix 2**

Enhanced financial management has been vital to the organisation through recent financial challenges and particularly the Covid-19 pandemic. As we further understand the longer-term implications of those events and now face further challenges such as “Cost of Living” and from specific services such as Home to School Transport, we are working closely with Directors and Lead Members to continually review and challenge forecasts and to model future impacts.

These activities include;

- Seeking to maximise opportunities to deliver on savings plans, ensuring service models and approaches reflect latest demand and local need.
- Exploring reduced expenditure opportunities, including a review of Special (one-off) expenditure Items.
- Maintaining a regular financial review of the ongoing Covid-19 and emerging pressures of cost of living impacts including collection rates and Direct Debit failure rates on major income streams.
- Undertaking a Corporate transformation and efficiency program identifying key workstreams to shape and drive key opportunities including through use of assets and our approach to procurement and contract management.
- Initiating an early MTFP review process tailored to identify areas of relative financial certainty and high-risk areas of greater ambiguity.
- Reviewing non-General Fund balances to assess risks and potential options to transfer balances to the General Fund reserve (if the General Fund position becomes perilously low).
- Continuing to make representations for additional funding through Government Returns, Regional Conference calls and MPs.

As well as ongoing operational budget management and monitoring the authority utilises external and historical data and understanding to ensure confidence and robustness in its overall finances, funding and future spending need including those detailed in Appendix 1 and 2

### **3. How Council services are funded?**

For 2023/24, the Council are planning to spend in the region of £530 million across revenue, capital, housing revenue account and dedicated school grants services. Council services can be broken down across 4 key financial areas known as;

- **Revenue (also known as General Fund) – expenditure in providing day to day services.**

Revenue expenditure covers the day to day running of services across the Council. For 2023/24, the Council will spend approximately £231m across these services. This is known as gross expenditure. Service specific grants and income will reduce this spend to a net expenditure in the region of £154m.

Further information on where this money is spent is highlighted throughout the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). Funding of this revenue expenditure is determined through the local government finance settlement and consists of;

- Settlement Funding Assessment (SFA);
  - Revenue Support Grant (RSG)
  - Retained Business Rates
- Council Tax
- New Homes Bonus

A robust budget must be a balanced budget whereby total expenditure and total income match. Any change in the annual budget in relation to spend pressures must be balanced by service efficiencies and where appropriate council tax increases.

Local authorities have continued to push for a fairer funding review and long-term finance settlements to provide sustainable long-term funding for Local authorities. The intention from the government for some years has been to set a three-year finance settlement, however this has yet to materialise. The fundamental funding review is not likely to be enacted until 2025/26 at the earliest and has recently been published for 2023/24 only, with some indications for 2024/25. This means that there is still much uncertainty around future settlements in terms of duration and the actual funding Wokingham will receive. Consequently, it has been difficult to make definite determinations about budgets in 2024/25 and 2025/26. This context alongside a number of local and national pressures means it is extremely important the Council takes a prudent approach in its budget setting proposals for the 2023-2026 medium term financial plan.

- **Capital – expenditure in assets that generate economic benefits greater than one year.**

A five-year capital strategy has been developed with the aims of realising the Council's vision, raising the quality of life of residents and improving medium to long term planning.

The first three years of the capital vision invariably receive greatest consideration and provides an indicative capital programme, although budget approvals and scheme commitments are provided to year 1 only. This has been developed following an assessment against key Council priorities, including a value for money and risk analysis.

The capital programme over the next three years will include existing asset investment (predominantly school buildings and infrastructure assets) and schemes that seek to deliver the Council's vision.



To finance the capital strategy, an approach to funding has been taken that: optimises assets; seeks flexible use of future section 106 contributions and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL); and attracts new funding sources where available (particularly through the bidding for Government grants).

Under the prudential code, all authorities can borrow as much as they require to fund their capital programme provided it is affordable, prudent, and sustainable. A large proportion of Council borrowing is deemed as “supported” borrowing which means there is a direct repayment method identified meaning the cost of borrowing does not impact on the council taxpayer. These include investment to generate future cost reductions / income generation and forward funded investment to be recovered from developer contributions

The capital programme is funded from a variety of sources: capital receipts, borrowing, grants and other contributions. The relative reliance on each funding source is set out below and shows a greater dependency on borrowing and developer contributions as the Council embarks on its ambition to develop its four strategic development locations, regenerate the borough, and reduce our impact on the climate.

Further detail of the Capital Programme and its funding is shown in **Appendix 3**

- **Housing Revenue Account (HRA) – ringfenced expenditure across the local authority housing stock.**

Under the Localism Act the Council took control of its housing rental income thus enabling more effective planning for the long-term management of these key assets. In return Wokingham took on its share of the £28bn national housing debt as part of the self-financing settlement. Although the Council took on significant debt to do this, the scheme should be beneficial to the Council and its tenants in the longer term both regarding retaining income and generating capacity to invest in the housing stock.

The HRA is a ring-fenced account and as such has no impact on the level of council tax. The money spent maintaining the Council’s housing stock (valued at approximately £274m) and providing a service to Council tenants is mainly funded by housing rents paid by Council tenants.

For capital spend, this is funded from the major repairs reserve, right to buy receipts and borrowing. Under accounting rules, an amount equal to the depreciation charge is transferred from the HRA revenue reserve into the major repairs reserve to contribute towards capital expenditure. It is therefore necessary to generate sufficient net income through housing rents to both reduce the level of debt over time and provide for major repairs.

- **Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) – ringfenced expenditure across maintained schools, early years and high needs services.**

The Council receives DSG annually from the DfE and it must be used in support of the schools’ budget as defined in the School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2022. The purpose of the schools’ budget is defined in legislation as the provision of primary

