



# WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

A Meeting of the **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY  
MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE** will be held in David Hicks 1  
- Civic Offices, Shute End, Wokingham RG40 1BN on  
**WEDNESDAY 16 NOVEMBER 2022 AT 7.00 PM**

Susan Parsonage  
Chief Executive  
Published on 8 November 2022

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

Note: Non-Committee Members and members of the public are welcome to attend the meeting virtually, in line with the Council’s Constitution. If you wish to participate, either in person or virtually via Microsoft Teams, please contact Democratic Services. The meeting can also be viewed live using the following link: <https://youtu.be/UDxOuOVNRQk>

This meeting may 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 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

### Councillors

Jim Frewin (Chair)	Andrew Mickleburgh (Vice-Chair)	David Cornish
Andy Croy	Peter Dennis	Graham Howe
Norman Jorgensen	Adrian Mather	Stuart Munro
Gregor Murray	Alison Swaddle	

### Substitutes

Gary Cowan	Michael Firmager	Chris Johnson
Pauline Jorgensen	Morag Malvern	Charles Margetts
Alistair Neal	Beth Rowland	Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey
Wayne Smith	Bill Soane	

ITEM NO.	WARD	SUBJECT	PAGE NO.
51.		<b>APOLOGIES</b> To receive any apologies for absence	
52.		<b>MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS</b> To confirm the Minutes of the Meeting held on 5 October 2022 and the extraordinary meetings held on 24 and 25 October 2022.	5 - 28
53.		<b>DECLARATION OF INTEREST</b> To receive any declarations of interest.	
54.		<b>PUBLIC QUESTION TIME</b> To answer any public questions. A period of 30 minutes will be allowed for members of the public to ask questions submitted under notice. The Council welcomes questions from members of the public about the work of this Committee.  Subject to meeting certain timescales, questions can relate to general issues concerned with the work of the Committee or an item which is on the Agenda for this meeting. For full details of the procedure for submitting questions please contact the Democratic Services Section on the numbers given below or go to <a href="http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/publicquestions">www.wokingham.gov.uk/publicquestions</a>	
55.		<b>MEMBER QUESTION TIME</b> To answer any Member questions.	
56.	None Specific	<b>CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT REVIEW</b> To scrutinise the Council's approach to consultation and engagement with residents and community stakeholders.	29 - 34

<b>57.</b>	None Specific	<b>RESULTS OF THE SCRUTINY IMPROVEMENT REVIEW</b> To consider the findings of the recent review of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny function.	<b>35 - 58</b>
<b>58.</b>	None Specific	<b>COUNCIL MOTIONS</b> To consider progress made against Motions approved by Council.	<b>59 - 82</b>
<b>59.</b>	None Specific	<b>OFFICER RESPONSE TO THE REPORT OF THE TREE &amp; BIODIVERSITY TASK &amp; FINISH GROUP</b> To consider the officer response to the recommendations from the Tree & Biodiversity Task & Finish Group.	<b>83 - 114</b>
<b>60.</b>	None Specific	<b>CONSIDERATION OF THE CURRENT EXECUTIVE AND IEMD FORWARD PROGRAMMES</b> To consider the current published version of the Executive Forward Programme and the Individual Executive Member Decision Forward Programme.	<b>115 - 124</b>
<b>61.</b>	None Specific	<b>COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMMES</b> To discuss the work programme of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and Overview and Scrutiny Committees.	<b>125 - 132</b>
<b>62.</b>	None Specific	<b>ACTION TRACKER REPORT</b> To consider the latest Action Tracker report.	<b>133 - 136</b>

**Any other items which the Chairman decides are urgent**

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

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## MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE HELD ON 5 OCTOBER 2022 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.30 PM

### **Committee Members Present**

Councillors: Jim Frewin (Chairman), Andrew Mickleburgh (Vice-Chairman), David Cornish, Andy Croy, Peter Dennis, Graham Howe, Norman Jorgensen, Adrian Mather, Stuart Munro, Gregor Murray and Pauline Jorgensen

### **Other Councillors Present**

Councillor: Sarah Kerr

### **Officers Present**

Neil Carr, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist  
Ian Gough, Energy Officer  
Mark Gwynne, Insight, Strategy and Inclusion Specialist  
Emily Higson, Head of Insight, Strategy and Inclusion  
Will Roper, Customer Insight Analyst and Performance Manager  
David Smith, Regeneration Planning Manager  
Callum Wernham, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist

### **27. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were submitted from Alison Swaddle.

Pauline Jorgensen attended the meeting as a substitute.

Stuart Munro attended the meeting on Microsoft Teams.

### **28. CHAIR'S STATEMENT**

Jim Frewin made the following introductory statement:

I want to start tonight with an update. We asked all members of this Committee, prior to our first meeting of the Municipal Year, to tell us what they wanted from Overview and Scrutiny. On top of this we also had a Scrutiny review which highlighted opportunities to improve our Scrutiny. An advanced sight of the draft report was kindly shared with myself and the Vice-Chair. It will be published shortly once it has been reviewed by the Executive and the Corporate Leadership Team. We were fortunate to have the opportunity to discuss the findings with one of the authors, from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, prior to the recent Member budget scrutiny training session.

All of this feedback and your original input has indicated that we have an opportunity to improve Scrutiny in Wokingham. As a first step we are working up a proposal to implement a more structured approach to Scrutiny, so that we get opportunities for earlier engagement, take a more structured strategic approach across all our Scrutiny, do a fewer things better rather than lots of things in a rush and try to improve our "constructive critical friend" relationship with officers. Coming to Scrutiny does not need to be a Spanish Inquisition!

We will be looking to share this proposal before our next Overview and Scrutiny meeting. As always, any ideas or contribution you wish to make to this would be welcomed. A key objective of developing a structure and consistency to Scrutiny is that, irrespective of possible annual Member changes, appropriate and relevant Scrutiny can become

seamless. As a start, the Leader and Chief Executive have agreed to meet for regular updates. These will start on a three-weekly basis and we will feedback on progress.

A quick reminder of what we should be aspiring to in these meetings (taken from the Member Scrutiny training sessions earlier in the year. We should strive to:

- Provide constructive “critical friend” challenge;
- Amplify the voice and concerns of the public;
- Be led by independent people who take responsibility for their role;
- Drive improvement in public services.

I am learning as the Chair of this meeting and from lessons from previous meetings. I will try to apply a little more structure tonight. Andrew and Neil are going to help me to identify who wants to speak and we will try to do so in the order that hands are raised. I would ask that questions and any supplementary questions are kept on topic. If you have more than one supplementary question, please ask these after everyone has been given the opportunity to speak.

### **29. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS**

The Minutes of the previous meetings of the Committee held on 7 July 2022 and 8 September 2022 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair, subject to the inclusion of apologies from Gregor Murray for the meeting held on 8 September 2022.

### **30. DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

A declaration of interest was submitted from Andy Croy in relation to Agenda Item 37 – Barkham Solar Farm – Financial Business Case. Councillor Croy stated that he had been appointed to the Barkham Solar Farm Project Board. Consequently he would take part in the discussion of the item but would not vote on any proposals.

### **31. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions.

### **32. MEMBER QUESTION TIME**

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

As the Member question related to the Barkham Solar Farm project, the Chair stated that the question would be linked to that item.

As Councillor Cowan could not attend the meeting, the Chair read out the question and answer.

Gary Cowan asked the Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Management Committee the following question:

#### **Question**

Barkham Solar Farm – Financial Business Case

In the light of the current financial crisis and interest rate rises, along with its impact on borrowing, coupled to the SSEN grid connection agreement set out in the report and the huge increase in energy prices, does the plan as reported fit in as the best available deal for Wokingham and its residents?

## **Answer**

In light of the current rapidly changing financial situation, we have reviewed the potential solar farm at Barkham in line with revised potential rates of borrowing and increasing energy costs, as well as other financial implications for the project. We feel that the financial performance of the scheme is still very robust, as demonstrated in the papers submitted to this Committee this evening.

At this point in time, we still feel that what has been considered thus far, is the best available deal for Wokingham and its residents.

The business case of the project will be continually kept under review throughout the project, in light of changing costs and values, to ensure that financially the Barkham solar farm measures up and continues to provide anticipated payback. Importantly, we will also continue to ensure that it also achieves much needed carbon reduction for the Council as part of the Borough's stated net zero carbon reduction ambitions.

### **33. Q1 22/23 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT**

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 19 to 52, which set out details of corporate performance for Quarter 1 of 2022/23 (April to June 2022).

Sarah Kerr (Executive Member for Climate Emergency and Resident Services), Emily Higson (Head of Insight, Strategy and Inclusion) and Will Roper (Customer Insight Analyst and Performance Manager) attended the meeting to present the report and answer Member questions.

The report stated that Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) demonstrated that good performance had continued in Quarter 1 in the face of significant challenges. The challenges included the cost of living crisis, which was driving increased demand for services, high levels of inflation, the ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the impact of the Ukraine crisis.

Despite these challenges, the majority of KPIs (18) were Green, with 11 Amber and 5 Red. Services were continuing to take proactive steps to drive strong performance and to manage demand as effectively as possible. There was also a strong focus on assessing risk and ensuring that the Council's stable financial position was maintained.

The five Red KPIs in Quarter 1 were:

- AS1 – Percentage of safeguarding concerns, leading to an enquiry, completed within two working days;
- AS2 – Social work assessments allocated to commence within 28 days of the requests (counted at the point of allocation);
- CEX8 – Early resolution versus Stage 1 customer complaints;
- CS4 – Percentage of Education, Health and Care Plan (ECHP) Assessments completed within 20 weeks of referral;
- RA3 – Usage of Wokingham Borough leisure centres.

The report gave details of the relevant background for each of the Red indicators and the steps being taken to bring the KPIs back on track.

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following questions and comments:

On Page 19 of the Agenda there is a reference to the Great Resignation (post-Covid) and later in the report re CEX5 there is a voluntary staff turnover figure of 242. What actions are being taken to improve people retention rates? It was confirmed that the retention of engaged employees, who are able to deliver against the Councils' priorities and corporate objectives are taken seriously by the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT). To ensure that corporate messages are disseminated throughout the business there is a programme of communication which includes weekly Senior Management Team meetings, monthly Extended CLT workshops and Teams briefings to all employees from CEO or Deputy CEO in addition to a monthly newsletter. Furthermore, annual staff engagement surveys along with regular 121's and formal annual appraisals are undertaken, which provide the opportunity for managers and employees to discuss their achievements, objectives and to address any concerns the individuals may have.

CEX5 – Voluntary staff turnover - supplementary questions – Please provide examples of specific programmes aimed at tackling issues relating to staff turnover and/or sickness. Also – Do the staff turnover figures include volunteers who were taken on to support the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic? Also – can the response to the questions above include a view from the Trade Unions re the Council as an employer? It was confirmed that a written response would be provided on these points.

The report states (Page 19) that the Place and Growth directorate is reviewing priorities and challenges with the new administration. We are 3 months into the new administration what update do we have on these priorities and challenges? It was confirmed that this was an on-going/live process which was the right approach with the current economic uncertainty due to the cost of living crisis and inflation. Financial sustainability of the Council was the main focus and ensuring the Council does all it can to protect the most vulnerable in our communities. This was a major challenge as there was increased demand without the additional funding to support that demand. In simple terms if there was no additional funding to support the increased demand, then prioritising the limited resources in a targeted approach would be the inevitable outcome. This would need to be a corporate approach, an approach that was not limited to Place and Growth.

On Page refers to ongoing impact of Ukraine Crisis, what are the figures of this ongoing impact? It was confirmed that the medium to long-term impact of the Ukrainian refugee programme was still unknown. To date, any additional financial pressures were being met through central Government funding allocations associated with the scheme. Officers have worked admirably supporting both the Ukrainian families and those generously agreeing to act as hosts. It was unclear at this stage what demands may be asked of the Council going forward but officers would keep Members updated as the situation developed.

Supplementary questions on the Ukraine Crisis – Please provide information on the Government's longer term support and funding proposals (if known) to support Ukrainian refugees living in the Borough, following the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. What are the potential longer term impacts and risks for the Borough and what are the potential impacts on Council services? It was confirmed that a written response would be provided on these points.



CEX4 – Proportion of WBC staff who have self-declared their ethnicity and disability information via BWO – Q1 data indicated that 70% of staff had self-declared - what actions were being proposed to improve this percentage? It was confirmed that there was ongoing communication activity to encourage staff to update their ethnicity and disability information on BWO. This was part of the wider BWO improvement project.

PG4 – Percentage of “standard” works orders completed within 28 days – this KPI was showing a downward trend - what actions are being proposed? It was confirmed that the drop-off in performance had been addressed with the contractor who had been told that it needed to improve. Financial penalties have been raised for substandard performance and will continue to be issued until service standards are corrected in line with the KPI’s required within the contract.

RA5 – Number of FOI requests handled within statutory timeframes was showing performance of 83.5% in Q1 against a target of 90%. What was the actual number of FOI requests received and what was the trend? It was confirmed that 278 FOI requests had been received in Q1 of 2022/23.

RA5 – supplementary questions – Please provide a breakdown of the type of FOI requests received, service areas included, the source of the requests (e.g. public, media, etc.) and the impact on WBC officers (e.g. time taken to provide responses). It was confirmed that a written answer would be provided.

CEX 8 – Early resolution versus Stage 1 complaints - Stated that “formal complaints often centre around problems with communication.” What are some of the common examples and in what ways does the new training address requirements of residents with specific needs – including those with different types of disabilities and for whom English may be a foreign language? It was confirmed that examples included no regular updates after a request for service or information has been submitted, thereby leaving customers in the dark about what was happening. As a result, this leads to further frustration and failure demand as customers are then having to chase us to find out what’s happening. Another example is where officers make a decision but do not explain clearly the reasoning behind it – or we think we have, but the customer does not understand as we have not been clear in our explanation, or perhaps used jargon or the wrong language in our response. The training we are giving is around a “3C” concept, making sure that we communicate with Care, Clarity and Confidence. This includes making sure that we choose the right communication channel for the customer, and ensure that we consider any additional needs that they may have. When customers submit a complaint, we also ask them how they wish to be communicated with.

CEX7 - Overall customer satisfaction across phone and web was RAG rated Green, with a new approach being designed to set customer service KPIs. How was this KPI currently measured, and can you share any details of how the new measurements might be different? It was confirmed that the Council currently used Gov Metric to gather customer feedback and satisfaction levels around their experience across: calls into the main Council number, face to face interactions at Shute End and in Libraries, on all web chats, on all web pages including microsites and on some team emails. Performance currently reported was the overall satisfaction level across phones and website, where we received the highest volume of feedback. Officers are looking to roll out Gov Metric further across other channels as part of the Customer Excellence Programme.

The increasing complexity of demand on many of the service areas is reported repeatedly. Are there any specific areas of 'preventative activity' that WBC would like to undertake but have been unable to do so or would like to prioritise going forward? Is there any empirical evidence of the cost and other impacts that this increased complexity is having on service delivery – including the quality of services, on staff, and costs? It was confirmed that this was a complex question that required further investigation. The suggestion would be that this could be on the Scrutiny forward programme for a deep dive or a task and finish group. Also, as it covered a wide range of services this would need to cut across Children's and HOSC Committees as well as the O&S Management Committee.