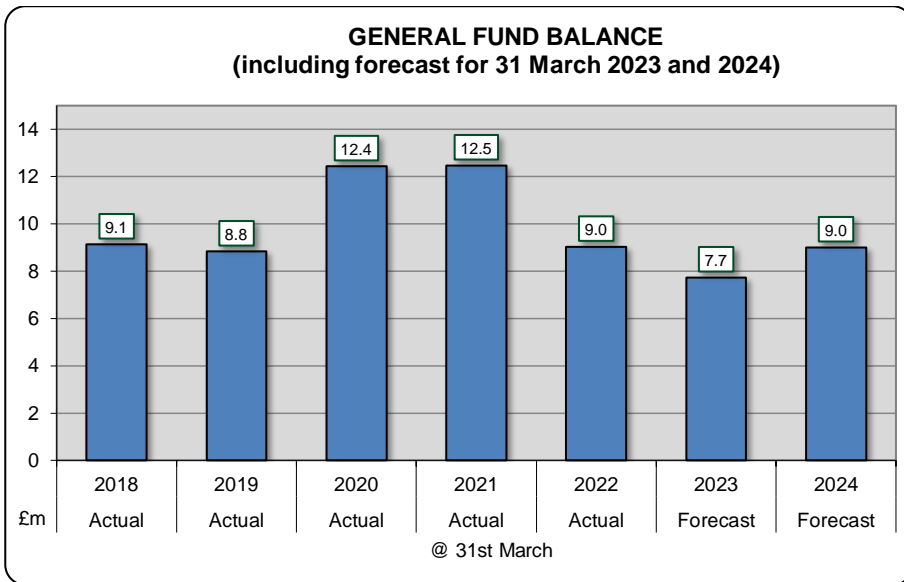
and secondary education. Since the implementation of these regulations DSG deficits have risen in many Councils across the country and Wokingham is no exception. The annual deficit has risen significantly over the past five years and the accumulated deficit is of considerable concern. For this reason the Council has enlisted in the national Safety Valve programme, to ensure it is doing all it can to appropriately contain demand through numerous measures with regards to early intervention and prevention, manage need through greater self-provision and attain some additional financial support from the Government.

Further detail of the DSG are included in **Appendix 4**

#### 4. Adequacy of reserves

The level of general fund balances is informed by a budget risk analysis. This approach was introduced in 2003/04 when the Council agreed the policy on reserves and balances. The budget risk analysis is included annually in the medium-term financial plan. Historically this has shown that a safe level of General Fund Balances to be in the region of £9m with a minimum at £5m.

The risks facing the Council's finances have increased significantly, they include the implication of future years of austerity; further grant reductions; additional service pressures; substantial regeneration programmes requiring forward funding; dependency on future commercial income and capital contributions; risks around business rate receipts, and the level of retained business rates.



Please note that work continues in 2022/23 to reduce the in-year overspend of £1.3m reported in the quarter three revenue monitoring and thereby restore reserves towards an intended minimum target level of £9m.

### **Capital**

The Council hold various reserves for capital spend in the form of capital grants and contributions. Due to the nature of capital spend and multi-year projects, some reserves will be held but will be allocated to funding future year capital projects. The Council continuously review all capital funding each financial year to ensure grants are used where possible ahead of borrowing to reduce the capital financing costs (e.g. principal repayment + interest).

### **Housing Revenue Account (HRA)**

Similar to the general fund balance, the level of HRA balance is informed by a budget risk analysis. Due to nature of the HRA being a ringfenced account where the main source of income is tenant's rental income, holding prudent reserves remain important to act as a contingency to meet unforeseen spending requirements or income reductions and to provide stability in medium term financial planning. Reserves have remained stable for the past two years and in line with our estimate of a prudential reserve limit

### **Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)**

As highlighted earlier, the Council have faced significant pressures over the past 4 years in relation to the High Needs Block, combined with under funding from the government the Council are now estimating a deficit reserve at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 of £16.5m in this area. For 2022/23 the mitigations are largely due to be delivered from actions and provision already planned for in the budget. From 2023/24 onwards successful delivery of the mitigations are predicated on increased local provision and are likely to require additional capital investment options currently being developed. We are currently working with the DfE to form a recovery plan for this. Recent accounting guidance published by CIPFA confirmed that this deficit reserve should be held as an unusable reserve and therefore not the responsibility of the council taxpayer to fund.

The Council also hold approximately c£7m in school reserves which are held to act as a contingency to offset future pressures and or put towards capital investment within schools.

### **Other Balances**

The Council holds other earmarked balances in addition to the general fund balance. These should be reviewed as part of the budget submission and in the context of their benefit and opportunity cost.

Many of the earmarked reserves are held for specific purposes such as developer funding for future maintenance of assets, grants received in advance and equalisation funds to smooth annual changes on demand led areas such as waste and recycling. Other reserves include interest equalisation and forward funding which are linked to the capital programme where infrastructure is delivered ahead of receipt of developer funding.

Further information is available in section 2 of the medium-term financial plan under reserves and balances.

## 5. Major Financial Risks – Forward Look

Although the Council has worked over many years on the highest standards of financial management, including a strong track record of delivery of significant savings, the financial future looks both extremely challenging and uncertain. The degree of uncertainty is at a level never previously experienced by the Council.

The explanatory below sets out the key risks identified by each Directorate. Further detail including the mitigations and controls that are in place are provided in **Appendix 5**

**Adult Social Care** – Although the charging reform has been postponed until year 3 of the MTFP, the risk of care reform measures and the impact on the care market remains. The National living wage increase will mean an already struggling care market will require additional financial support through care payment increases. There is also a national requirement to enable an expedited hospital discharge rate with the consequence of a higher number of care placements to be secured and funded by the Local Authority with little additional funding to do this. Already demand in this area is increasing both in terms of numbers and complexity, which will be exacerbated through further pressures on both the care market and the health system.

**Children’s Services** – Particularly pressures are being experienced through a starkly rising number of Children in Care and through increased EHCPs. The later which is the primary reason behind the escalating DSG deficit and linked to this is significant year on year growth in Home to School Transport which is compounded by other factors such as the increase in transport running costs. Inward migration, particularly the Unaccompanied Asylum scheme which has recently required a higher uptake brings further pressure on Children’s Services.

**Place & Growth** – Inflationary pressures are being felt severely in many areas undertaken within this Directorate in terms of both in Revenue and Capital. As a Directorate that provides the highest value of discretionary services and generates the highest value of discretionary income, it is inevitable that it will be putting forward a number of the funding solutions to address the budget gap. The successful delivery of these proposals will carry risk, some considerably higher than others.

**Corporate** – The impact of inflation, interest rates, the continuing impact of Covid and the cost of living crisis is felt Council-wide both in terms of the direct impact and the imperative to respond to the needs of the community where we can. Similar to Place & Growth, there will be considerable Corporately held savings and efficiencies targets, such as those coming out of the Organisation Foundations, that must be delivered on.

From a strategic financial perspective, it will be extremely challenging to keep spending within budget in 2022/23 given the National and Local context and we must do all we can to minimise and prevent any unfunded financial burdens flowing into 2023/24. The 2023/24 budget proposals will attempt to fund and address the challenges described above, however considerable financial risk will need to be held and managed within Directorates

and across the Council. The longer term strategic financial position will be impacted by the Council's responsible approach in setting the 2023/24 budget and how it continues to closely review and respond where necessary. These endeavours will need to be discharged in the context of considerable uncertainties which includes both the economic landscape and Government funding, given the financial settlement was for one year only. Longer term the unknown financial pressures around future legislative requirements, will also need to be understood and overcome, such as; the removal of the statutory override on the DSG; the new requirements for Minimum Revenue Provision; and the ASC charging reform.