RA4 – Return on investment portfolio (Property Investment Fund) - Does the return on investment portfolio include all of the Council's commercial properties and all costs, including officer time, security and maintenance of un-let properties? Can you please also give summary details of the profile of properties in the portfolio that are not let, such as numbers of any that have been tenanted for six months or longer; and an estimate of the number of any that might require considerable expenditure to bring them to a 'lettable' standard? It was confirmed that the measure related to the ten commercial property assets held in the Council's investment portfolio in accordance with the Council's approved investment strategy. The rate of return was measured in the conventional manner, applying the passing rent to the total acquisition cost of the asset, and was therefore a reflection of the headline yield before allowance for debt, MRP and holding costs (if any). For the five single let assets the holding costs were zero. For the five multi-let assets any holding costs varied according to whether or not any of the properties had unlet units from time to time. The running costs of multi-let properties were covered by a service charge fund contributed by the tenants so they paid their own running costs. The landlord contributed only in respect of any unlet units. Two properties were currently being considered for refurbishment to enhance the re-letting of vacant units.

RA4 – supplementary question – Was it possible that the Rate of Return could be lower than reported, depending on the types of property within the Council's portfolio? It was confirmed that a written answer would be provided on this issue.

AS1 – Percentage of safeguarding concerns leading to an enquiry, completed within two working days and AS2 – Social work assessments allocated to commence within 28 days of the requests – What was the rationale for setting the targets relating to these two KPIs? It was confirmed that a detailed response would be circulated to Members outside the meeting. It was noted that these KPIs were reviewed by HOSC, so a response should be submitted to HOSC Members.

Resources and Assets Top Wins (Page 28) – the general upwards trend of leisure participation and the success of the move with confidence programme. Was this statement consistent with the Q1 performance data (RA3) which indicated a downturn in attendance figures for the Borough's leisure centres? It was confirmed that the longer term trend was improving and that visitor numbers for the Carnival Hub would be included in the Q2 figures.

CEX3 – Proportion of Wokingham-resident pupils eligible for Free School Meals in Wokingham Borough schools – What criteria were used to determine the allocation of free school meals? It was confirmed that decisions were based on criteria set out on the Government website.

PG1 – All recorded crime in Wokingham Borough (excluding fraud) – It was confirmed that Q1 performance showed an improvement, so the direction of travel should be “Better”, not “Worse” as set out in the report.

Sarah Kerr confirmed that the Overview and Scrutiny Committees would be able to discuss the emerging KPIs for 2023/24 (along with the associated targets) with the relevant Executive Members and officers.

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) Sarah Kerr, Emily Higson and Will Roper be thanked for attending the meeting to answer Member questions on the Q1 performance report;
- 2) performance relating to the KPIs within the purview of the Management Committee be noted;
- 3) written responses be provided for the Member questions which could not be answered at the meeting.

#### **34. CLIMATE EMERGENCY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 53 to 58, which gave details of Member request to establish a Climate Emergency Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee had given initial consideration to this request at its meeting on 7 July 2022. The decision was deferred until tonight’s meeting in order to provide further information on a number of points raised by Members.

The report stated that the Management Committee’s terms of reference enabled it to propose amendments to the composition and terms of reference of Overview and Scrutiny Committees, subject to approval by full Council. The proposed Climate Emergency Overview and Scrutiny Committee would provide a central focus for scrutiny of the Council’s Climate Emergency Action Plan. Detailed draft terms of reference for the Committee were appended to the report.

If approved, the new Overview and Scrutiny Committee would fit into the existing Scrutiny structure with the Chair sitting on the Management Committee. The report proposed a Committee membership of four Wokingham Borough Partnership Members and three Conservative Members.

**RESOLVED** That Council be recommended to approve:

- 1) the establishment of a Climate Emergency Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as set out in the report;
- 2) the proposed terms of reference for the Climate Emergency Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Annex A);
- 3) that the composition of the new Overview and Scrutiny Committee be four Wokingham Borough Partnership Members and three Conservative Members, plus substitute Members (four/three) as advised by the Group Leaders;
- 4) that the Chair and Vice-Chair of the new Committee be elected at its first meeting.

### **35. BARKHAM SOLAR FARM - FINANCIAL BUSINESS CASE**

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 93 to 106, which gave details of the financial business case for the proposed Barkham Solar Farm. (The Committee considered Part II financial information in private after excluding the public).

Sarah Kerr (Executive Member for Climate Emergency and Resident Services) attended the meeting, supported by officers, to present the report and answer Member questions.

The report stated that energy generation was one of the key priorities in the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP). The Barkham Solar Farm was a specific project within the CEAP.

The financial business case for the Barkham Solar Farm was approved initially by the Executive and Council in 2021. The forecast costs and revenues were based on the best estimates available at that time. The latest report included an update on the Capital costs of the project together with the General Fund Income and Expenditure forecast (Part II).

The latest forecasts indicated a net income (after Capital financing costs) over the 25 year life of the project of 67.16m (£2.69m per annum on average). This compared to the initial expenditure of £26.85m. The forecast return compared extremely variably against the forecast return of £480k per annum in the 2021 business case.

On 30 June 2022, a Special Council Executive Committee meeting approved the procurement strategy for the contractor required for the construction of the solar farm. The report stated that procurement of the contractor was progressing via a framework with the appointment expected in November 2022. The current delivery programme indicated that the solar farm would commence operation in the summer of 2024.

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points:

In relation to the technical business case for the Barkham Solar Farm – had the business case been reviewed by technical experts? It was confirmed that officers had held discussions with other Councils which had developed solar farms and were using technical consultants in order to ensure that the project was a success.

In relation to discussions with SSEN, had a deal been agreed for grid connection for the solar farm? It was confirmed that a price for the grid connection had been agreed and formally accepted. It was suggested that the Council should lobby the Government and the energy companies to ensure that the price of grid connections was reasonable.

What was the impact of recent events on the financial business case for the solar farm? It was confirmed that the calculations in the business case were prudent and that the current state of the energy market indicated higher returns than those stated in the report. Interest incurred in funding the project would be repaid over its lifetime.

What was the break-even rate for electricity prices? It was confirmed that a written response would be provided for this question.

What was the current availability of solar panels to supply the project? It was confirmed that there were some delays in delivery. However, a combination of pre-ordering and work with the contractor would mitigate any supply issues.

The solar farm had a project life of 25 years. How had this lifespan been determined? It was confirmed that the 25 year period was based on the lifespan of the equipment used in the project. The relevant planning permission had been granted for 25 years.

The report referred to the option of “sleeving” the electricity output directly to WBC’s operational portfolio through a licenced supplier. Were any additional costs relating to sleeving contained within the business case? It was confirmed that the two potential options (export to the grid or supplying WBC) had been evaluated and both stacked up financially. The options would be assessed and evaluated further as the project progressed.

Did the solar farm project envisage the use of batteries to extend the period for energy usage? It was confirmed that the project did include the installation of batteries – details would be discussed with the design and build contractor. The location and screening for batteries would be discussed with the Council’s Planning team in due course.

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) Sarah Kerr and the relevant officers be thanked for attending the meeting to answer Member questions;
- 2) responses to Member questions not answered at the meeting be circulated to the Committee in due course;
- 3) following the Committee’s consideration of the financial business case for the Barkham Solar Farm, the following points be referred to the Executive:
  - a) the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee has reviewed and scrutinised the financial business case for the Barkham Solar Farm;
  - b) the Committee identified a number of issues requiring further officer investigation and feedback, including: break-even calculations, risks relating to changes in the energy market and the pros and cons of split versus turnkey projects;
  - c) whilst the Executive should consider these issues fully, the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee supports the Barkham Solar Farm project in principle and believes that it should proceed in a timely manner;
  - d) the Council should lobby the Government and Energy Companies in relation to charges for grid connection, in order to ensure that charges are realistic and viable for Councils and other affected organisations.

**36. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

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

### **37. BARKHAM SOLAR FARM - PART II DISCUSSION**

The Committee scrutinised Part II papers relating to the Barkham Solar Farm Financial Business Case.

### **38. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE TASK & FINISH GROUP**

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 59 to 63, which gave details of a proposed Corporate Performance Task and Finish Group.

The report stated that, at its meeting on 7 July 2022, the Committee had agreed in principle to establish the Task and Finish Group subject to further detail on the group's terms of reference and composition. The task and finish group would seek to develop recommendations for measures which could be added to the KPIs currently reported to Members with a view to understanding more about outcomes and the service experience of residents.

The report noted that research and activity was already under way in this area via the Council's Customer Excellence Programme. The proposed task and finish group would seek to work closely with this the relevant officer team to ensure a joined up approach.

Appended to the report were draft terms of reference and proposed membership for the task and finish group. It was suggested that the task and finish group report back to the Management Committee at its meeting in January 2023.

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) a Corporate Performance Task and Finish Group be established, to review the current performance management reporting process and its impact on service improvement and the resident experience;
- 2) the proposed Terms of Reference for the Task and Finish Group (Annex A to the report) be approved;
- 3) the task and finish group submit a report to the meeting of the Committee held on 18 January 2023.

### **39. EXECUTIVE AND IEMD FORWARD PROGRAMMES**

The Committee considered the latest Executive and Individual Executive Member Decision forward programmes, set on Agenda pages 65 to 76.

**RESOLVED:** That the forward programmes be noted.

### **40. O&S COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMMES 2022/23**

The Committee considered its work programme and the work programmes for the three Overview and Scrutiny Committees, as set out on Agenda pages 77 to 88.

Adrian Mather suggested that the Committee scrutinise the performance of Thames Water and SSE. This would include inviting senior managers from each organisation to attend a Scrutiny meeting, potentially an extraordinary meeting.

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) the Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programmes be noted;
- 2) an extraordinary meeting of the Management Committee be organised in order to scrutinise the operations and effectiveness of utility companies – Thames Water and SSE;
- 3) senior representatives from each utility company be invited to attend the Scrutiny meeting;
- 4) the Committee agree, in principle to an additional meeting in December 2022, as necessary.

#### **41. ACTION TRACKER**

The Committee considered the latest Action Tracker report, set out at Agenda pages 89 to 92.

**RESOLVED** That the Action Tracker report be noted.

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**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE  
HELD ON 24 OCTOBER 2022 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.45 PM**

**Committee Members Present**

Councillors: Andrew Mickleburgh (Vice-Chair), David Cornish, Andy Croy, Peter Dennis, Graham Howe, Adrian Mather, Stuart Munro, Alison Swaddle and Alistair Neal

**Other Councillors Present**

Councillors: Norman Jorgensen, Pauline Jorgensen, Imogen Shepherd-DuBey and Ian Shenton

**Officers Present**

Richard Bisset, Lead Specialist, Place Clienting  
Neil Carr, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist  
Graham Ebers, Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Resources & Assets  
Callum Wernham, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist

**42. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were submitted from Jim Frewin and Gregor Murray.

Al Neal attended as a substitute.

Norman Jorgensen attended the meeting as one of the signatories, to present the Call-In.

**43. DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**44. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions.

**45. MEMBER QUESTION TIME**

There were no Member questions.

**46. CALL-IN FOOD CADDY LINERS**

The Committee considered a Call-In on a decision made by the Executive, at its meeting on 29 September 2022, relating to ending the supply of Food Waste Caddy Liners. The Call-In covering report stated that the Executive decision was:

“That the Executive agree ceasing the supply of caddy liners as alternatives are available”

Andrew Mickleburgh (in the Chair) explained the procedure to be followed at the meeting and the issues for Members to focus on. The Committee was tasked to review the Executive decision against the decision making principles set out in the Council’s Constitution, viz:

- a) proportionality (i.e. the action must be proportionate to the desired outcome);
- b) due consultation and the taking of professional advice from Officers;
- c) human rights will be respected and considered at an early stage in the decision making process;

- d) a presumption in favour of openness;
- e) clarity of aims and desired outcomes; and
- f) when decisions are taken by the Executive, details of the options which were taken into account and the reasons for the decision will be recorded.

Norman Jorgensen, one of the five Call-In signatories, presented the Call-In (supported by Pauline Jorgensen). Councillor Jorgensen addressed the Committee and made the following opening statement:

“The purpose of this call in is two-fold. Firstly to ensure decisions are made following the processes set out in the Council’s constitution and, secondly, to encourage good decision making.

On 29 September the Lib Dem Executive made the decision to cease the provision of food caddy liner bags. The Conservative Councillors who signed this call-in fear that if this decision is carried through it will act as a barrier to the use of the food waste recycling scheme and adversely impact the level of food waste recycled if some residents chose to discard food waste into the blue bags instead. This at a time when we wish to improve levels of recycling and reduce the volume of material discarded in the blue bags.

The Council has a target of increasing the use of the food waste service in 2022/23 by about 70%, which was not given due weight when making this decision. We feel the targeted 70% improvement has been placed in jeopardy by the decision to stop providing food caddy liners.

I will now go through the specific reasons for the call in.

1. a) In breach of rule 1.4.2.a) *proportionality*, we believe the decision is not proportional to the desired outcome in that the savings attributed in the 2022/23 Medium Term Financial Plan to the targeted increase in food waste recycling of £350,000 would not be achieved if caddy liners are not provided. To give context, each tonne of food waste diverted from the blue bags results in a saving to the Council of £1,000 in disposal costs. As stated previously, we feel that removal of the provision of caddy liners will discourage use of the food recycling scheme. Our view on the likely reduction in food waste recycling resulting from this decision was confirmed by the Leader of the Council on 22 September 2022 in the Reading Chronicle where he said that whilst the volume of recycling could dip slightly it will come back because people want to recycle.
1. b) In breach of rule 1.4.2.b) *due consultation*, no public consultation was undertaken on the proposed removal of the service and no alternatives were considered as shown in the decision sheet for the 29 September Executive meeting. Also, before the paper was considered by the Executive, the Leader of the Council stated in the Reading Chronicle on 22 September, that “It will be debated at the Council meeting on Thursday, but this is just to ratify it and the decision has been taken”. This is a clear case of predetermination in breach of rule 1.4.2.d) *a presumption in favour of openness*.
2. Rule 5.4.8. requires that any key decision is to be advertised on the Forward Programme of the Executive at least 28 days before a key decision is made. It also

says that “*Each month a copy will be provided to all Members*” (that is, a copy of the Forward Programme listing the key decisions to be made by the Executive). This latter requirement was not met, so Members did not have adequate foresight of upcoming business of the Executive.

We have presented four instances where the decision to cease supplying caddy liners has breached the rules of the Council’s decision making processes and so invite the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee to ask the Executive to look at this decision again, this time following the proper processes.”

Following Councillor Jorgensen’s statement, members of the Committee raised the following points and questions:

How significant was the risk to achieving the £350k saving in the MTFP? Councillor Jorgensen stated that there was a significant risk. There was a danger that residents would be put off recycling food waste if the caddy liners were not available. Although the potential use of other materials was noted, it would be a less convenient and messier process for residents.

Andy Croy queried the wording of the Call-In which referred to the Lib Dem/Labour coalition Executive. Councillor Croy confirmed that there were no Labour Members on the Executive.

In relation to proportionality, what were the desired outcomes relating to this decision? Councillor Jorgensen stated that it was important to focus on the overall environmental impact of the decision. So, for example, a proper consultation may have generated ideas about the use of recycled caddy bags. It was necessary to look at the potential cost saving against the overall impact on the amount of food waste recycled.

What evidence was there that the overall £350k savings target would not be achieved as a result of the decision? Councillor Jorgensen referred to the comments of the Leader in the Reading Chronicle, to the effect that the volume of recycling could dip slightly. It was also important to note that the new administration had made a commitment to more effective consultation with residents.

What were the financial implications of continuing to supply the food waste caddy liners? Councillor Jorgensen stated that supplying the caddy liners would help to achieve greater levels of food recycling. This would then deliver a greater saving, a saving which could be used to cover the costs of the liners. A proper consultation could also have generated more ideas leading to further increases in recycling and less contamination of the blue bags.

In relation to due consultation, many decisions were taken without public consultation. What was different about this decision? Councillor Jorgensen commented that this was a big decision which impacted on every household in the Borough.