## 6. Conclusion

My concluding statements of the safeness of the budget proposals will accompany their presentation to Council in February.



**Graham Ebers**  
Deputy Chief Executive  
(and Chief Financial Officer)

## 7. Glossary

Abbreviation	Description
ASC	<b>Adult social care</b>
CCOSC	<b>Community &amp; Corporate Overview &amp; Scrutiny</b>
CIPFA	<b>Chartered Institute of Public Finance &amp; Accountancy</b>
CFO	<b>Chief Finance Officer</b>
CPI	<b>Consumer Price Index</b>
DSG	<b>Dedicated Schools Grant</b>
DFE	<b>Department for Education</b>
DoHSC	<b>Department of Health and Social Care</b>
ESG	<b>Education services grant</b>
GFB	<b>General fund balances</b>
HND	<b>High Needs Block</b>
HRA	<b>Housing revenue account</b>
MOD	<b>Ministry of Defence</b>
MTFP	<b>Medium term financial plan</b>
NDR	<b>Non-domestic (business) rates</b>
NHB	<b>New homes bonus</b>
PUF	<b>Primary unit cost</b>
RPI	<b>Retail Price Index</b>
RSG	<b>Revenue support grant</b>
SDL	<b>Strategic development locations</b>
SEND	<b>Special Educational Needs and Disability</b>
SFA	<b>Settlement funding assessment</b>
SoBM	<b>Summary of budget movements</b>
SUF	<b>Secondary unit cost</b>
TCR	<b>Town centre regeneration</b>
WHL	<b>Wokingham Housing Limited</b>

## Appendix 1;

### Key Financial Standing & Funding Context

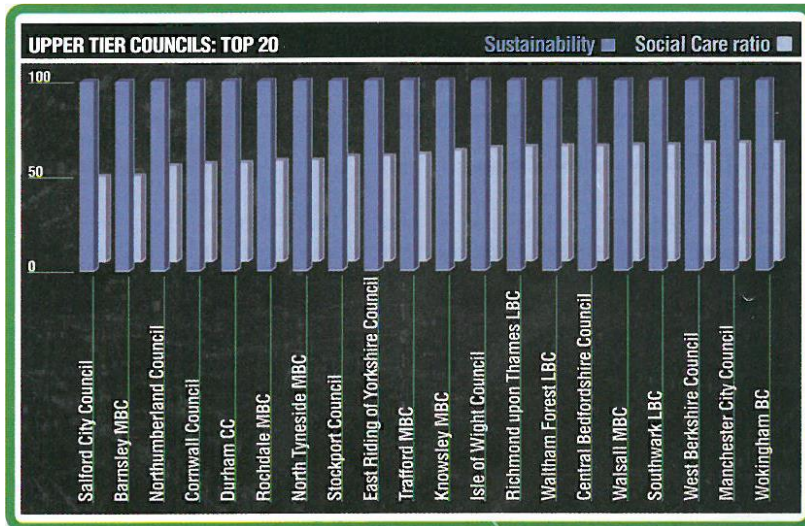
As part of the overall approach to managing and monitoring the financial position it is important to monitor and review the longer-term trend, impacts of funding and the position against other Councils. These are useful measures to further ensure Wokingham's approach and understanding is reasonable and there are not other risks or opportunities that have not been considered or understood.

#### **CIPFA Resilience Index**

In December 2019, CIPFA published their first financial resilience tool which highlighted key financial indicators such as reserves sustainability, external debt and social care ratios based on the 2018/2019 financial year. The index shows a council's position on a range of measures associated with financial risk and financial stress. The selection of indicators has been informed by the extensive financial resilience work undertaken by CIPFA over a number of years, public consultation and technical stakeholder engagement.

Wokingham have been rated in the top 20 of upper tier councils for financial sustainability (source: 9<sup>th</sup> Jan 2020 – The Management Journal). Although Wokingham have been rated highly for financial sustainability (measured by ability to maintain reserve balances), the Council still face significant challenges and risks in the future which are outlined in this report and throughout the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). Also included in the graph is the social care ratio which shows how much of the annual spend is linked to social care which is seen by CIPFA as an area of financial risk for all local authorities.

The latest resilience index published (based on 2020/21 data) showed an improved position on indicators of financial stress. These included improved indicators around maintaining or improving earmarked reserves and the cost of social care as a proportion of total expenditure compared to other local authorities.



Source – The MJ – 9<sup>th</sup> January 2020 (The above analysis, undertaken for a national report, has not been repeated or updated since January 2020, however is still relevant to understand Wokingham's position and context at that time. We will consider methods to update this for future years reports)

### Wokingham Funding Context

The reductions in Government grants have had a major impact on the Council's finances and budgets since 2010/11. The Council's net expenditure budget has been reduced each year since 2010/11 as shown in the table below, which indicates that the net expenditure budget has been reduced by £53m (50%) between 2010/11 and 2023/24 meaning the Council are delivering services more cost effectively.

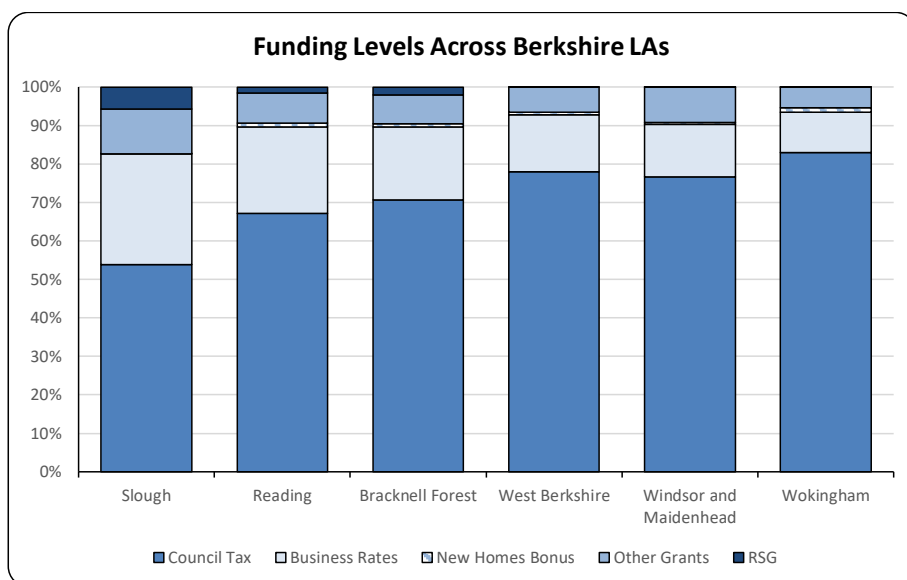
	£m
WBC 2023/24 net expenditure budget	153.9
Less reduction in grants for services now part of formula grant	(12.5)
Less discount re inflation since 2010/11 (based on CPI)	(68.4)
Less discount re growth in council tax base since 2010/11	(21.5)
<b>Net expenditure budget 2023/24 discounted to 2010/11 Prices (a)</b>	<b>52.2</b>
<b>WBC 2010/11 net expenditure budget (b)</b>	<b>105.2</b>
<b>Estimated reduction in expenditure since 2010/11 ( b – a )</b>	<b>£53.0m (50%)</b>