#### **47. RESPONSE TO THE CALL-IN - FOOD WASTE CADDY LINERS**

Ian Shenton, Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure, addressed the Committee in response to the Call-In.

Councillor Shenton stated the Executive had agreed to the food waste service in January 2018, with a commencement date in 2019. There was no intention to continue to supply caddy liners after the initial batch, which was funded through a one-off capital receipt. In 2020, the caddy liners were made available on request. Then, in 2021, they were supplied again to all households, funded from income from the garden waste scheme. No growth bid was submitted to formalise the funding arrangement. This came to a head in the summer of 2022 when it became clear that funding from other parts of the service was no longer viable.

It was clear that many other councils, which did not provide caddy liners, were able to achieve better performance than WBC. Caddy liners were not material to their high performance. The Executive decision did not constitute a significant change to the service as other materials could be used to line the food waste caddies, as set out in the Executive report. The weekly collection service would continue as normal. Consequently, there was no need to carry out a consultation on the new arrangement.

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points and questions:

After the caddy liners were made available on request in 2020, who made the decision to recommence the supply to all households in 2021? It was confirmed that the decision was taken in consultation with the Executive Member. The decision was taken for the convenience of residents. It was not based on a reduction in performance of the service.

Was the decision to continue supplying the caddy liners without budget provision taken in public? Is there a record of the decision? It was confirmed that the decision was taken internally following discussions between officers and the Executive Member. There was no consultation on this decision.

Graham Ebers confirmed that there was no specific ongoing revenue provision for the caddy liners after the first year of operation. Funding from elsewhere in the service became problematic this year in the context of the financial challenges facing the Council.

If finalised, how will the impact of the decision to remove the caddy liners be monitored and reported? It was confirmed that there was monthly monitoring of the waste tonnages collected. The data would reveal any impact towards the end of the 2022/23 Municipal Year. In the meantime, officers were confident that food waste tonnages would increase and the overall £350k saving would be achieved.

In relation to the application of section 5.4.8 of the Constitution, Andrew Moulton commented that the Council's legal obligations had been met in line with the relevant Access to Information requirements. It was accepted that not circulating the Executive Forward Plan to all Members amounted to a technical breach of the rules. This was seen as a "one-off" incident. It was confirmed that the Forward Plan could still be viewed on the Council's website during September. The scale and impact of this technical breach was a matter for the Committee to consider.

#### **48. SUMMING UP AND DECISION**

Ian Shenton summed up the response to the Call-In as follows. There was no specific budget for the food waste caddy liners. For a budget to be created there would have had to be a growth bid – which did not happen. The cost of the caddy liners has been met from elsewhere in the service budget. The food waste collection service will continue – there are other ways to line the food waste caddy. No other council provides a routine supply of

caddy liners, yet they are able to outperform WBC. The caddy liners are not essential to the delivery of the service and ending their supply will save the current cost.

Norman Jorgensen summed up the Call-In as follows. The funding issue is set out in the Medium Term Financial Plan – diversion of food waste from blue bags to caddies. A public consultation took place last year on recycling. A similar consultation should have taken place on the issue of caddy liners. Some of the reasons for the Call-In, e.g. proportionality were subject to a degree of subjectivity. However, the breach of section 5.4.8 of the Constitution was clear. That alone is justification for referring the matter back to the Executive. Greater notice to Members would have allowed more time for discussion and questioning. It was also clear, from comments in the media, that predetermination had taken place before the decision was made.

Having considered the Call-In and the response from the Executive Member, the Committee considered its decision.

Andrew Mickleburgh confirmed that the Committee could not overturn the Executive decision subject to the Call-In. If the Committee had concerns, it could refer the decision back to the Executive for further consideration with any recommendations the Committee agreed. Alternatively, the Committee could confirm the Executive decision.

It was proposed by Andy Croy and seconded by Adrian Mather that the Executive decision, relating to Food Waste Caddy Liners, be confirmed.

Upon being put to the vote it was:

**RESOLVED:** That the Executive decision, relating to Food Waste Caddy Liners, be confirmed.

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**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE  
HELD ON 25 OCTOBER 2022 FROM 7.00 PM TO 10.25 PM**

**Committee Members Present**

Councillors: Andrew Mickleburgh (Vice-Chair), David Cornish, Andy Croy, Peter Dennis, Graham Howe, Norman Jorgensen, Adrian Mather, Stuart Munro, Pauline Jorgensen, Charles Margetts and Alistair Neal

**Other Councillors Present**

Councillors: Keith Baker, Imogen Shepherd-DuBey, Abdul Loyes, Paul Fishwick and Bill Soane

**Officers Present**

Neil Carr, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist  
Graham Ebers, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Resources and Assets  
Andy Glencross, Service Manager - Green and Blue Infrastructure  
Martin Heath, Traffic Management, Parking and Road Safety Team Manager  
Callum Wernham, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist

**1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were submitted from Jim Frewin, Gregor Murray and Alison Swaddle.

Jim Frewin was able to attend part of the meeting.

Pauline Jorgensen, Charles Margetts and Alistair Neal attended the meeting as substitutes.

**2. DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

A declaration of interest was submitted from Graham Howe, Norman Jorgensen, Pauline Jorgensen and Charles Margetts. Each Member made the following statement:

“I signed a recent petition asking to stop planned increases in car parking charges. However, I have not made up my mind about the subject, and wish to hear the officers’ response to tonight’s call-in, and the debate, before making a decision. I am advised that, in the circumstances, I can take part in the debate and vote this evening.”

**3. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions.

**4. MEMBER QUESTION TIME**

There were no Member questions.

**5. CALL-IN - OFF STREET CAR PARK CHARGES**

The Committee considered a Call-In on a decision made by the Executive, at its meeting on 29 September 2022, relating to Off Street Car Park Charges. The Call-In covering report stated that the Executive decision was:

“That the Executive agree to increase the parking charges, as detailed in the amended report (which included a schedule of revisions on Page 11) circulated and published as a supplementary paper”.

Andrew Mickleburgh (in the Chair) explained the procedure to be followed at the meeting and the issues for Members to focus on. The Committee was tasked to review the Executive decision against the decision making principles set out in the Council's Constitution, viz:

- a) proportionality (i.e. the action must be proportionate to the desired outcome);
- b) due consultation and the taking of professional advice from Officers;
- c) human rights will be respected and considered at an early stage in the decision making process;
- d) a presumption in favour of openness;
- e) clarity of aims and desired outcomes; and
- f) when decisions are taken by the Executive, details of the options which were taken into account and the reasons for the decision will be recorded.

Bill Soane, one of the five Call-In signatories, presented the Call-In. Councillor Soane addressed the Committee and made the following points:

The proposed increase in off-street car park charges would have a significant impact on residents and businesses. The scale of the changes should have triggered a consultation with residents, businesses and affected organisations. There was a precedent for consultation – a consultation exercise was carried out in 2016, the previous occasion when evening and Sunday charges were considered. At that time a month long consultation was carried out with the outcome reported to the Executive on 31 March 2016. Relying on the TRO process was unsatisfactory as residents would find it hard to understand the process and respond effectively.

There was also concern about the failure to provide all Members with a copy of the Executive Forward Programme in line with the Council's Constitution. At least 25 Members have confirmed that they did not receive a copy of the Executive Forward programme between 29 July and 23 September. This was a clear breach of the Council's Constitution.

The decision to dramatically increase the car park charges was rushed and ill thought out. If implemented it would have a devastating impact on the businesses in Woodley town centre. It would also create uncertainty in relation to the current arrangements with Waitrose. The decision should be given further thought.

Councillor Soane informed the Committee that four witnesses would give evidence in support of the Call-in, as follows:

Councillor Keith Baker – Leader of Woodley Town Council:

Councillor Baker stated that he had not seen the TRO process used as a consultation mechanism. The TRO process was a legal process and it was not suitable for effective consultation. There was a precedent for public consultation on proposed changes to car park charges, dating back to 2016. Councillor Baker also confirmed that several shops in Woodley were still unaware of the proposed changes – this demonstrated a lack of



openness. Also, the decision making principles referred to the requirement to record other options that were considered during the decision making process. On behalf of Woodley Town Council, Councillor Baker felt that the decision should be referred back to the Executive for further consideration.

Brian Fennilly – Woodley Town Centre Manager:

Mr Fennilly stated that his main concern was the lack of consultation about the proposed changes. He had specific concerns about the introduction of Sunday evening charges and the impact on businesses in Woodley. Local businesses were still struggling post-Covid and the proposed changes would have a negative impact on the local economy. There was a specific concern about volunteer staff who worked in local charity shops.

Alex Shatonowski – Wargrave resident:

Mr Shatonowski stated that there were serious concerns about parking in Wargrave. Issues included parked vehicles blocking private driveways. The buildings and streets were not designed to cope with the current volume of traffic. The extension of chargeable hours would also impact on local businesses and organisations such as the boat club which held meetings in the evening. The proposals were not in the best interest of local residents.

Michaela Dalton – Woodley Pets:

Ms Dalton expressed concern about the lack of consultation. Some of the larger retailers in the Woodley precinct were still unaware of the proposed changes. There would also be an impact on employees who parked in the public car parks, e.g. on Sundays. Trade amongst the local shops was still well down on pre-Covid levels and these proposals would not help businesses to recover, especially on Sundays. Customers were unhappy about the loss of free parking and may go elsewhere.

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points and questions:

Andy Croy queried the wording of the Call-In which referred to the “Lib Dem/Labour coalition Executive”. Councillor Croy confirmed that there were no Labour Members on the Executive.

Whilst it was accepted that some Members did not receive a copy of the relevant Executive Forward Programme directly, it was suggested that there were other means of checking the upcoming business items, for example by checking the Council website.

In relation to the potential impact of the changes on Woodley town centre, was there any data about footfall compared to the situation pre-Covid? It was confirmed that, anecdotally, footfall was down by around 30%. If consultation had taken place the traders would have provided information about the local situation and concerns about the impact of increased charges. Similar feedback would have been submitted in relation to Wargrave.

What were the specific issues around using the TRO process for consultation? Keith Baker stated that the TRO process was typically used for technical issues such as changes to speed limits, etc. It was not used for this type of consultation. Examples of proper local consultation were given, such as waste collection and the Woodlands Avenue proposals.

In relation to the options available to the Council, it was felt that the context was the significant financial challenges facing the Council. As such, the fundamental options were to increase charges or not to increase charges. Bill Soane commented that the potential reduction in footfall following the proposed changes would not help to fill the gap in the Council's Budget.

## **6. RESPONSE TO THE CALL-IN - OFF STREET CAR PARK CHARGES**

Paul Fishwick, Executive Member for Highways and Transport, addressed the Committee in response to the Call-In.

Councillor Fishwick stated that the Council had not increased off street car park charges for five years. The previous administration had considered increases in 2021, but this did not materialise. Regular budget monitoring this year had indicated a significant shortfall in parking income. This meant that urgent steps had to be taken to address this issue. If the shortfall was not addressed by measures to increase income there were potential impacts on key frontline services.

In relation to consultation, it was confirmed that changes to fees and charges could be made by a variation order and could be linked to the fees and charges review process. However, changes to hours of operation and other restrictions were made using the TRO process. This would provide 21 days of public consultation. This would be supported by extensive communications, including signs in each of the public car parks. Blue Badge holders would not be affected by the proposed changes.

In relation to options, it was confirmed that other options were considered including higher charges and a "do-nothing" scenario. The latter would have resulted in a funding gap of £600k to £800k. The Executive decided to agree proposals at the lower end of the funding gap. Changes were also made to reflect feedback received, e.g. the introduction of a two-tier system for Wokingham and locations outside Wokingham. This reflected feedback received from residents and businesses in Woodley. Consideration would be given to any points arising during the TRO process.

It was estimated that the proposals would generate additional income of £540k, which was still below the lower estimate of the funding gap.

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points and questions:

In relation to car parking revenue for 2022/23, what were the issues contributing to the budget shortfall? It was confirmed that car park footfall was at 90% of pre-Covid levels but park and ride income was only at 25% of pre-Covid levels. In addition, the Covid support grant had ended this year.

What other steps could be taken to address the car parking budget shortfall? It was confirmed that one option could be to reduce the levels of reactive maintenance on the Borough's roads.

If the TRO generated issues requiring further changes to the proposals, what process would be followed? It was confirmed that any proposed changes would be submitted to the Executive or would be subject to an Individual Executive Member Decision.

The new administration had made a commitment to increase levels of consultation with residents and stakeholders. Should something as significant as the proposed changes to car park charges not have been subject to wide consultation. It was confirmed that the reasons for urgency had been outlined. The TRO process did enable consultation and would be backed up by a communications exercise. Feedback from the TRO process would be given detailed consideration.

Imogen Shepherd-Dubey outlined the financial pressures facing the Council. At the time of the Executive decision, the overall budget gap was estimated at £2.2m. Work was ongoing to find savings or increase income across all service areas. Graham Ebers confirmed the difficult financial position. The use of balances to fill the financial gap was not advisable. In addition, around 80% of the Council's services were statutory, which meant that there was limited scope to achieve further savings. The 2023/24 Budget process was currently being scrutinised by the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Executive report did not contain a business case with estimates of the impact of the changes on demand - footfall and income. How would the impact of the proposals be measured? It was confirmed that monthly monitoring of car park usage data would be used to measure the impact. The proposed changes were felt to be reasonable bearing in mind that charges had not increased for five years. It was also noted that neighbouring authorities were increasing their charges. If the projected additional income was not generated, further savings would be required from other areas.

In relation to the Executive Forward Programme, Andrew Moulton confirmed that the Council had met its legal requirements under the 2012 regulations by publishing the programme on the Council's website. It was accepted that a technical breach had occurred in that a copy of the Forward Programme had not been circulated to Members. However, this was not a legal requirement. The impact of this technical breach was a matter for the Committee to consider.

Following the proposed increases, how would the Borough's charges compare to neighbouring authorities? It was confirmed that, after the proposed increases, the Borough's car parking charges would still be at the lower end of the scale compared to neighbouring authorities such as Bracknell and Reading.

What was the rationale behind the introduction of evening and Sunday charges? This was a fundamental change that would impact on local communities. It was confirmed that the introduction of evening and Sunday charges would lessen the impact on daily charges, i.e. these charges would not have to increase as much.

## **7. SUMMING UP AND DECISION**

Paul Fishwick summed up the response to the Call-In as follows. Budget monitoring had indicated a significant shortfall on the car parks budget, estimated at £600k to £800k. Urgent action was required to address the shortfall. The proposed changes were at the lower end of the options available to fill the gap. Car park charges had not been increased for five years. Consultation would be undertaken via the TRO process, supported by signage in car parks and a communications exercise. This budget shortfall was part of the wider financial challenges faced by the Council. These challenges required tough decisions. The impact of inflation and rising costs were affecting services across the Council. If the car parks budget shortfall was not met, savings would have to be found elsewhere.

Bill Soane summed up the Call-In as follows. The Call-In covered four key points – due consultation, openness, details of options and the Executive Forward Programme procedure. The proposed changes would have a significant impact on residents and businesses. It was not clear that the proposals would generate the income necessary to fill the budget gap. Residents were facing difficult times – they may decide to heat their homes rather than pay additional car park charges. Businesses would be penalised if the proposed increases went ahead. The delay caused by the Call-In process could have been avoided if the correct procedures had been followed in the first place.

### **Note – Extension of the meeting**

At this point in the meeting, 10.15pm, in accordance with Procedure Rule 4.2.12 (m), it was proposed by Andy Croy and seconded by Pauline Jorgensen that the meeting continue beyond 10.30pm for a maximum of 30 minutes (if necessary) to enable the business on the Agenda to be transacted.

Upon being put to the vote, the proposal was carried.

### **Decision**

Having considered the Call-In and the response from the Executive Member, the Committee considered its decision.

Andrew Mickleburgh confirmed that the Committee could not overturn the Executive decision subject to the Call-In. If the Committee had concerns, it could refer the decision back to the Executive for further consideration with any recommendations the Committee agreed. Alternatively, the Committee could confirm the Executive decision.

It was proposed by Adrian Mather and seconded by Peter Dennis that the Executive decision, relating to Off Street Car Park Charges, be confirmed.

Upon being put to the vote it was:

**RESOLVED:** That the Executive decision relating to Off Street Car Park Charges be confirmed.

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Consultation and Engagement Review</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on 16 November 2022
<b>WARD</b>	Non specific
<b>LEAD OFFICER</b>	David Allen Communications, Engagement and Marketing Manager

## **OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY**

Improved consultation and engagement will lead to better decision-making and service design which benefits service users and all residents. It will also enhance the council's reputation for listening and responding to residents.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

That the Committee consider current consultation and engagement practice and provide input to support future development and improvement.

## **SUMMARY OF REPORT**

This report summarises some of the key issues faced in consulting and engaging residents and stakeholders in a meaningful way to seek input from the committee on future service development.

Specific issues outlined in the report are:

- Accessibility and inclusion
- Accurate and appropriate information
- Use of consultation findings
- Timing of consultation and engagement
- Consultation design and delivery
- Potential need for a formalised Consultation and Engagement Protocol

## **Background**

The council's consultation states: Local authorities have a statutory obligation to consult on a range of specific issues of local and national interest. Wokingham Borough Council is keen to exceed its statutory obligations and consult effectively with local residents, businesses and other stakeholders on issues which affect them, to ensure

they are involved in the planning, implementing and monitoring of the services offered by the Council.

Most of the council's public consultation is administered by the Communications, Engagement and Marketing team and managed through the Engage Wokingham Borough online platform, although there is no cross-council policy requirement for this.

### **Why we consult:**

The overriding reason to consult residents is to help decision-making. There are issues on which we are statutorily required to consult and issues on which we would choose to consult but in both cases consultation findings should be used to inform decisions. Decisions on which we must consult on include those with a set statutory requirement such as Traffic Regulation Orders. Planning Applications and on service design in adult and children's services. We must also consult residents and/or stakeholders on decisions where there is a 'legitimate expectation' that we do so.

The Local Government Association states that legitimate expectation applies:

- When there has been a clear promise of consultation
- Where official guidance or policies imply a promise to act in a particular way
- Where there is a withdrawal of a benefit with significant impacts to be considered
- Where the nature of the relationship would create unfairness if there were to be inadequate consultation.

### **How we consult:**

All public consultation we carry out must adhere to the four 'Gunning Principles' which have been established through common law. These are:

#### **1. Proposals are still at a formative stage**

A final decision has not yet been made, or predetermined, by the decision makers

#### **2. There is sufficient information to give 'intelligent consideration'**

The information provided must relate to the consultation and must be available, accessible, and easily interpretable for consultees to provide an informed response

#### **3. There is adequate time for consideration and response**

There must be sufficient opportunity for consultees to participate in the consultation. There is no set timeframe for consultation as the length of time given for consultee to respond can vary depending on the subject and extent of impact of the consultation

#### **4. Conscientious consideration must be given to the consultation responses before a decision is made**

Decision-makers should be able to provide evidence that they took consultation responses into account. It is important to note that this requirement does not mean local authorities are bound by any consultation findings – consultations are not referenda – but that findings must be considered as part of decision-making

## **Analysis of Issues**

### **Accessibility and inclusion:**

To participate fully on Engage Wokingham Borough, residents are required to register with a valid email address. This has been cited as a barrier to participation but there are sound reasons for the requirement and no resident has to register to take part in any specific consultation. The benefits of requiring registration are:

1. Supporting the development of genuine two-way engagement: openness/transparency is a key to building trust and mature dialogue and part of being transparent is being identified (it is difficult if not impossible to have a fully trusting dialogue with an unidentified person).
2. Registration limits the possibility of multiple responses from the same person: Following technical improvements to Engage, it is now possible to limit any registered user to one response per consultation. Multiple responses could still be submitted through hard copies and/or through multiple registrations.
3. Registration allows us to contact respondents (subject to their agreement) in connection with responses they have provided. Examples have included respondents reporting service issues such as missing food waste caddies and one occasion of potential abuse in the home.
4. Registration allows (subject to agreement) respondents to be kept updated on the progress through long-term engagement.

In addition, there is now no requirement for residents to register to participate in any individual survey as hard copies and other alternative channels are provided, including bespoke sessions for target groups (such as with CLASP or the Youth Council), support to complete surveys at libraries and via telephone.

### **Accurate and appropriate information:**

In line with Gunning Principle 2 (*there is sufficient information to give 'intelligent consideration'*) the Council aims to provide the right level of information in each consultation so they are open and accessible to all. The Council's consultation service attempts to meet this requirement with clear, easy-to-understand language (in line with the council's Customer Excellence programme), by providing an appropriate level of information and alternative format (such as Easy Read).

There are challenges with this when presenting complex issues (such as the Local Plan) and, in these areas, practice is to provide different levels of detail so that respondents select how much information to read before responding.

### **Use of consultation findings:**

In line with Gunning Principle 4 (*conscientious consideration must be given to the consultation responses before a decision is made*) all consultation findings are provided

to services to analyse and utilise in service design and decision making. For major decisions that are considered by the Executive, a summary of the findings is included in the Executive report.

However, *conscientious consideration*, is not the same as automatic agreement with a majority of respondents because consultations are part of intelligence gathering to support good decision making rather than being a decision making process in themselves.

### **Timing of consultation and engagement:**

In line with Gunning Principles 1 and 3 (Proposals are still at a formative stage and there is adequate time for consideration and response) we should always carry out consultation at an early stage of decision making and ensure there is time for all stakeholders and residents to participate.

To meet this requirement, services considering major decisions are encouraged to adopt a three-step process to consultation:

- Early engagement – this is informal engagement to get an understanding of residents' and stakeholders' priorities, general preferences and principles on an issue
- Detailed consultation – this is still informal but is an opportunity to ask about specific proposals, ideas or changes that could be implemented
- Formal consultation – this is a required, formal consultation generally involving a survey on a set of specific proposals or a specific policy / strategy (at this stage we would have these in draft form available for review) and the survey would ask views on those

Practice in this area in the past has been inconsistent with some consultations taking place too late in the decision-making process.

### **Consultation design and delivery process:**

In line with Gunning Principle 2 (*there is sufficient information to give 'intelligent consideration'*) consultations should have clearly defined objectives that can be easily understood and set what respondents can and cannot influence. Surveys should also be designed to ask clear, meaningful questions that support the consultations objectives.

Current practice is for these objectives to be agreed by the relevant service area in collaboration with appropriate Executive member(s).

Detailed design work on the consultation or engagement process (including survey design and the promotion / publicising of the consultation) is generally provided by the CEM team in collaboration with service areas and, where appropriate ward members and/or outside organisations. Relevant Executive Members and directors / assistant



directors then approved final versions of the consultations and accompanying communications.

**Potential need for a formalised Consultation and Engagement Protocol / Code of Practice**

Current engagement and consultation practice across the Council varies. There is not a single set of guiding principles or protocol that all service areas must adhere to. This allows for a great degree of flexibility in the way consultations are carried out but also results in a different experience for residents depending on the consultation.

It also means that the Council is not consistently following best practice and, therefore, does not always have the best intelligence from consultations possible when making decisions or designing services.

An agreed set of principles or protocol would remove this inconsistency and provide a clear set of standards that residents could expect the council to adhere to.

**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	NA	NA
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	0	NA	NA
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	0	NA	NA

<b>Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision</b>
None

<b>Cross-Council Implications</b>
Improved consultation and engagement will lead to better decision-making and service design which benefits service users and all residents.

<b>Public Sector Equality Duty</b>
Due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty is taken in the consultation and engagement 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***

Consultation with residents and stakeholders is a key element in the implementation of the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan

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

None

**List of Background Papers**

None

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**Service** Chief Executive

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**Email** david.allen@wokingham.gov.uk

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Results of the Scrutiny Improvement Review</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on 16 November 2022
<b>WARD</b>	None Specific
<b>DIRECTOR</b>	Graham Ebers, Deputy Chief Executive

**OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY**

The role of Overview and Scrutiny is to hold decision makers to account, both inside and outside the Council. It provides independent “critical friend” challenge to the Council and other public service providers across the Borough. Overview and Scrutiny plays a role in developing and reviewing policy and ensuring that the Council and its partners are working effectively to improve services for residents, businesses and visitors. Effective scrutiny is an important element of the successful functioning of local democracy.

**RECOMMENDATION**

The Committee is requested to:

- 1) consider the results of Scrutiny Improvement Review reported at Appendix 1 by the Centre for Governance & Scrutiny (CfGS);
- 2) note the initial officer responses to the recommendations at Appendix 2 and give further consideration and support to improvement actions.

**SUMMARY OF REPORT**

In 2021 the Council underwent a LGA Corporate Peer Challenge. As part of the peer challenge process the Council asked the LGA team to advise on how it could make the Overview and Scrutiny function more meaningful and effective. The LGA team observed that Overview and Scrutiny at WBC was often the scene of lively debate and was seen as a political arena rather than creating “good policy” and positive challenge.

Following the peer review, the Chief Executive commissioned the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) to carry out a Scrutiny Improvement Review (SIR). The SIR included the following elements:

- A review of documentation and Overview and Scrutiny reports;
- On-site interviews in June 2022 and observation of Overview and Scrutiny meetings;
- A study of Scrutiny’s role and integration in the Council;
- Joint development of an improvement action plan with follow up work as necessary.

The CfGS final report was received in late October (see Appendix 1) and concluded that, “the conditions for successful scrutiny are clearly present at Wokingham; there is a shared understanding from members and officers that good governance involves scrutiny, and when used effectively, scrutiny can add value to decision-making. All of those interviewed believed that improvements can be made to make scrutiny more effective and to add greater value.”

The report contains a series of twenty recommendations to which officers’ initial responses are given at Appendix 2. The CfG&S is arranging a Member/officer workshop to discuss the recommendations in more detail and further develop the improvement action plan.

## **Background**

In 2019 the Government published Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local Authorities. The guidance stated that effective Overview and Scrutiny should:

- Provide constructive and “critical friend” challenge;
- Amplify the voices and concerns of the public;
- Be led by independent people who take responsibility for their role;
- Drive improvement in public services.

In 2021 the Council underwent a LGA Corporate Peer Challenge. As part of the peer challenge process the Council asked the LGA team to advise on how it could make the Overview and Scrutiny function more meaningful and effective.

The LGA team observed that Overview and Scrutiny at WBC was often the scene of lively debate and was seen as a political arena rather than creating “good policy” and positive challenge. The team felt that all Members involved in Scrutiny should understand the terms of reference of each “Scrutiny Board (Committee)” and recognise what “good scrutiny” looks like.

Following the peer review, the Chief Executive commissioned the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) to carry out a Scrutiny Improvement Review (SIR). CfGS is the leading national body promoting and supporting excellence in governance and Scrutiny. The SIR provides Councils with CfGS expertise to assess where Scrutiny is adding value, identify improvements and help to implement practical solutions.

The SIR process is carried out through a combination of:

- An online review of the Council’s documentation and reports;
- On-site interviews and observation of Overview and Scrutiny meetings;
- A study of Scrutiny’s role and integration in the Council;
- Joint development of an improvement action plan with follow-up engagement as necessary.

The SIR looks at the following areas:

- Culture – the relationships, communication and behaviours underpinning the operation of the Overview and Scrutiny process – the Council’s corporate approach, organisational commitment and the status of Scrutiny;
- Member engagement – are Members motivated and engaged? How do they participate, take responsibility and self-manage their role?
- Member skills and application – are skills up-to-date and can Members participate fully or are there development gaps?
- Information – how information is prepared, shared and accessed and used to support the Scrutiny function.
- Impact – ways to ensure that Scrutiny is effective, that it makes a positive difference in the effectiveness of the Council and to local residents;

- Focus – how prioritisation, timeliness and relevance of the work programme and agendas lead to value-adding and productivity;
- Structure – formats used by Scrutiny to carry out its work and how effective these formats are.

## **Themes Identified by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny from SIRs**

CfGS has been undertaking SIRs since 2018 and has now completed over 30 reviews. CfGS has published information on the main themes identified through the SIR process to date. Details of the four main themes are set out below.

### **Theme 1 Organisational Commitment to Scrutiny**

**The attitude of the Executive towards Scrutiny** – effective Scrutiny requires a strong organisational commitment – without that commitment, Scrutiny will struggle to have its voice heard. The prevailing organisational culture, behaviours and attitudes of an authority will largely determine whether its Scrutiny function succeeds or fails.

**Parity of esteem** – Putting the Executive and Scrutiny on a more equal footing creates conditions for effective challenge to happen. Parity of esteem means that the Scrutiny function has a similar level of importance as the Executive. The work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees should be treated with the same respect as the work of the Executive.

**Resourcing** – a key indicator of the organisation’s commitment to Scrutiny is the decision to resource it appropriately. Nationally, the past decade has seen a reduction in the available resource for Scrutiny.

### **What “Good” looks Like**

- Clarity on the role and purpose of Scrutiny within the Council’s overall governance framework and how it aligns with Council decision making;
- Proactive approaches by political and officer leadership to draw Scrutiny into discussions on the development of policy;
- An understanding that Scrutiny’s sense of what is important may not always tally with the Executive’s;
- Support for the Scrutiny function and a recognition of the value it can add to overall Council governance.

### **Theme 2 Member engagement and fostering good relationships**

**Member Leadership** – Good Chairs are crucially important - having Members in chairing positions who command respect and are independent-minded. Scrutiny is more effective in councils which take Member support and development more seriously.

**Scrutiny Members’ Engagement** – nationally, the commitment of Scrutiny Members is variable. In most councils there is a core of committed and engaged Members.

Sometimes these Members are drivers of high quality work and continuous improvement, but they may also act as a barrier to change.

**Scrutiny Members' behaviours** – Scrutiny is not always a politically neutral space. There will always be differences of opinion and disagreement about policy and decisions – this should be factored in. If Scrutiny becomes too politically charged or adversarial mutual trust and respect may be weakened, leading to negative outcomes.

Scrutiny may also become a “conversation” or an information exchange or become too focused on detailed aspects of performance with too little emphasis on improving through enquiry and constructive challenge, evidenced by strong recommendations to the Executive.

### **Relationships with the Executive and senior officers**

Evidence suggests that both the Executive and Scrutiny benefit from a closer relationship. Rather than operating along parallel tracks, greater collaboration enables Scrutiny to align and play a greater role in policy development. It also allows the Executive to draw on a different perspective and source of recommendations. When Scrutiny and the Executive engage earlier and share future plans, it builds a better understanding of what decision makers are trying to achieve and how Scrutiny can test and refine these plans.

### **What “Good” looks like**

- A role description for chairing and Committee member roles – providing clarity around expectations and responsibilities;
- Scrutiny chairs elected on the basis of ability to lead and to lead impartially – supported with specialised coaching and mentoring;
- Scrutiny development training for all Scrutiny Members to develop a common understanding of what “Good” practice looks like;
- Scrutiny and Executive working collaboratively within a framework where Scrutiny’s independent challenge role is recognised and welcomed – this involves regular communication and information sharing;
- Upholding respectful behavior between Members and between Members and officers in the context of robust challenge and probing questions.

### **Theme 3 Prioritising work and using evidence well**

**Scrutiny’s role** – the Government’s statutory guidance on Scrutiny (2019) highlighted the importance of articulating Scrutiny’s role clearly. Prioritising well has three main stages:

- Establishing Scrutiny’s role within the Council’s governance structure;
- Ensuring that Scrutiny has access to timely and relevant information;
- Developing a work programme which focuses on the most important issues – delivery is able to demonstrate the impact made by Scrutiny.