This is the result of numerous years of local government funding driven by a formula that is skewed toward deprivation factors (as opposed to recognising the basic cost of providing services) and reductions in centrally funded grants based on percentage reductions to



previous years, Wokingham Borough Council has been for many years the lowest funded unitary authority (per head of population) in the country. A consequence of this is that Wokingham Borough Council's local services are deemed in the finance settlement to have the majority funded by its council taxpayers. Whilst the average unitary authorities receive revenue support grant and retained business rates to fund around 30% of their service costs, Wokingham receive only 11%.

The graph below highlights the imbalance of funding requirements across the 6 Berkshire authorities. Based on the core spending assumptions from central government in the finance settlement, Wokingham has the majority of funding expected to come from council tax as opposed to Slough for example, who receive more revenue support grant and can retain more business rates funding.

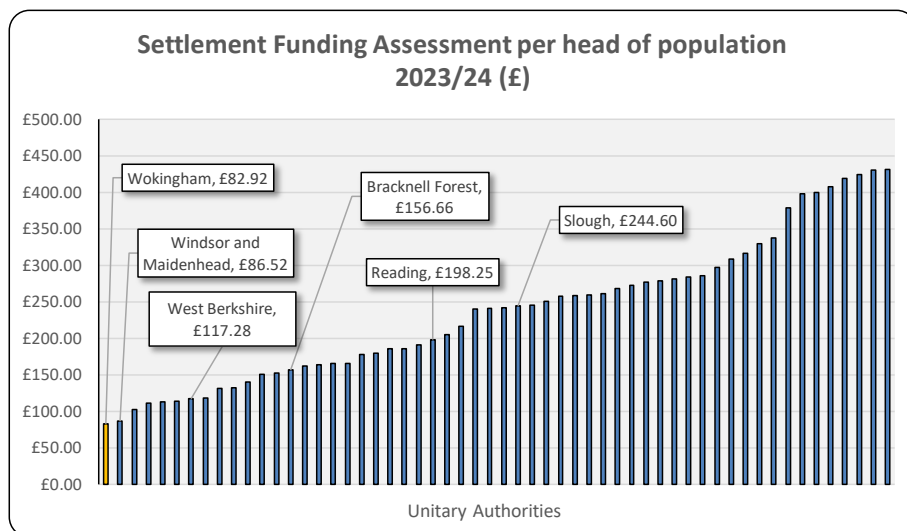


### **Settlement Funding Assessment (SFA)**

The SFA is a calculation consisting of the sum of baseline funding level (BFL) and the revenue support grant (RSG). The BFL represents Wokingham's share of business rates retained income (£14.65m) and the RSG represents a grant from government to help fund services within Wokingham (£0.12m).

Wokingham's total SFA will be £14.77m in 2023/24, compared to £19.07m in 2016/17, a reduction of 22.5%, or £4.3m. Wokingham's SFA has remained close to £14.1m since 2017/18 after the reduction in 2016/17. 2023/24 is the first year the Council have seen a small increase (c4%). This means our baseline funding level and therefore retained business rates have not seen any inflationary increases.

The graph below shows the position for 2023/24 in terms of SFA funding per head of population and confirms that Wokingham is the lowest funded unitary authorities, well below the unitary average, and less than 17% of the highest funded unitary authority:



Wokingham will receive the SFA per head of £82.92, which is significantly lower than the unitary authorities' average. It is also less than half the funding of two of the Berkshire authorities. If the Council received £250 per head, this would equate to an additional c£30m in funding.

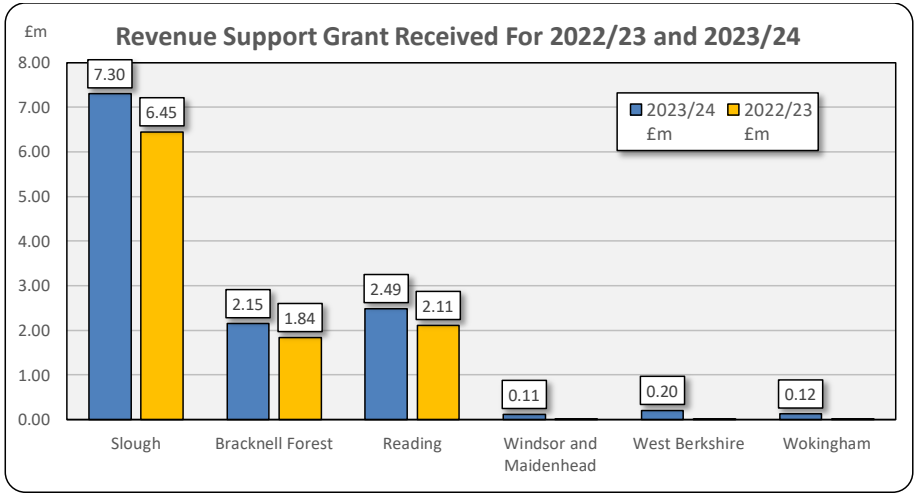
**Revenue Support Grant (RSG)**

RSG was previously the significant un-ringfenced grant that supported the Council's ongoing revenue expenditure. From 2013/14 it has been incorporated within the settlement funding assessment (SFA) which Wokingham faced reductions in grant yearly and the complete removal of this grant since 2018/19. Only this year (2023/24), have Wokingham seen some RSG allocation, £0.12m.

It was expected that from 2019/20 the grant would be cut still further with some authorities required to pay a 'negative RSG'.

However, following consistent representations made by this authority, we have been informed again through the finance settlement that negative RSG will not be enacted in 2023/24 (similar to 2022/23). The funding position is unclear from 2024/25 onwards and Wokingham will need to continue to make representations regarding the new methodology for financing local authorities to ensure we secure a fair and viable ongoing funding settlement from the Government.

The graph below compares the RSG allocations over the past two years across Berkshire Councils.