**Information** – accurate, timely information is key to the effective delivery of Scrutiny. It enables Scrutiny to prioritise its work programme and to understand what is happening within the organisation. A key part of Scrutiny’s role is representing the “voice” of local communities. There are a number of ways to engage with residents more effectively – these include the use of social media, calls for evidence and taking Scrutiny out into the community – meeting local stakeholders away from the Committee setting.

**Work Programming** - work programming is key to ensuring that Scrutiny stays focused on strategic issues where it can make an impact. The work programme should include a focus on the high impact issues set out in the Council Plan. Scrutiny should also focus on cross-cutting issues which affect residents across the Borough. To be effective, the work programme should be Member-led.

### **What “Good” looks like**

- Scrutiny Members developing greater expertise and insight, e.g. on finance, commercial activities and transformation;
- Using independent experts and more officer “masterclass” style events to build Member knowledge and confidence;
- Changing the way that information is provided to Members, reducing the number of items coming to Scrutiny for noting and/or information;
- Developing the annual work programme process to involve greater engagement with residents, Members, officers and partners;
- Ensuring that work programming is flexible enough to include new issues which emerge during the year;
- Greater focus on engagement with the public, e.g. through site visits and use of social media.

### **Theme 4 Making an Impact**

Scrutiny impact is a recurring theme in SIRs – the timing of Scrutiny’s involvement in the decision-making process can have a considerable effect on its impact. Pre-decision Scrutiny needs to happen at early stage in the process of policy formulation rather than when decisions are imminent. Too often, Scrutiny work has limited impact because it is focused on activity and not on outcomes, e.g. what is the impact of Scrutiny’s recommendations on the residents of the Borough. Making high quality recommendations and understanding the impact on local communities is an essential part of effective Scrutiny. There must be an effective feedback loop once recommendations are considered by the Executive and implemented. Task and Finish Groups are highlighted as an example of successful Scrutiny as they allow greater focus on a single issue combined with the opportunity to engage with subject experts and local stakeholders.

### **What “Good” looks like**

- Publishing an annual report to Council setting out Scrutiny’s focus and impact over the past year;

- An emphasis on developing strong recommendations to the Executive;
- Moving Scrutiny towards more outcome-focused Scrutiny meetings through better planning and preparation;
- Reviewing how Scrutiny recommendations are developed and how their impact is measured;
- Greater use of Task and Finish Groups – facilitating improved cross-party working and detailed investigation on matters of public interest.

### **Executive – Overview & Scrutiny Protocol**

The Government’s statutory guidance suggested that an Executive-Scrutiny Protocol can help to deal with the practical expectations of Executive and Scrutiny Members, as well as the cultural dynamics within the organisation. In 2019 the Protocol was approved by the Executive and the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee. The Protocol addresses a number of the themes set out in the report including the important issue of closer working between Scrutiny, the Executive and the Corporate Leadership Team.

### **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 focussed on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.**

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	0	NA	NA
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	0	NA	NA
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	0	NA	NA

#### **Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision**

None.

#### **Cross-Council Implications**

Effective Overview and Scrutiny helps to drive service improvement, policy development and the achievement of value for money for the Borough’s residents.

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

Due regard has been given to Council’s Public Sector Equality Duty.



**Climate Emergency – The 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 O&S Climate Emergency Task & Finish Group has produced two reports with a number of recommendations to the Executive aimed at improving the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan. At its meeting on 5 October 2022, the Committee agreed to the establishment of a Climate Emergency Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

**List of Background Papers**

CfGS – Scrutiny Impact Reviews – Themes and Findings

Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities - 2019

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<b>Date</b> 3 November 2022	<b>Version No.</b> 1.0

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Susan Parsonage  
Chief Executive  
Wokingham Borough Council  
Civic Offices  
Shute End  
Wokingham

November 2022

Dear Susan,

## **Scrutiny Improvement Review – CfGS consultancy support**

I am writing to thank you for inviting the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) to carry out an evaluation of Wokingham Borough Council's Scrutiny function. This letter provides feedback on our review findings and offers suggestions on how the Council could develop its Scrutiny process further.

As part of this feedback stage, we would like to facilitate a workshop with members and officers to reflect on this review and to discuss options for improvement.

### **Background**

Wokingham Council commissioned CfGS to advise and support its members and officers in the review of the Council's Scrutiny function. The aim was to ensure that Scrutiny is effective in delivering accountability, improving policy and decision making, and that scrutiny makes a quality contribution in the delivery of Council plans and overall improvement.

Wokingham Borough Council changed political control in May 2022 after a long period of being consistently led by a Conservative administration, it is now a council with no overall control and has Lib-Dem minority administration.

This change has created some new challenges as roles change and politicians take new positions.

This review was therefore able to explore how scrutiny had coped during this transition. To see what, if any, changes – positive or otherwise are emerging and how scrutiny could be developed in the future. It was also a timely check that scrutiny is meeting reasonable expectations of democratic accountability and transparency, and that the interface of decision-making and Scrutiny is effective and relevant.

A Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) which reported in November 2021, made reference to the need for scrutiny to be the focus of constructive challenge and to contribute to producing good policies and decisions. Although this review pre-dates the change in political control, this scrutiny improvement review explored the progress made since the recommendations of the CPC were presented.

Wokingham Council's governance structure is based on a Executive-Cabinet model. Its current Scrutiny arrangements consists of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which has a co-ordinating role plus three Scrutiny committees.

CfGS undertook a review of these scrutiny arrangements, involving evidence gathering through conversations with members and officers during 10<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> June 2022.

CfGS met with elected members and officers, including Leader, Executive members, Group Leaders, Scrutiny Chairs and members of the Scrutiny Committees.

The review was conducted by:

- Ian Parry – Head of Consultancy, Centre for Governance and Scrutiny
- Sarah Jones – Associate-Consultant, Centre for Governance and Scrutiny

The findings and recommendations presented in this letter are intended to advise the Council on strengthening the quality of scrutiny activities, increasing the impact of its outputs, and through its members, develop a strong and shared understanding of the role and capability of the Scrutiny function.

## Summary of findings

### 1. Scrutiny has the conditions for success

1.1 The conditions for successful scrutiny are clearly present at Wokingham; there is a shared understanding from members and officers that good governance involves scrutiny, and when used effectively, scrutiny can add value to decision-making. All of those interviewed believed that improvements can be made to make scrutiny more effective and to add greater value.

1.2 Members recognise the benefits of change and improvement, and this presents a good opportunity for the Council to further develop the way in which scrutiny operates from its current position. Strengthening its role could also aim to elevate the status of scrutiny, so that it is recognised as a strategic function and is fully utilised as a resource to support continuous council improvement.

1.3 It is also important to note that this review has the support of the Leader of the Council, Leader of the Conservative Group Chief Executive, who expressed a desire and willingness to support Scrutiny and confirm that its role is central to open, transparent decision-making and accountability in the Council.

We therefore would stress that this confirmation and buy-in at the most senior political and officer level is crucial to improvement.

1.4 Our review identified several positive indicators for Scrutiny, most notably; the positive attitude and commitment of Members and officers, the reasonable level cross-party working in scrutiny working groups and most committee meetings, the overall capacity and range of experience of members, as well as the strong belief that more can be achieved. The council has a strong cohort of committed councillors across the council and is therefore in a good position to progress. There were other positive behaviours and practices which do support good scrutiny and can therefore provide some foundations for further building, which this report will also highlight.

1.5 The commitment of members and officers to this review and the ambition to drive improvement in Scrutiny was further indicated by good attendance of those who were invited to meet with the CfGS review team. We appreciated this high level of participation and everyone's constructive contributions in interviews and discussions. The review team were impressed by this high level of commitment.

### 2. Officer support and organisational culture

2.1 The foundations for good Scrutiny start with the context in which it operates and the position it holds within the council.

2.2 We were reassured by the Council's senior leadership team's commitment to properly supporting Scrutiny, even if at times the understanding of the Scrutiny objective can be unclear. Our conversations with members were positive about the assistance they received from officers who support Scrutiny and overall they were satisfied that support meets their current needs.

2.3 Organisational culture is also identified as foundational in improving the quality of Scrutiny. This review noted that Scrutiny mainly operated in space that was generally free from adversarial political activity and generally aimed to be collaborative, but not consistently. Scrutiny's ability to effectively carry out its business, rests on the strength of organisational and committee-based culture. This includes but is not limited to:

- Mutual respect between members – within the context of robust political debate and disagreement, and Members respecting officers as professionals.
- Members and officers understanding their mutual roles and responsibilities – in the most basic sense, that councillors lead on strategy and overall direction, while officers lead on delivery and implementation.

2.4 These cultural aspects above are present at Wokingham Council, but more needs to be done to position and orientate Scrutiny as a total-council, cross-party collaborative endeavour with clear objectives which are widely understood and have broad buy-in from members.

2.5 The presence of some party-political activity in scrutiny is evident. We were told that it was present in the previous council and continued after the May election. It was also noted by the LGA's CPC review. It is inevitable that political differences exist. Political Groups will hold mandates from their electors and will wish to differentiate on key areas of policy. A level of political debate is therefore to be expected in a democratically elected body. However, too much adversarial politics risks diluting the effectiveness of scrutiny and can cause it to miss the crucial point of its role – to add value and impact to good policy making and key decisions.

2.6 Yearly elections seem to add a level of sensitivity to the scrutiny challenge as issues that can affect political support are more carefully managed and can potentially crowd-out collaborative working.

2.7 There are signs that leaders of the main parties want scrutiny to become a more neutral environment where cross-party working can focus on constructive challenge, improvement, and accountability in decision-making.

2.8 To assist this process more could be done to engage earlier with Executive Members to help shape and improve through early constructive challenge. Furthermore, there is a real opportunity for Scrutiny to be better aligned with core corporate plans of the council. We explore this further in this report letter.

2.9 Overall we found that Scrutiny is valued in the council as an important part of governance, democracy and accountability and receives strong support from political leaders, corporate officers and an experienced democratic services team who provide the right framework for good scrutiny.

### **3. Clarity on Scrutiny's role and responsibilities**

3.1 Scrutiny's overall role is to hold the Executive to account, to assist policy development, contribute to improved decision-making, and channel the voice of the public. A good Scrutiny function is one that provides robust, effective challenge. But equally, is recognised and valued as a positive influencer of policy and key decision-making through constructive challenge, positive enquiry, and quality insight.

3.2 Through our evidence gathering, members involved in Scrutiny could articulate the role that Scrutiny should play in being an integral part of the Council's governance structure and contributing to the council's budgetary and policy making function. However, some members seemed to be unclear on how exactly Scrutiny should be holding the Executive to account. Committee meetings can spend a lot of time focusing on officer presentations and less time in enquiry and scrutiny mode. It is essential that Scrutiny meetings do not become classrooms for learning and information up-dates, but remain focused on the scrutiny task, challenge, and improvement.

3.3 We observed that Executive participation in Scrutiny could be limited and their purpose in attending unclear. We suggest that scrutiny meetings are clearly framed around Executive Members with robust, constructive (but respectful) challenge, with the aim of producing compelling and constructive recommendations for the Executive Member to take away to consider or for a flow of questions and debate that lead to good accountability and assurance. Executive Members would find the experience tough and challenging but equally useful, supportive and beneficial. We suggest that a 'select committee' style would be appropriate at Wokingham Council, where the strategic challenge to Executive Members could be strengthened.

3.4 The Leader, Executive and Scrutiny members all say that they want to see more emphasis on shaping policy, challenging, and holding to account. Therefore, Scrutiny will need earlier access to and involvement with the core policy and decision-making activities of the Executive. We heard that information and reports can often arrive at scrutiny after Executive has received them, rather than allowing scrutiny to play a role in shaping and improving. This is potentially a process weakness and missed opportunity.

3.5 Overall, our assessments concluded that Executive members and Scrutiny all recognise and say that greater collaboration and engagement would be strongly beneficial, but there is an obligation on everyone to ensure that it is delivered.

#### We recommend:

- **Political group leaders play a key role** in resetting the level and standard of collaboration and transparency in scrutiny to allow it to function as a crucial part of council governance – accountability, policy and decision-making and improvement. Leadership is a must have ingredient in making this change. Leaders need to set the standards for others.
- **A clearer focus on democratic accountability** - Scrutiny of Executive members should form a key part of the work plan, with Executive members regularly attending Scrutiny to answer questions on items falling within their portfolio responsibilities is vital.
- **Leader to attend Scrutiny on a quarterly basis** to present an integrated finance and performance report and to be held to account for Council performance and progress. Perhaps adopting a 'select committee' style.
- **More emphasis on scrutiny's shaping role** - With a clear mapping for scrutiny in early policy development and key-decisions. Involving scrutiny early and sharing information in a transparent way, based on trust and co-operation.
- **Scrutiny avoids the main focus on updates and presentations.** The task of providing Scrutiny members with the essential core knowledge to be sufficiently effective in the scrutiny task could be developed as briefings or 'master classes' where the topic is complex. Lengthy learning exercises can squeeze scrutiny capacity.
- **Resist scrutiny being a source of political point-scoring.** Intentionally targeting scrutiny as a forum to gain a media headline is a disruptive and diluting activity. This does not prevent disagreement or different perspectives being debated.

## 4. Collaborative approach to Scrutiny

4.1 We were told that there is limited dialogue between scrutiny and Executive. There is no facility for Chairs of Scrutiny and appropriate Executive Members to meet to discuss how scrutiny and the executive can work together. Such meetings are fairly familiar in other councils.

4.2 This might involve arranging triangulation meetings between officers, Scrutiny and Executive members to explore and collaborate on the key areas of delivery by Executive and the essential focus of Scrutiny. This may help to achieve greater alignment between Scrutiny and Executive in terms of efforts of both being focused on the same key areas of the council plan and council or community priorities.

4.3 Their purpose is to share plans and agree where alignment might be useful. They are also intended to be a meeting of equals where scrutiny and Executive have parity and can form useful relationships that support and benefit each other. This process can be particularly beneficial to policy development work.

4.4 Overall our assessment is that Scrutiny can become a space for robust challenge?, where constructive challenge is welcomed by the Executive without any negative repercussions. But scrutiny needs to be 'let-in' and mutual trust and respect be developed.

### We recommend:

- **Developing regular communication and information sharing so that Scrutiny can be a resource to inform (often improve) Executive decision making.** This could be achieved through holding triangulation meetings between scrutiny chairs, Executive members, and relevant Directors to consider future issues and the part which Scrutiny could play in testing and shaping these forward plans. It would also present an opportunity to share and discuss opportunities to involve Scrutiny as an improvement asset.

## 5. Scrutiny's focus and workplan

5.1 We heard that Scrutiny could try to take on too much, without spending enough quality time on big corporate issues or emerging pressures and risks. Orientating through a vast array of potential issues that could be scrutinised is itself a 'first base' task. This review was not convinced that Scrutiny utilises its resources to best effect and with maximum efficiency and impact? What Scrutiny is scrutinising (work programmes and agendas) is essential to quality outputs from scrutiny.

5.2 Work programmes across committees do tend to have an air of repetition or member interest, rather than corporate and community focus. We could find no clear methodology for the design and content of work programmes or rationale for some items which were included that appeared not to have any solid link with the council plan or priority.

5.3 Scrutiny work programmes are therefore not as well developed as we would expect. However, a change in political control and new council priorities from an incoming administration may take some time for scrutiny to adjust. This area does need further work to get Scrutiny into a place where it can comfortably and confidently prioritise and focus on key issues.