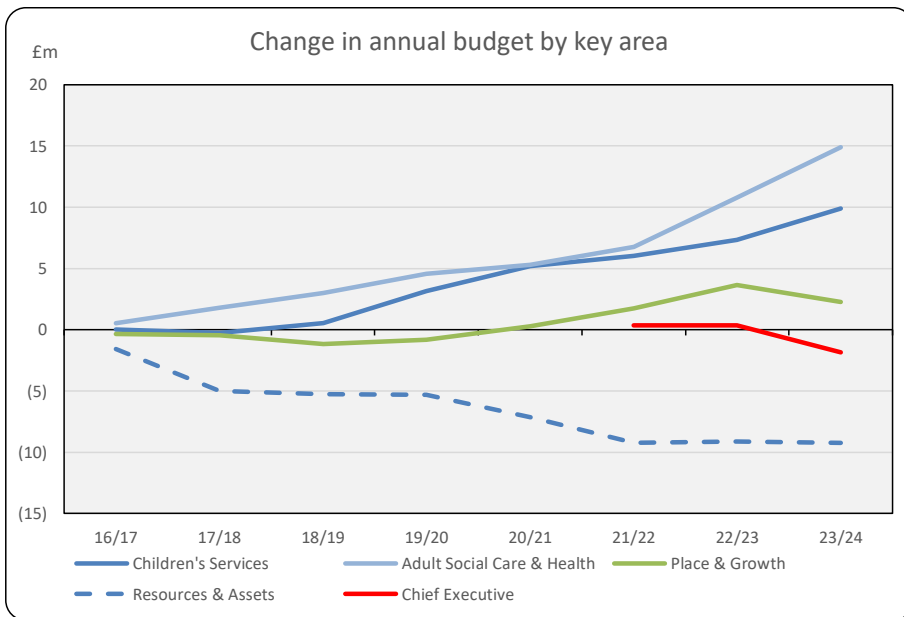


**Appendix 2;**

**Delivering through financial governance and ongoing efficiency**

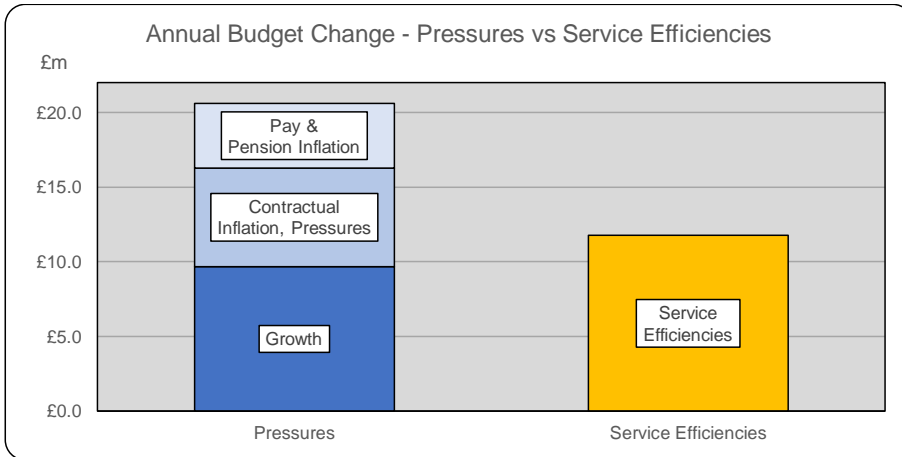
Across the many varied and complex services the Council provide, there will be pressures and risks as well as efficiencies and opportunities to reduce costs or to deliver more value from current resources. Often efficiency initiatives are required to meet additional demand and service need without the need for budget growth. The budget process aims to capture these to ensure the budget set is prudent and robust and that services continue to review their operations and cost base. The detail below shows where opportunities have been identified and how those initiatives have impact the distribution of resources across services and the impact on the overall budget position.

The graph below shows the cumulative change in annual budget across four key areas of Children’s Services, Adult Social Care & Health, Place & Growth, Resources & Assets. Whilst the graph shows cost pressures across the social care areas, the Council have managed to offset many of these through efficiencies and income generation within resources & assets services and recently place & growth.



*Note – the graph above excludes £2.96m of inflation in 2023/24 which will be distributed to services during the year.*

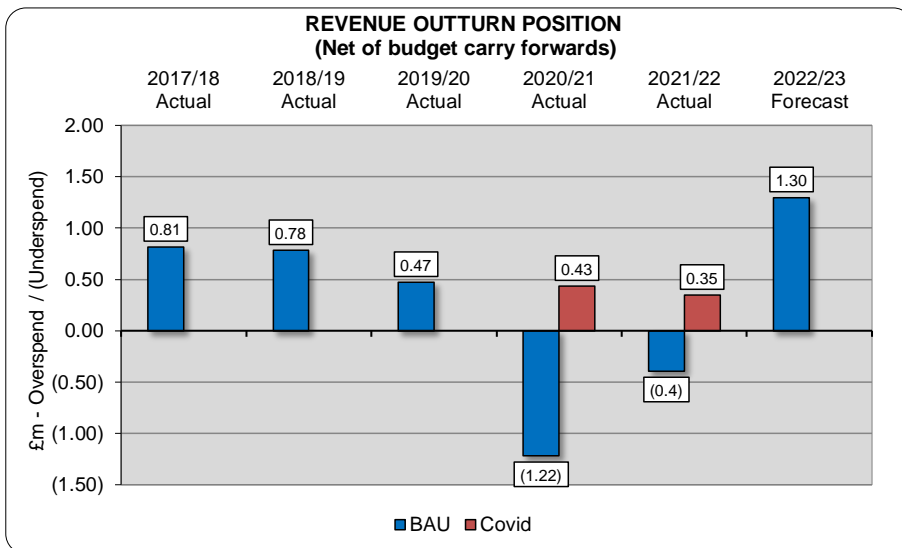
The annual change in budget is shown below. For 2023/24, the total pressures outweigh the service efficiencies. The difference will be required to be funded via council tax rises. The detail budget changes have formed part of the information provided to Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee throughout the budget process.



\* Service Efficiencies are designed to reduce costs whilst maintaining services to the public.

#### **Mitigating Service and Budget Pressures**

Over the past number of financial years, the Council have faced a number of demand led pressures in year and more recently, the financial impact from Covid-19. These underlying pressures are considered as part of the budget process. The forecast budget variance in 2022/23 currently shows a combined overspend of £1.295m compared to the budget approved in February 2022, based on December 2022 monitoring.



Further information is available in the quarterly revenue monitoring reports reported to Executive and available on the Councils website.

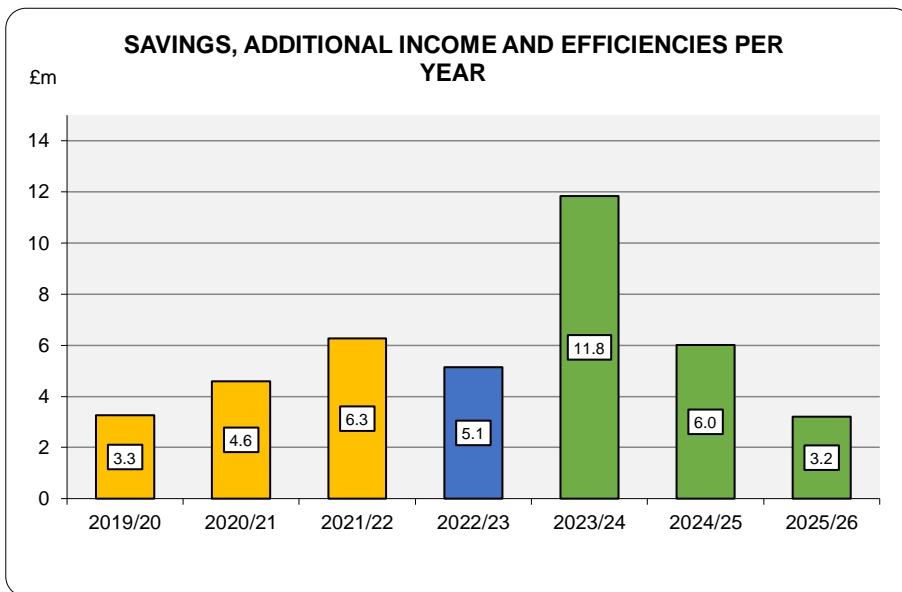
Extensive work is currently underway to manage the in-year 2022/23 position and to bring the current forecast back to a balanced position. This is critical in order to maintain appropriate reserves. Current activity includes;

- a) Departmental budget savings programmes,
- b) Restrictions on all recruitment,
- c) Implementation of future savings programmes being brought forward where possible,
- d) Program of contract reviews to manage inflation and understand efficiency options

**Delivering Efficiency and Income generation**

In order to continue to provide value for money and to maintain budgets within the ever difficult financial environment, efficiencies and income generation are required to meet the changing pressures in growth, inflation, and demand for services.

The total savings, efficiencies and income generation that have been identified in setting the council tax in previous years are shown below, along with planned savings required in the 2023/24 three year medium term financial plan. Efficiencies are used to fund growth, inflation and reductions in Government grants whilst allowing the Council to maintain frontline services.



*Nb – Amber denotes savings delivered, Blue denotes savings in delivery and Green denotes savings in future plans.*

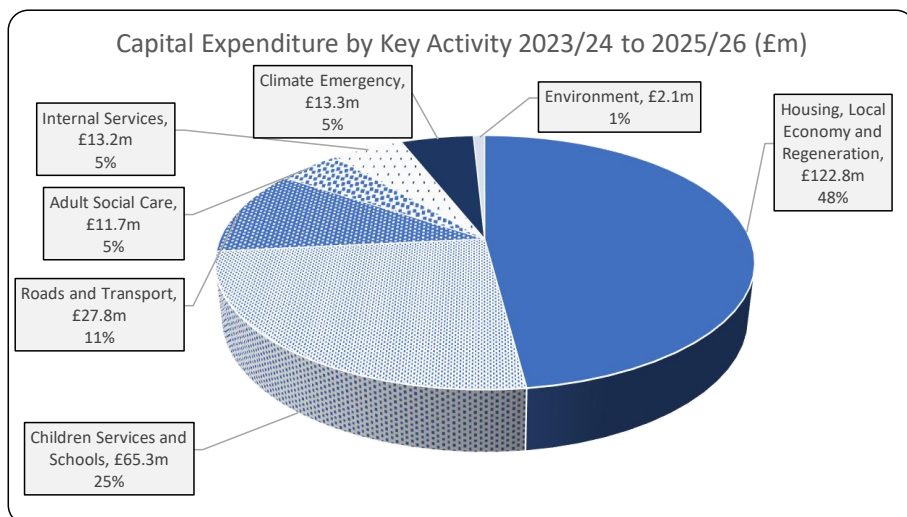
**Appendix 3;**

**Capital Programme – Investing in the Borough**

The following paragraphs further detail the Capital Programme showing where investment is being made, how the programme is being funded and the overall impact on borrowing, the capital financing requirement and the return on investments.

**Spend Analysis**

The graph below shows the capital expenditure planned for the next 3 years by key activity area. This excludes any previously approved budget that has will be carried forward into future years. In total the Council plan to invest a further £216m (including HRA) over the next 3 years.



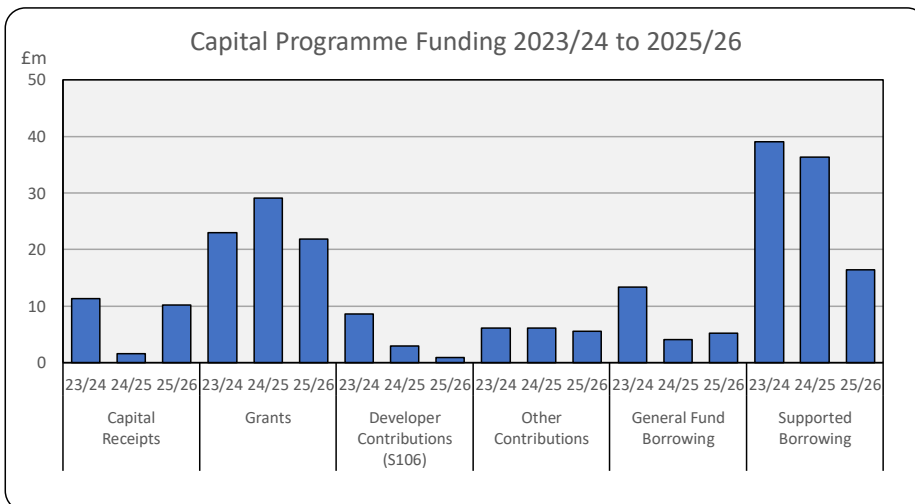
As highlighted above, significant investment is planned across schools, roads and transport, housing, local economy, and regeneration.

**Funding Capital Investment**

There is currently a gap in funding for the capital programme over the full MTFP period, however year 1 of the programme is fully funded. The longer-term budget gap will be addressed through a combination of expenditure reductions, reprofiling of projects and seeking to maximise funding resources.