5.4 Scrutiny could benefit from a simpler approach to prioritisation of topics. There is strong evidence that when Scrutiny focuses on fewer things of greater importance, more is achieved. The 'less is more' maxim can readily be found in quality scrutiny.



5.5 Work planning is key to ensuring Scrutiny stays focussed on strategic issues where it can make an impact, whilst making the best use of time and resources. From our conversations we noted that many members felt that they have little opportunity to influence work plans, and the way that issues are prioritised. Wokingham's scrutiny function may need to consider how it organises its work plans in a way that is led by all members of the committees to have ownership over committee activity.

5.6 It is important to emphasise that work planning is an ongoing process and not just a one-off event. Whilst a workshop will help identify priorities and provide structure to work for the months ahead, there will need to be flexibility in the workplan, and time set aside to regularly revisit the relevance of topics in meetings as the local context changes.

5.7 Work programmes will also clearly influence agendas. We saw and we heard that agendas can also become dominated by presentations, up-dates and for information items, which again lean into the scrutiny-classroom scenario. Too much time on these issues where the value scrutiny can add is limited or questionable can consume valuable time which could be better spent on the bigger, more crucial topics. Scrutiny could be more discerning about what it permits on its agendas.

5.8 Scrutiny currently can tend to be more retrospective, rather than forward looking. It is important that Scrutiny carries out reviews and assesses performance, but there is an important missed opportunity for it to add value to council policy and strategy through greater emphasis on the big challenges and opportunities ahead for the council. The future is where the opportunities, challenges, risks and threats are present, and scrutiny has a vital role to play in asking about the Executive's plans and preparedness for what is ahead. Evidence from elsewhere clearly indicates that scrutiny's absence in this space can be a significant factor in subsequent failures.

5.9 The Council's corporate plan should significantly influence Scrutiny's focus, this is where it can help to shape policy and hold decision makers to account for the delivery of the plan. The plan can readily be allocated across respective committees. Currently scrutiny business does not always seem to be aligned with either the Council's overall priorities, the 3-month rolling programme of Executive decisions or with pressing corporate performance or risks and challenges - when topics are reviewed the focus can lean towards operational rather than strategic or outcome focused.

5.10 Task and finish style working was cited as some of the most successful examples of scrutiny by members, where it has selected key issues to scrutinise and to explore. These could be further improved if Scrutiny focused on making compelling, quality recommendations based on its activity.

5.11 We found that budget and finance scrutiny is based on good foundations and is well-placed to be more effective if member skills and input can be increased. Members take this task seriously and responsibly. The process starts early and there are several briefings for scrutiny members. Officers are determined to ensure transparency and access for scrutiny.

5.12 For scrutiny members, council finance and budget can seem technical and daunting, particularly if they attempt to become too forensic or immersed in detail. We would suggest that Members are not expected to act or have the skills of an accountant or a finance expert, but to view the budget as a resource for the council plan. The task of councillors is therefore more strategic and concerned with priorities, risks, pressures, opportunities and medium-term resilience.

5.13 From the positive position we observed, we wondered if scrutiny would need even more support, officer time, development, and training to equip it for this task. We would also recommend following the guidance in CfGS & CIPFA (2020) 'Financial Scrutiny, practice guide' - [https://www.cfgs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Financial-Scrutiny-practice-guide\\_proof3.pdf](https://www.cfgs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Financial-Scrutiny-practice-guide_proof3.pdf)

5.14 Similarly, the review concluded that both the Children's O&S and Health O&S committees are well intentioned, and Members recognise the gravity and essential nature of scrutiny in these areas. Both have good officer support and advice. However, both committees appear to struggle with the size and complexity of the task. There is a weakness in the alignment of what might be considered to be critical areas and the agenda topics being considered. Overall, we must conclude that they fall short of robust scrutiny of key areas and will need to take a greater responsibility for what they are scrutinising rather than depending on officer direction or in fact simply having agendas managed by officers.

#### **We recommend:**

- **Work planning to be a committee-based responsibility** – review the need for a Co-ordinating committee to oversee this.
- **Review the process for developing work plans for each Scrutiny committee** - Engaging members, officers, partners, and the public to prioritise the topics for review.
- **Build on the current approach to financial Scrutiny, MTFS/ budget scrutiny.** We have produced guidance on financial scrutiny with CIPFA<sup>1</sup>, setting out scrutiny activity to complement Councils' annual financial cycle. The guide suggests ways to move budget and finance scrutiny beyond set-piece scrutiny 'events and quarterly financial performance scorecards being reported to committee.
- **Set clear priorities for Children's, Adult Social Care and Health scrutiny** as areas where scrutiny must be fully engaged and properly focused. (Especially LAC, Safeguarding, SEND, changes to health and social care [with potentially large cost implications], and others.

## **6. Scrutiny committee structure and scheduling**

6.1 Wokingham Council scrutiny committee structure includes an Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee. The council constitution states: *The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee is responsible for co-ordinating the Council's arrangements for holding the Executive to account. This includes undertaking policy development and review performance monitoring and external Scrutiny.*

6.2 We are uncertain about the value of the O&S Management Committee, since individual committees could readily identify and agree their own work programmes and ensure that they are prioritising the right issues. This could be something to consider further.

6.3 The three main Scrutiny committees follow a logical pattern covering the big areas of council activity: Children's Services, Health and ASC and Community and Corporate. This structure of three committees would seem to be sufficient to provide sufficient capacity for effective scrutiny.

6.4 We would also suggest that scrutiny does not readily benefit from too much detail or lengthy reports. Detail can become counter-productive in helping Scrutiny to stay strategic and we would suggest that more consideration is given to the way committee meetings are constructed to ensure short agendas and information provided that is designed to serve the Scrutiny objective. To make this work will take some understanding and collaboration between Scrutiny and corporate officers.

6.5 We found that without some refocusing Scrutiny could continue to drift towards more performance management of officers, rather than being forward looking, focusing on important areas of challenge and opportunity which is largely the focus of Executive, and we suggest Scrutiny also.

6.6 We were told about several successful examples of task and finish group work. Scrutiny could benefit from further use of task and finish groups or 'spotlight events' where single issues of major importance to the Council or community can be considered and explored in greater detail. This can add significant impact and quality to scrutiny activity.

6.7 But all task and finish projects need to be clearly scoped, resourced, time-limited and with clear objectives to be useful and effective. The current structure does provide for up to three task and finish projects per committee. We suggest that this would seem a lot in terms of support and resource capacity.

6.8 Task and finish style working is often where Scrutiny can do its best work by focussing on a single issue and drilling down to provide clear analysis to inform policy making.

#### **We recommend:**

- **Review the need for the O&S Management Committee.** Or consider its purpose and its role within the overall scrutiny structure,
- **Consider extending the use of task and finish group work – or alternative scrutiny arrangements** – To ensure the most effective use of time and resources and to deliver maximum impact.

#### **7. Scrutiny's output and impact**

7.1 When asked more specifically about Scrutiny's output and impact, most members and officers found it difficult to point to consistent work that has made a real difference or tracking recommendations that have been accepted and implemented. Again, we think it is reasonable to make some allowance for the change of council administration and the change in priorities and scrutiny roles this has created.

7.2 Some substantive items are considered by scrutiny committees, but too often the objective is unclear. And the conclusion of these discussions does not always have an articulated outcome or recommendation to Executive. Scrutiny meetings can often appear to be for the purpose of obtaining information or to obtain updates rather than scrutinising, shaping and recommending. The practice of reports being presented 'to note', or inviting speakers only to share information, should be avoided.

7.3 Overall, our assessment is that Scrutiny does a reasonable job, but could be much more productive, if it is embedded and included and well sighted on the core and critical business of the council. It needs to be let in. To be trusted by others and itself to be accountable - for its actions and the responsibility it carries.

7.4 Committee agendas can become overburdened and even cluttered with too many items which are arguably not particularly something that scrutiny can add much value to or are for information. Scrutiny should not be viewed as an approval process.

7.5 Scrutiny must be clear in its purpose to add value to the issue or subject being considered. If Scrutiny cannot add value, then arguably the subject should not reach the agenda. As a matter of general principle, items for information or updates could be shared with members as briefing notes outside of committee, leaving more capacity for constructive activity.

7.6 When members of the Executive and Senior Officers are asked to attend, scrutiny committees would benefit from being clear about what the aims and objectives are of the session (including clarity over the content of any reports and presentations). Through our recommendation of establishing pre-meetings in the next section, this can also improve scrutiny's impact by allowing the space to create a shared understanding and trying to discuss beforehand what recommendations the committee might make on the day, and how the Executive might respond to them.

7.7 In carrying out 'external' Scrutiny work, it is important to ensure that Scrutiny has a clear focus on objectives and can influence outcomes concerning the topic discussed.

#### **We recommend:**

- **Changing the way that information is provided to Scrutiny members for oversight -** Reduce the number of items coming to Scrutiny solely for information and consider how information on the following matters could be shared with councillors, outside of committee.
- **Review how reports and information is supplied to scrutiny –** so that it supports the scrutiny objective, is not excessively detailed and is understandable by members.
- **Reviewing how the recommendations are made and how impact is measured –** This could include putting a 'recommendations monitoring report' at the beginning of agendas to orientate Scrutiny towards outcomes-focused meetings, alongside an emphasis on finding strong recommendations from questioning, to present to the Executive as improvement or challenge proposals.

## **8. Chairing, Member development and meeting preparation**

8.1 Scrutiny's success is dependent on the right members, with the right capabilities and attributes, leading and managing the Scrutiny function. Scrutiny Chairs have a vital task in leading the committee, ensuring that it builds and maintains strong relationships with the Executive, officers and relevant external partners.

8.2 Chairs can also lead on setting the working culture of Scrutiny, helping it to set and uphold high standards of behaviour, engagement, and debate, ensuring good cross-party working. The lack of opposition members involved in Scrutiny chairing roles was raised as an issue in our evidence gathering. Although there is no single 'right' approach to selecting chairs - the emphasis ought to be on selecting chairs based on skill set and capability and providing ongoing training and support.

8.3 Scrutiny provides an excellent opportunity to support members in getting an in-depth understanding of issues across the Council's services. To get the most out of Scrutiny, Members need a clear sense of what is required of them as committee members and the work involved which allows good scrutiny to happen.

8.4 Many members were unsure of how to achieve impactful scrutiny; some were also open about a lack of understanding about the specific areas they are asked to scrutinise. Members felt that more briefings to provide them with core knowledge, especially on more complex or technical issues would be welcome and equip them better as scrutineers.

8.5 We heard that the quality of questioning in scrutiny varies; in some instances, it is forensic and probing, but it is often more general and exploratory and sometimes superficial.

8.6 Wokingham Council is clearly committed to member development and regularly reviews member training needs. However, training was raised by some members who were clearly aware of the gaps in their knowledge and understanding.

8.7 From our observations of committee meetings there is little evidence of co-ordinated questions or members acting as a team with clear lines of inquiry. Pre-meetings could allow members to give voice to their objectives for meetings and allow mutual motivations to be understood and questioning strategies to be agreed. It is likely that differences will remain and will, in some cases, be significant, but the airing of these differences will make it easier for members to understand where consensus is possible.

#### **We recommend:**

- **More skills development support is offered for the key roles of Chair and Vice-Chair** – To provide them with the confidence they need in leading the scrutiny function.
- **Consider further Scrutiny development and training for all committee members** - To develop a common understanding of what "good" Scrutiny practice looks like.
- **Providing additional briefing or expert involvement as required** - To assist Scrutiny members in becoming more capable to develop questioning strategies that will deliver high-impact and value-adding Scrutiny.
- **Cross-party pre-meetings for Scrutiny committees could be established** - with a specific focus on identifying priorities and members working together to develop lines of enquiry so that recommendations are more likely.

## **9. Public engagement**

9.1 Scrutiny should explore and experiment with ways to allow greater access, openness and involvement with the public. This could include Scrutiny going on more site visits in the community, inviting the public to offer ideas for work plans, and greater use of social media channels for resident input and communicating the progress and impact of scrutiny work.

9.2 The council's website would benefit from easier navigation to information about committees and democracy, including scrutiny. It requires a level of determination to get through to the relevant webpages. We would also recommend exploring opportunities for scrutiny to raise its public profile, perhaps through social media or other communication channels.

## Thank you and acknowledgements

We would like to thank the Chairs, members of the Scrutiny Committees, Leader and Executive members, Leaders of Political Groups and officers who took part in interviews for their time, insight and open views.

Yours sincerely,

Ian Parry,  
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## Appendix 2

### SIR Draft Improvement Action Plan

No.	Recommendation	Action	Timescale
1	<b>Political group leaders play a key role</b> in resetting the level and standard of collaboration and transparency in scrutiny to allow it to function as a crucial part of council governance – accountability, policy and decision-making and improvement. Leadership is a must have ingredient in making this change. Leaders need to set the standards for others.	Agreed. Leader has emphasised the importance of effective cross-party Scrutiny and its potential increased role in policy development.	Ongoing
2	<b>A clearer focus on democratic accountability</b> - Scrutiny of Executive members should form a key part of the work plan, with Executive members regularly attending Scrutiny to answer questions on items falling within their portfolio responsibilities is vital.	Agreed. Executive Members are regularly invited to attend O&S meetings to present items and answer questions.	Ongoing
3	<b>Leader to attend Scrutiny on a quarterly basis</b> to present an integrated finance and performance report and to be held to account for Council performance and progress. Perhaps adopting a 'select committee' style.	Agreed. Attendance by Leader and CEX is scheduled every 6 months.	Next attendance due in January 2023.
4	<b>More emphasis on scrutiny's shaping role</b> - With a clear mapping for scrutiny in early policy development and key-decisions. Involving scrutiny early and sharing information in a transparent way, based on trust and co-operation.	Agreed. Regular meetings between Executive Members/Scrutiny Chairs and CLT to "horizon scan" and discuss effectiveness of Scrutiny.	Quarterly
5	<b>Scrutiny avoids the main focus on updates and presentations.</b> The task of providing Scrutiny members with the essential core knowledge to be sufficiently effective in the scrutiny task could be developed as briefings or 'master classes' where the topic is complex. Lengthy learning exercises can squeeze scrutiny capacity.	Agreed. Training programme for Scrutiny Members in place and "one off" briefings on key issues.	Ongoing
6	<b>Resist scrutiny being a source of political point-scoring.</b> Intentionally	Agreed. Planned training for Scrutiny	Ongoing

	targeting scrutiny as a forum to gain a media headline is a disruptive and diluting activity. This does not prevent disagreement or different perspectives being debated.	Chairs to control meetings more effectively.	
7	<b>Develop regular communication and information sharing so that Scrutiny can be a resource to inform (often improve) Executive decision making.</b> This could be achieved through holding triangulation meetings between scrutiny chairs, Executive members, and relevant Directors to consider future issues and the part which Scrutiny could play in testing and shaping these forward plans. It would also present an opportunity to share and discuss opportunities to involve Scrutiny as an improvement asset.	Agreed. As discussed in 4 above. Regular discussion on topics, timing, training and team (i.e. ensuring that the right people are in the room when issues are considered)	Quarterly
8	<b>Work planning to be a committee-based responsibility</b> – review the need for a Co-ordinating committee to oversee this.	Agreed. O&S Management Committee sets annual work programme. Each O&S Committee then reviews its own programme.	Annual work programming process starts in January each year
9	<b>Review the process for developing work plans for each Scrutiny committee</b> - Engaging members, officers, partners, and the public to prioritise the topics for review.	Agreed. As part of annual work programming process.	Next iteration commences in January 2023
10	<b>Build on the current approach to financial Scrutiny, MTFs/ budget scrutiny.</b> We have produced guidance on financial scrutiny with CIPFA <sup>1</sup> , setting out scrutiny activity to complement Councils' annual financial cycle. The guide suggests ways to move budget and finance scrutiny beyond set-piece scrutiny 'events and quarterly financial performance scorecards being reported to committee.	Agreed. Community & Corporate O&S Committee reviews Budget development each year. Training provided for all Members on Budget Scrutiny. CIPFA guide shared with Members.	Ongoing
11	<b>Set clear priorities for Children's, Adult Social Care and Health scrutiny</b> as areas where scrutiny must be fully engaged and properly focused. (Especially LAC,	Agreed. These issues are scrutinised by Children's Services O&S and HOSC.	Ongoing



	Safeguarding, SEND, changes to health and social care [with potentially large cost implications], and others.		
12	<b>Review the need for the O&amp;S Management Committee.</b> Or consider its purpose and its role within the overall scrutiny structure,	O&S Management Committee has the oversight role and has its own extensive work programme. It also carries out the Call-In function. Its role is clearly established in the overall scrutiny structure.	Ongoing
13	<b>Consider extending the use of task and finish group work – or alternative scrutiny arrangements –</b> To ensure the most effective use of time and resources and to deliver maximum impact.	Agreed. Task & Finish Groups have operated successfully. Current Groups scrutinising Corporate Performance and Preferred Registered Providers.	Ongoing
14	<b>Change the way that information is provided to Scrutiny members for oversight</b> - Reduce the number of items coming to Scrutiny solely for information and consider how information on the following matters could be shared with councillors, outside of committee.	Agreed. More effective briefings and pre-meeting work to ensure effective meetings and alternative methods of information sharing.	Ongoing
15	<b>Review how reports and information is supplied to scrutiny</b> – so that it supports the scrutiny objective, is not excessively detailed and is understandable by members.	Agreed. See 14 above.	Ongoing
16	<b>Review how the recommendations are made and how impact is measured</b> – This could include putting a ‘recommendations monitoring report’ at the beginning of agendas to orientate Scrutiny towards outcomes-focused meetings, alongside an emphasis on finding strong recommendations from questioning, to present to the Executive as improvement or challenge proposals.	Agreed. Implement a more effective “feedback loop” following O&S recommendations to the Executive. Annual O&S report to Council outlines key issues scrutinised and the impact on residents. Scrutiny must be able to demonstrate “added value” to the organisation, especially in the current financial climate.	Ongoing

17	<b>More skills development support is offered for the key roles of Chair and Vice-Chair</b> – To provide them with the confidence they need in leading the scrutiny function.	Agreed. 1 to 2 training pilot being implemented for Chair and Vice-Chair of the O&S Management Committee – using the Centre for Governance & Scrutiny experts.	December 2022
18	<b>Consider further Scrutiny development and training for all committee members</b> - To develop a common understanding of what “good” Scrutiny practice looks like.	Agreed. Member training programme being implemented – including: introduction to Scrutiny; Budget Scrutiny; HOSC; Children’s Services; Chairing and Questioning skills.	Ongoing
19	<b>Providing additional briefing or expert involvement as required</b> - To assist Scrutiny members in becoming more capable to develop questioning strategies that will deliver high-impact and value-adding Scrutiny.	Agreed. Expert witnesses have attended Task & Finish Group meetings. Co-opted members on Children’s Services O&S Committee.	Ongoing
20	<b>Cross-party pre-meetings for Scrutiny committees could be established</b> - with a specific focus on identifying priorities and members working together to develop lines of enquiry so that recommendations are more likely.	Agreed. These cross-party meetings have been successful in the past – look to re-establish for each O&S Committee.	January 2023

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Council Motions</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on 16 November 2022
<b>WARD</b>	None Specific
<b>DIRECTOR</b>	Graham Ebers, Deputy Chief Executive

## **OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY**

Motions debated at full Council meetings are an important part of the democratic process. It is important that agreed Motions are fully implemented and that residents and Members are appraised of progress and outcomes for residents.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The Committee is requested to:

- 1) scrutinise progress against the Council Motions, as set out in Annex A;
- 2) note that an annual feedback report on Motions will be submitted to the Committee in November each year;
- 3) consider any further ideas to improve the current process for implementing and reporting back on Council Motions.

## **SUMMARY OF REPORT**

Members are entitled to submit Motions to Council meetings in line with Section 4 of the Constitution. Motions on Notice must relate to matters for which the Council has responsibility or which affect the Borough. Members are also able to move Motions without Notice at the meeting on procedural issues.

Motions agreed by the Council are submitted to the relevant department for implementation. Until now, there has been no “feedback loop” process whereby Members and residents are appraised of the implementation of Motions and any outcomes for the Borough.

Appended to the report (Annex A) is a list of Motions approved by the Council over the past three years (2019-22). Annex B sets out the full wording of each of the approved Motions.

Members are invited to consider progress against the Motions and to consider any ideas for improving the process for reporting to Members and residents.

## Background

Members are entitled to submit Motions to Council meetings and to raise procedural Motions at the meetings in line with Section 4 of the Constitution.

Motions with Notice – a Member may submit a Motion (a formal proposal suggesting a particular course of action) providing it is submitted seven working days before the meeting. These Motions are listed on the Council Agenda in the order they are received. Once a Motion is moved and seconded at the meeting it may be the subject of amendment. If an amendment is carried, the substantive Motion is then put to the vote.

Motions agreed by the Council are submitted to the relevant department for implementation. Until now, there has been no “feedback loop” process whereby Members and residents are appraised of the implementation of Motions and any outcomes for the Council and the Borough.

Appended to the report (Annex A) is a list of Motions approved by the Council over the past three years for discussion and comment. Annex B sets out the full wording for each of the Motions.

Any additional updates on progress will be reported at the O&S meeting.

Looking forwards, an annual update report on Motions will be submitted to the November meeting of the Committee each year, setting out the Motions agreed by Council in the previous year together with details of implementation by officers and any issues arising.

Members may have other ideas for consideration in relation to developing the feedback loop referred to in the report.

Details of the approved Motions are set out on the Council’s website.

## 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 focussed 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	NA	NA
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	0	NA	NA
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	0	NA	NA

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision
None

**Cross-Council Implications**

Effective Overview and Scrutiny helps to drive service improvement, policy development and the achievement of value for money for the Borough's residents. Implementation of agreed Motions is an important aspect of the decision-making process.

**Public Sector Equality Duty**

Due regard has been given to Council's Public Sector Equality Duty. A number of the submitted Motions aimed to achieve better/fairer outcomes and increased value for money for residents.

**Climate Emergency – The 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**

A number of the approved Motions had positive implications for carbon reduction and improved health outcomes for residents.

**List of Background Papers**

Report to O&S Management Committee – March 2022

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**Date** 7 November 2022

**Version No.** 1.0

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## COUNCIL MOTIONS – 2019/22

Submitted by and date		Council Date	Motion	Progress
S Kerr	5.19	18.7.19	Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) of the Equalities Act 2010	Equality Impact Assessments included in key decision reports. Training for newly elected Members as part of the post-election induction. Training session on equalities is being developed for Members in 2022 as part of the Member Training Programme
J Halsall	5.19	18.7.19	Climate Emergency Declaration	Climate Emergency Action Plan in place and reported annually to the O&S Management Committee and Council
W Smith	5.19	18.7.19	Housing Needs – Council opposes any housing need calculation above demographic growth	Ongoing lobbying of the Government over the Borough’s housing numbers
K Baker	5.19	18.7.19	Anti-Semitic Sentiments	Ongoing – the Motion stated: “Council abhors any attack on individual groups, including our Jewish residents, and commits to lend support to anyone attempting to drive out such anti-Semitic views...”
P Fishwick	7.19	19.9.19	Introduction of Low Emissions Transport Strategy	The Low Emission Transport Strategy is under development. Officers are expecting to have a final draft ready for discussion in May 2022 which will then go through the decision making process before formal adoption.
C Jones	7.20	23.07.20	Political leadership to challenge Government targets for increased housing in the Borough	Ongoing lobbying of the Government over the Borough’s housing numbers

Submitted by and date		Council Date	Motion	Progress
G Murray	7.20	23.07.20	Single use plastics are eliminated from all Council operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilities removed all disposable cups from vending machines in Shute End apart from the machine on the ground floor public area – however, the paper cups provided are recyclable. All kitchens have a supply of washable cups for staff to use which fit the vending machines. Re-usable plastic glasses are provided for water in large meetings in Council Chamber/David Hicks Rooms</li> <li>The Council is currently delivering Let's Talk Climate, engaging with businesses, community groups, school children and residents to share advice, ideas, and best practice on building a sustainable community. One of the key areas of this project is waste and recycling.</li> <li>The Council's Green Team is continually working on increasing awareness among Council staff with campaigns including signposting on Shute End drinks machines in all staff areas to increase staff awareness about single-use plastics and encourage the use of reusable tableware for lunch. Other campaigns such as Christmas-free plastic have been delivered over the last year.</li> <li>A Climate Pledge campaign was launched at the beginning of 2022, to engage residents and inspire them to make small changes. A key topic of the pledge includes helping to reduce plastic in our community.</li> <li>Through collaboration with school catering contractor Caterlink, significant progress was made with the removal of cling film, plastic cups, straws, bottles and the introduction of reusable plastic pots and containers and fully recyclable package materials from 34 local authority schools in the Borough.</li> </ul>
S Kerr	2.20	23.07.20	Air pollution reduction – including increased monitoring, vehicle idling and active travel	Actions set out in the Climate Emergency Action Plan – reported annually to the O&S Management Committee and Council.
I Pittock	7.19	23.07.20	Expansion of Heathrow Airport	That this Council does not support the expansion of any airport unless it can be proven to be carbon neutral.
R Burgess	7.20	17.09.20	This Council will adopt the	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Council Tax Protocol adopted in line with the Motion.</li> </ul>



Submitted by and date		Council Date	Motion	Progress
			Council Tax protocol agreed by Citizens Advice and the LGA during municipal year 2020/21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with enforcement agencies and Citizens Advice to help people pay Council Tax bills while accessing debt advice - each case is treated on its own merits before any action is taken.</li> <li>• All communication with residents about Council Tax will be clear - the Council is working corporately with First Word to review letters.</li> <li>• Consider using the Standard Financial Statement when calculating repayment plans - when setting up payment plans an Income and Expenditure form is used to assess a customer's eligibility to pay.</li> <li>• Flexible payment arrangements will be offered to residents - they are offered depending on the individual's circumstances.</li> <li>• Where resident receives Council Tax support, WBC will consider matters carefully, including refraining from using enforcement agents - each case is treated on its own merits before any action is taken.</li> <li>• WBC will publish policy on residents in vulnerable circumstances. The full protocol can be found here: <a href="#">Citizens Advice Council Tax Protocol 2017.pdf</a> - we do not have a bespoke policy on residents in vulnerable circumstances per se - we have many policies that already cover this sensitive area.</li> </ul>
R Bishop-Firth	2.20	17.09.20	Publish a review of the how the Council can best mitigate the effects of Brexit on local EU-National residents	<p>An officer working group was established to consider this matter. Officers promoted settled status via news releases, social media and inclusion in the residents' newsletter. Communications stated that WBC offered assistance to residents who required additional help applying for UK immigration status through the EU Settlement Scheme. The majority of applicants should have been able to use the EU Exit: ID Document app to complete the ID verification stage of the <a href="#">EU Settlement Scheme application</a> using their smart phone, without any further assistance. Individuals who might require extra support with ID verification were advised to book a one-to-one appointment at the Borough Council's Register office.</p> <p>For businesses WBC's role was primarily signposting to business advice services – key being the Growth Hub, but also the Chamber of Commerce to pick up on Brexit related issues (importing, exporting and labour market where relevant). Officers have no evidence of significant impact of British citizens returning to the UK.</p>

Submitted by and date		Council Date	Motion	Progress
P Helliars-Symons	2.20	17.09.20	Sprinkler policy centred on WBC schools	<p>Letter sent to the Government in line with the Motion. The letter stated: "Since 2012, we have been installing sprinkler systems in all new schools which is over and above the requirement legislated through the Building Regulations process. This now improved approach raises the bar again and states, as a default position, that we will install sprinklers to our wider buildings and major refurbishment programme. We are driven to this approach in our attempts to not only improve the life safety of the building occupiers but also in an attempt to protect the assets themselves. Not only do we believe that this is a cost-effective measure, but it also reflects the negative social and disruptive impact a loss of a building (especially a school) would have on residents".</p> <p>WBC have installed an AFSS (Automatic Fire Suppression System) in all WBC funded and delivered schemes instigated since the adaptation of the Motion in line with the criteria as set out in the Motion. Examples are: Bulmershe Leisure Centre, Carnival Pool Leisure Centre, Aborfield Primary School, Matthews Green Primary School and several other sites.</p>
I Shenton	9.21	18.11.21	Declaration of an Ecological Emergency	Referred to Tree Protection & Biodiversity Task & Finish Group to examine the benefits of formally declaring an ecological emergency and the actions set out in the Motion. The Task and Finish Group report and recommendations will be considered by Council at the end of 2022.
G Murray	9.21	18.11.21	Tree Cities of the World status	Application for Tree Cities of the World status to be submitted following completion of the eight actions set out in the Motion
D Hare	10.21	18.11.21	White Ribbon UK Accreditation	<p>Referred to Equalities Working Group and then considered at January 2022 Council meeting. Council resolved that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Council explore how it can improve communications to residents on what it is doing to support domestic violence victims;</li> <li>2) Council Officers explore whether there is a more comprehensive accreditation to certify at which level the Council is performing when it comes to domestic violence provision and provide a report on their findings to a meeting of the Executive;</li> <li>3) the Leader of the Council write to the Home Secretary in support of making public sexual harassment a specific offence and impress the need for wider cultural change, and write to the four MPs that cover Wokingham</li> </ol>

Submitted by and date		Council Date	Motion	Progress
				4) Borough and the PCC to encourage them to also support this; the Executive Member for Children's Services write to local schools on how they are upholding the Department for Education's September 2021 "Keeping Children Safe in Education" policy on public sexual harassment.
R Burgess	25.03.22	21.07.22	Local Welfare Provision Scheme – more effective delivery and signposting	
A Mather	25.03.22	21.07.22	The Local Electricity Bill – promoting local community energy schemes	
C Margetts	30.06.22	21.07.22	Alternatives to car travel – improving journey times from Wokingham Borough stations to London Waterloo	
G Cowan	11.07.22	21.07.22	Banning the use of live animals for prizes on WBC land + lobbying the Government for an outright ban	
L Blumenthal	12.10.22	20.10.22	Leave policy for Members who become parents	
Rachel Bishop-Firth	12.10.22	20.10.22	Declaration of a Cost of Living Crisis in the Borough – working with the Hardship Alliance to support residents	

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## Motions Agreed by Council – 2019/21 – Full Wording

### Motion 416 by Sarah Kerr:

**RESOLVED:** That Local Authorities have a statutory requirement to demonstrate their compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) of the Equalities Act 2010. This Act requires Local Authorities to consider how their work affects people of different ages, disability, sex, sexual orientation, religion or beliefs, marital status, pregnancy and maternity and gender identity. Everyone that lives in, works and visits Wokingham Borough needs to have confidence that this is being done throughout the Borough. This Council will evidence its compliance with the PSED through undertaking Equality Impact Assessments (EqIA's) when required, and ensure they are included in public reports and are easily accessible on the Council's website. In addition, all newly elected Members will have PSED and EqIA training as part of their induction. Executive Members will also have to undertake PSED and EqIA training.

69

### Motion 417 by John Halsall:

**RESOLVED:** That Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) believes the world is now in a climate emergency. More concerted and urgent action is needed at local, national and international level to protect our planet for future generations. As such, this Council commits 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 Executive Member for Climate Change will set up a cross-party working group on the climate crisis to investigate and propose further recommendations to help achieve a carbon neutral Borough, reporting back within six months. The working group will invite, consult and involve as wide a participation from our local community as possible, in order to create a broad consensus of how we contribute to the fight against the climate crisis.