The major funding source for the capital programme will be supported borrowing which relates to borrowing upfront where a direct repayment source (e.g. Income generation, HRA rental income, repayment of subsidiary company loans and future developer contributions) has been identified whereas general fund borrowing is funded through existing revenue base budget. The graph below shows how the capital programme will be funded over the next 3 years (assuming the funding gap in year 2 and 3 are met through reducing / rephasing capital expenditure).

The amounts shown under supported borrowing are based on the budget permissions set out in the capital programme consisting of different projects. Some projects will be committed to deliver whereas some budget allocations will not yet have detailed plans for spend or relevant outcomes/returns and therefore will not progress until that detail is fully understood.

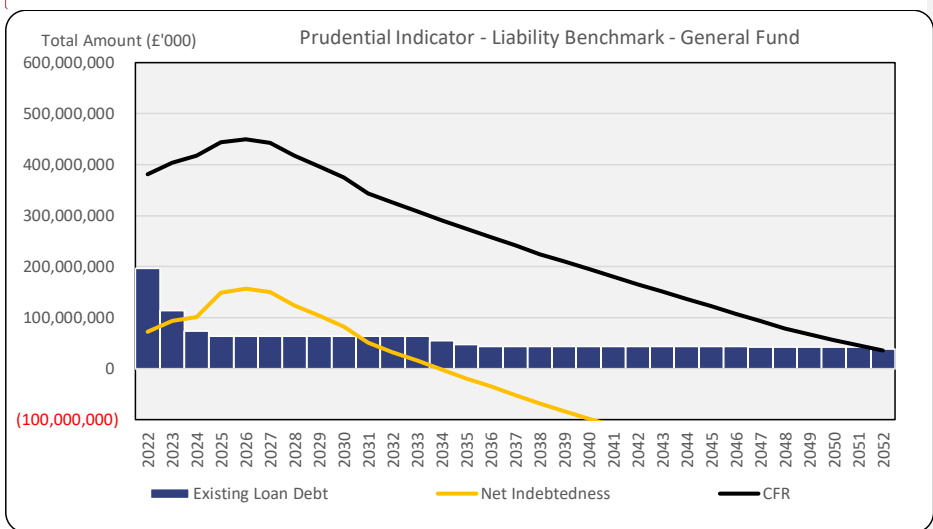


*Nb; as explained above, funding identified in graph is currently less than total capital requirements. Further funding opportunities will be required or a reduction in the total capital programme will be needed in order to balance the position.*



As the Council continues to borrow over the short to medium term period, debt levels will increase as shown by the CFR line in the graph below. The level of debt is considered affordable and sustainable as required by the CIPFA prudential code. All capital projects are supported by detailed business cases which include where appropriate how supported borrowing will be repaid.

Commented [GC1]: To replace this graph with the one now required for the treasury strategy



Note – net indebtedness is calculated by subtracting treasury investments from external borrowing.

Further information on the funding of the capital programme is set out in the Capital Strategy and the Treasury Management Strategy.

## Appendix 4;

### Dedicated Schools Grant

The Council receives DSG annually from the DfE and it must be used in support of the schools' budget as defined in the School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2022. The purpose of the schools' budget is defined in legislation as the provision of primary and secondary education.

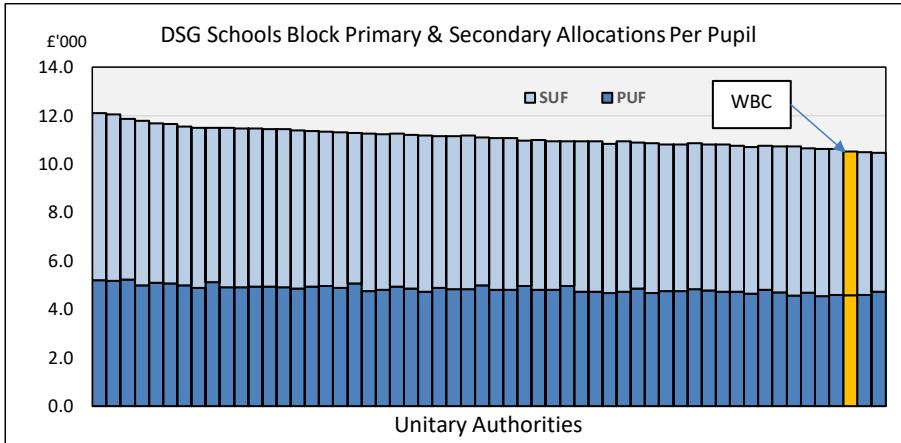
The following pages explain further how the grants are calculated and distributed. They also show Wokingham's grants in comparison to some other unitary authorities

The amount for 2023/24 was notified to the authority by the Department for Education (DfE) in December 2022. However, a proportion of this amount is in respect of free schools and must be paid to them. The actual DSG allocation available to the Council for 2023/24 is £180.86m, compared to £167.16m in 2022/23. The increase to 2022/23 is accounted for by increased funding on both two-unit costs, one for primary unit cost (PUF) and one for secondary unit cost (SUF). The DfE created a centrally retained schools block for the Council to carry out its statutory duties which includes an element of the old education support grant.

DSG funding has increased for 2023/24 for all four blocks. This much needed funding increase is welcomed by the Council and all of our schools and will help contribute to the day-to-day funding of services.

Block	2022/23 £,000	2023/24 £,000	Change £,000	Change %
Schools Block	129,842	138,780	8,938	7
High Needs Block	25,031	28,430	3,399	14
Early Years Block	11,289	12,615	1,326	12
Central School Services Block	995	1,039	44	4

The actual 2023/24 PUF is £4,579 and SUF is £5,936 per pupil compared to £4,404 (PUF) and £5,656 (SUF) in 2022/23. Wokingham continues to receive one of the lowest funding amounts of all unitary authorities.



As outlined in the previous section, the DSG funding is based on 4 blocks and therefore expenditure mirrors these 4 blocks and includes;

- Schools Block – expenditure on day to day running of schools.
- High Needs Block – expenditure on high needs including independent special schools. This area has seen significant financial pressures due to growing demand and complexity in cases.
- Early Years Block – expenditure in relation to providing to early year settings including funding for free entitlement for 2, 3 and 4 years old.
- Central Schools Services Block – expenditure in relation to statutory services such as school admissions and education support services.

Of the £138.8m in the Schools Block, £1.7m is proposed to be retained for the Growth Fund, funding new and growing schools. The remaining £137.1m is allocated to individual school budgets based on the local funding formula, which all schools have been consulted on, and will be presented to Schools Forum for final approval on the 11<sup>th</sup> January.

All schools are funded using the same formula regardless of whether they are maintained or an academy, with the formula taking account of a large number of variables including pupil numbers and other factors such as deprivation.

The current school profile is as follows:

	Number of Schools	Total Number on Roll	Draft Budget 2022/23 £,000
Maintained Schools	29	9,713	46,758
Academies	36	16,702	90,356
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>26,415</b>	<b>137,114</b>

The High Needs Block is separate block of funding to support those young people with SEND requirements. This has been underfunded by central government for the past few years and, when combined with the increased demand and out-of-borough placements this has meant that the account has operated in a deficit position since 2017/18. Whilst this is permitted under regulation in the short term, it is not an ideal scenario nor sustainable in the medium to long term; The Council have been invited into the government's Safety Valve Programme and are working with the ESFA to produce a DSG management Plan that will see The Council setting an in-year balanced budget by 2028/29".

## Appendix 5;

### Key Financial Risks and mitigations/Controls

Risk	Mitigation and Controls
Adult Social Care and NHS reform	Significant work has been undertaken to model costs and service options. Liaison is ongoing with central gov and professional organisations. Contingency budgets built into MTFP. Recent delays allow for further preparation and understanding
Additional statutory costs of Children in Care	We are experiencing significant increases in demand and a number of management actions are in place to mitigate the risks including targeted service work to support children to remain at home and working with partners to manage and reduce costs of placements.
One-year financial settlement	Working with central gov, professional orgs and other local authorities to best understand future options and implications. MTFP includes a number of assumptions and contingencies
Increasing Interest rates and debt charges	The treasury team work with External experts to continually review and update borrowing and lending strategies. Investments are reviewed and modelled against various scenarios
Inflationary pressures – including pay and contracts	Specific corporate support is in place to assist contract management and procurement. MTFP includes provision for increases as best understood.
Future changes to Minimum Revenue Provision	Continue to work to understand likely changes and timing, input into consultation to inform future model. Investments are modelled against various future scenarios to ensure any revised investment decisions or further provisions are provided for
Dedicated Schools Grant Deficit	Actively involved in Safety Valve potential opportunity. Continually review service models and efficiency opportunities. MTFP includes further annual funding
Continuing impacts from COVID	Key budgets (leisure, parking) are continually reviewed with short-term addnl funds and increased base budgets provided in MTFP where required.
Cost of living pressures	Ongoing engagement with community partners to provide support and wherever possible proactive interventions. Increases in Council Tax Reduction schemes to support vulnerable
Specific service pressures; Home to School Transport Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers	Detailed budget monitoring and forecasting. Support to services to review and innovate in service delivery models. Where appropriate lobbying to central government for appropriate funding.

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## Appendix 6



**WOKINGHAM  
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

Tel: 0118 974 6557 (Direct Line)  
Email: [graham.ebers@wokingham.gov.uk](mailto:graham.ebers@wokingham.gov.uk)

Date: 16 January 2023

Our ref: CorpFin/03/23-24/CFO Report

Local Government Finance Settlement Team  
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government  
2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Fry Building  
2 Marsham Street  
LONDON  
SW1P 4DF

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Corporate Services

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Dear Sir,

### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE SETTLEMENT 2023/24 – CONSULTATION RESPONSE**

Dear Sir,

I am writing to you in respect of the above, and whilst we will also formally respond to the consultation questionnaire I felt it important to also provide you further details about the current financial pressures and significant risks that the settlement, and previous years settlement are now meaning for Wokingham.

Whilst again acknowledging the reasons for a single year settlement following the spending review, it is crucial that future settlement are of a longer duration and that any new local government funding model is based on the genuine costs of running a Local Authority and avoids a disproportionate allocation of available funding to meet perceived additional Local Authority needs. It is particularly welcome that the assumed Council Tax increase was excluded from the minimum core spending increase guarantee, as including Council Tax increases further penalised Authorities that are already required to raise a significant percentage of income from Council Tax to fund its net expenditure. We hope this principle continues into future funding Settlements.

In respect of the overall allocation of funding for 2023/24 we again ask that greater weighting is given towards recognising the basic cost of delivering Local Authority services, when determining need, as opposed to the recognition of specific factors. Wokingham will once again receive the lowest funding per head of population of any Unitary Authority which has a profound financial impact on us; if we were funded at the average we would receive almost £30m p.a. additional Government support (approximately one quarter of our total net budget). As a result, a disproportionate amount of expenditure has to be met by Wokingham council tax payers who are required to make a higher percentage contribution to funding services than any other unitary authority. We therefore strongly urge that this is taken into account in any future settlement.

We welcome the additional flexibility the ability to increase Council Tax provides and believe that local discretion to levy taxes and generate additional income should be provided to councils in any new funding settlement, particularly in the context of the escalating costs of statutory demand led care services. However, it should be recognised that this further adds to the financial burden on our Council Taxpayers and believe the answer is to address the insignificant quantum of funding made available to Local Authorities, particularly Wokingham. The provision of sustainable ongoing Local Authority funding must provide for the already challenging and escalating costs of Adult Social Care, which are well documented. Furthermore, this Council continues to be hit hard by a number of demand and cost pressures including; the longer-term impacts of Covid-19 pandemic, pressures from accommodating refugees and the impacts of cost of living pressures. There are also a number of Children's social care pressures such as increases of 30% in the number of children in care, over 200% demand for mainstream school places and 30% Educational, Health and Care Plans (all figures are year on year increases). Therefore, whilst the increase in core spending is welcomed it does not go anywhere near far enough to meet the number of pressures and ultimately costs increases we are experiencing.

Given the context above we consider the notion of a Negative Revenue Support both financially unsustainable and morally questionable and we again greatly welcome the Government's decision not to enact the potential transfer of our council taxpayers' money to other councils through the imposition of this measure. We trust that the baseline funding for 2023/24, without the imposition of Negative Revenue Support Grant, will be honoured in any new long-term settlement beyond this year.

On a final point, we believe that the continuation of the New Homes Bonus (NHB) is important if local authorities are to remain financially incentivised for their work in "fixing our broken housing market", and therefore support its inclusion in the 2023/24 proposed settlement and hopefully its continued inclusion in one form or another beyond this year; the decision to restrict NHB to a single payment for next year is regretted and it is further hoped that any fairer funding model continues to recognise the long term planning of authorities attempting to address the national housing shortage. We would also urge the Government to introduce measures to prevent housing developers holding onto significant Local Authority granted planning permissions and thereby frustrating housing delivery.

I hope the above response clearly conveys this Council's key concerns in respect of the proposed Local Government Finance Settlement and informs future funding considerations. If you would like to discuss any of the points raised then please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours



Clive Jones  
Leader of the Council



Imogen Shepherd-Dubey  
Executive Member for Finance and Housing



Graham Ebers  
Deputy Chief Executive (& Chief Finance Officer)