### Motion 418 by Wayne Smith:

**RESOLVED:** That Wokingham Borough Council understands and supports the need to provide homes, as it does the Government's desire to speed up delivery. That is why we are a proactive planning authority, seeking to shape future development through a carefully managed approach, which is enabling the delivery of sustainable, infrastructure rich new communities, including schools, new strategic roads, neighbourhood centres, sports hubs and improved public transport, in addition to 35% affordable housing. Since 2006, over 8,200 new homes have been provided and outstanding planning permissions are in place to deliver a further 7,000 new homes.

In addition, current allocations will deliver a further 2,300 new homes. Looking at future delivery from now: our housing permissions, allocations and windfalls are capable of delivering 10,700 homes between 2019 and 2036 (equates to an average of 630pa). This compares with the projected demographic growth of new households of 555pa calculated by the 2014-based ONS projections used by the standard method for calculating local housing need (despite more recent ONS figures in the 2016-based ONS projections demonstrating that this figure is an overestimate; the real growth is more likely to be around 486pa). The standard method for calculating local housing need is designed to require more homes to be built above that required by demographic growth, which is flawed for Wokingham Borough. Building more homes drives up house prices rather than lowering it because of the 20-30% premium on the cost of new homes. Developers will not build housing for sale at lower prices. Also the focus on workplace earnings fails to recognise that residents travel out of the borough to high value, well paid jobs, and that flexible working with work registered out of the borough, where in reality work is undertaken locally, often at home. The real and necessary response would be to allow us to focus on affordable housing and self-build products, both of which directly help our residents. The Council oppose any housing need calculation over and above the demographic growth by whatever means the Executive has at its disposal and agrees to ensure that what is actually built meets the needs of residents.

**Motion 418 by Keith Baker:**

**RESOLVED:** That recently a major political party has been embroiled in a large number of allegations of statements and speeches which express serious anti-Semitic sentiments. Up until now this had not really emerged locally but recent local newspaper reports have suggested that this area is not immune. Get Reading reported on 22nd May that “Reading Labour scraps anti-Semitism training session because of a pro-Palestinian speaker.” This was followed up by an article in the Jewish Chronicle on the same day, 22nd May expanding this same story. Nationally the Equality and Human Rights Commission have now opened an investigation into the Labour Party following complaints about anti-Semitism. On 28th May they posted “The Equality and Human Rights Commission is today launching a formal investigation to determine whether The Labour Party has unlawfully discriminated against, harassed or victimised people because they are Jewish.” I do not envy the Reading Labour Party or any other political party as they wrestle with how to deal with these matters and I wish them well in dealing with anyone who has expressed anti-Semitic views. I hope all Councillors will put party politics aside and support this motion: This Council abhors any attack on individual groups, including our Jewish residents and commits to lend support to anyone attempting to drive out such anti-Semitic views from our local political scene regardless of any political allegiance.

### **Motion 420 by Paul Fishwick:**

**RESOLVED:** National statistics indicate that emissions from transport continue to grow - increasing by four percent overall since 1990, including by six percent since 2013. Road transport is the primary source of this increase. Whereas vehicles have become more fuel efficient this has been offset by increased travel demand. These emissions are a key pollutant to the air that we breathe, causing major environmental and health issues. The negative impacts on the environment include the direct effects of pollutants on vegetation, and indirect effects on the acid and nutrients status of soils and ground and surface water. In terms of health, in 2016 a landmark report published by the Royal College of Physicians and the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health suggested that ‘...every year in the UK, outdoor pollution is linked to around 40,000 deaths’ ... and that ‘...air pollution can have a damaging effect from when a baby is in the womb and continue throughout life to older age, playing a role in many chronic conditions such as cancer, asthma, heart diseases and neurological changes linked to dementia’. This report concluded that "Real change will only occur when everyone accepts this responsibility and makes a concerted effort."

71 As the Highway Authority, Wokingham Borough Council has a specific duty to bring forward measures to improve air quality. Wokingham Borough Council has three declared Air Quality Management Areas but tackling the overall poor air quality across our Borough is the key objective. There are significant opportunities for sustainable transport options to simultaneously support clean economic growth, increase physical activity, and reduce emissions contributing to local air pollution.

This Council commits to introduce a Strategy to lower transport emissions that will sit under the Local Transport Plan and will include clearly stated objectives, SMART targets, strategies and tactics”.

### **Motion 432 by Clive Jones:**

**RESOLVED:** That this Council wants the political leadership to more than redouble their efforts to challenge the housing numbers which are being inflicted on this Borough by central Government which we consider do not meet our local needs. Since the beginning of the year, our lives have changed considerably and local circumstances are now very different to what they were in January and February. We would therefore like to again and again invite Ministers and senior Civil Servants from MHCLG to come to Wokingham to see for themselves the beautiful semi-rural nature of our Borough. We would like them to meet local residents, Borough Councillors from all political groups, Town and Parish Councillors from all parts of the Borough including Remenham to Swallowfield and everywhere in between; so they can understand for themselves the strength of feeling that residents have about the high housing numbers that have been forced on us by successive past and current Governments.

### **Motion 433 by Gregor Murray:**

**RESOLVED:** That at its meeting on July 18th 2019 the full Council voted unanimously to declare a Climate Emergency across Wokingham Borough and to commit itself to being carbon neutral by 2030. In order to achieve this crucial aim, and to live up to our environmental responsibilities we understand that it is essential we take steps to immediately reduce the amount of carbon we either directly or indirectly use each year. It is clear that no responsible Council can take action on climate change without seeking to drastically reduce the amount of single use plastics consumed by both its residents and by the Council in its every day operations. In face of the overwhelming evidence about the impact that single use plastics have on our lives, climate, seas, rivers and broader environments, Wokingham Borough Council commits to ensuring that – wherever possible – single use plastics are eliminated from use within the Council, and all Council controlled environments, as soon as possible. This would be achieved by:

- Phasing out the purchase of single-use plastic products through services commissioned by the Council where possible and as soon as practicable.
- Bringing regular reports to future committee meetings, describing the Council's plans to eliminate single-use plastic from the organisation, including a timetable for doing so.
- Working with Wokingham's businesses, community groups and residents to share advice, ideas and best practice on using sustainable alternatives
- Working with schools to support the aspiration of Wokingham's young people to eliminate plastic waste from our environment.
- Seeking to work with neighbouring Councils to tackle single use plastic use across the wider Berkshire area.
- Sign-posting on all Council buildings and properties to forbid the bringing of single use plastics onto the property.
- Sign-posting on all Council buildings and properties once it has become single use plastic free.'

### **Motion 434 by Sarah Kerr:**

**RESOLVED:** That this Council notes that:

- Air pollution poses a serious threat to the health of everyone and in particular the development of young people. Epidemiological studies show that symptoms of bronchitis in asthmatic children increase in association with long-term exposure to pollutants, as well as stunting lung growth.
- Our residents and visitors are exposed to unsafe levels of pollutants, particularly outside of schools at peak times in the morning and afternoon, next to taxi ranks, at level crossings and along our major roads.



- Road transport is one of the biggest contributors to particulate matter and pollution in Wokingham Borough.
- While many of the policy interventions to rectify this problem would have to come from central Government, this Council can do more and needs to be proactive on this issue.
- Only a handful of areas across the country are trialling “No Vehicle Idling zones” yet they bring many health benefits, and could be introduced around the borough, particularly outside schools, taxi ranks and at level crossings.
- It is important to provide our residents and visitors with healthier and less polluting alternatives to move about the borough, and in particular, parents taking their children to school.

Therefore, the Council should invest more in walking and cycling. This Council resolves to:

- Monitor the level of particulate matter 2.5 across the Borough.
- Continue to review the work done on No-Vehicle-Idling nationally in other local authorities and continue with the Action Plan for No-Vehicle-Idling zones covering the Wokingham Borough Council area with a view to implementing No-Vehicle Idling zones, around as many schools in the Borough as possible, by the end of 2022, and in other identified areas such as taxi ranks and close to level crossings.
- Continue to encourage local businesses to sponsor green walls and tree planting and the Executive Member for Environment includes this in his action plan.
- Continue to increase spending on active travel in future budgets, especially safe cycle lanes.
- Produce a strategy for implementing a car club scheme across the Borough.’

### **Motion 439 by Rachel Burgess**

**RESOLVED:** That this Council will adopt the Council Tax Protocol agreed by Citizens Advice and the Local Government Association (June 2017) during the municipal year 2020/21. This protocol includes, inter alia:

- Wokingham Borough Council will work with enforcement agencies and Citizens Advice to help people pay their council tax bills while accessing debt advice.
- All communication with residents about council tax will be clear.
- Wokingham Borough Council will consider using the Standard Financial Statement when calculating repayment plans.
- Flexible payment arrangements will be offered to residents.

- Where a resident receives Council Tax support, Wokingham Borough Council will consider matters carefully, including refraining from using enforcement agents.
- Wokingham Borough Council will publish their policy on residents in vulnerable circumstances. The full protocol can be found here: [Citizens Advice Council Tax Protocol 2017.pdf](#)

**Motion 440 by Rachel Bishop-Firth:**

**RESOLVED:** That EU nationals are our family members, parents, friends and colleagues. They care for our elderly and they teach our children. They are an integral part of a vibrant and thriving Wokingham. In the Referendum campaign, we were promised that "there will be no change for EU citizens already lawfully resident in the UK and [they] ...will be treated no less favourably than they are at present". This promise has not been honoured. Many EU27 citizens are unaware that if Brexit goes ahead, they risk deportation from their homes of many years unless they are granted settled status. Home Office figures show that many EU nationals have not applied for Settled Status, or have applied but have been refused. We don't know how many Wokingham residents, perhaps elderly or vulnerable people, are unaware that they may become illegal immigrants. We risk a Windrush-style scandal here in Wokingham, with families broken up. We also need to think of the 1.3 million British citizens who have made their homes in other EU countries, who may be forced to return to the UK, particularly if Brexit means they lose their access to healthcare. Many of these people are elderly, and many have made their homes overseas because of difficulties making ends meet on their pensions. How many will come to Wokingham, needing assistance with social housing and other support?

Therefore, the Council asks that Officers urgently undertake a review of the effects of Brexit on local residents and publicise what we intend to do and what mitigations we have already implemented including:

- a) How we promote and assist with applications for settled status particularly for residents who face language or technology barriers.
- b) What we provide to help landlords and employers to be trained on immigration status, to avoid potential discrimination against EU27 nationals.
- c) How Brexit is likely to affect EU27 nationals accessing services provided by the Council, and steps that we can take to mitigate difficulties.
- d) The likely impact on Wokingham of British citizens returning to the UK and how we can best prepare for this.

### **Motion 441 by Pauline Helliar-Symons:**

**RESOLVED:** That on 22nd November 2018, this Council adopted a Sprinkler Policy centred on our schools. After work by Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service, the Fire Authority's Management Committee on 22nd July 2019 adopted a wider policy which they proposed be considered by each of the Berkshire Unitaries. This goes further to support promotion of Sprinklers in their Council areas and to put pressure on Central Government to legislate on Sprinklers, following the successful introduction of legal powers in Wales. To be specific it is proposed: That Wokingham Borough Council supports the proposals of the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority to extend the promotion of Sprinklers and to lobby central government to bring in legislation or regulations which make installations a necessary part of new builds and major refurbishments in the categories identified. The policy agreed by the Council on 22nd November 2018 regarding schools remains, but additionally: Wokingham Borough Council:

- 75
- a) Recognises that Sprinklers and other Automatic Fire Suppression Systems (AFSS) save lives, protect property, reduce the impact of fire on the environment, reduce interruption to business and improve safety for individuals the community in general and firefighters, especially in the case of schools.
  - b) Commits to installation of sprinklers or other AFSS within its own building stock when planning for and constructing new buildings or as a retrofitted solution when undertaking major refurbishments of existing buildings where the extent of the refurbishment makes the fitting of sprinklers viable.
  - c) Through the planning application or building control process, promote and support the installation of sprinklers or other AFSS for all new or refurbished buildings and particularly those that present the most significant risk to the public and firefighters.
  - d) Supports the National Fire Chiefs Council position on sprinklers and will write to Central Government to express support for the creation of a legal requirement to fit sprinklers or AFSS in buildings.

### **Motion 467 by Ian Shenton:**

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

1. Address ecological issues alongside climate emergency actions and ensure that opportunities to gain co-benefits from addressing both the climate and ecological emergencies are maximised.

2. Add ecological implications alongside those for climate in committee and Council reports.
3. Ensure the delivery of biodiversity and environmental enhancements through our planning policy and development control functions by providing guidance through a biodiversity supplementary planning document.
4. Strive to enable the development of a 20% mandatory biodiversity net gain policy for Wokingham through the new local plan.
5. Create a Developing Nature Toolkit and direct developers to use the toolkit to assist them in demonstrating a net gain in biodiversity, to be used from the very outset of planning new developments, and ideally at the time of selecting sites to acquire for development.
6. Re-establish the Wokingham Biodiversity Forum to allow the Council to collaborate effectively with partners and the wider community.
7. Where possible, embed ecological initiatives within all Council work areas, including Covid-19 recovery projects and programmes.
8. Promote woodland planting and rewilding in the right places and with the right species, peatland restoration, natural flood management, wild flower meadows, and habitat creation and restoration.
9. Work with local, county, regional and national partners to increase wildlife habitats, green infrastructure and natural capital in Wokingham Borough ensuring robust connectivity between them.
10. Manage Council services, buildings and land in a biodiversity-friendly manner, including by reviewing the use of harmful chemicals, such as pesticides and taking opportunities to create new wildlife habitats and corridors.
11. Provide advice for local communities and businesses on how to incorporate biodiversity, green infrastructure and natural capital into Neighbourhood Plans and other initiatives.
12. Encourage residents to take biodiversity measures in their own homes by, for example, wildlife gardening and home composting.
13. Working collaboratively with the Berkshire Local Nature Partnership, Wokingham Biodiversity Forum, a cross party working group and other stakeholders, produce a local nature recovery strategy and associated action plan with an annual progress report to full Council.

**Motion 468 by Gregor Murray:**

**RESOLVED:** That building on our commitment to planting 250,000 new trees, this Council commits to achieving 'Tree Cities of the World' status for our Borough as part of the creation of a Borough wide Tree Strategy. This will be done by:

1. Maintaining clear responsibility within the Council for the care of trees across our Borough.
2. Agreeing a policy for the care and management of our forests and trees across the Borough. This must include standards for tree care, where and when they apply and penalties for non-compliance.

3. Working with external partners to create and maintain an inventory of the local tree resource so that effective long-term planning for planting, care and removal can be established.
4. Setting aside an annual budget for the implementation of the tree management strategy and management plan.
5. Holding an annual celebration of our Borough's trees and acknowledge the residents schools, charities and Council staff that contribute to our city tree programme.
6. Creating a 'Garden Forest' program to allow residents the opportunity to plant some of our 250,000 new tree commitment in their own gardens.
7. Developing a continuous education process aimed at informing residents of the importance of trees, tree planting and tree protection and how best to care for the trees in their own gardens and communities.
8. Committing to planting a Covid-19 memorial wood within the Borough, of native trees, as a long-lasting memorial to those who have lost their lives during the 2020-21 Pandemic.

77 Once the above conditions are met an application for Tree Cities of the World status should be made as soon as possible. Further information on the Tree Cities of the World status and benefits can be found at [www.treecitiesoftheworld.org](http://www.treecitiesoftheworld.org).

#### **Motion 469 by David Hare:**

**RESOLVED:** That White Ribbon UK is a leading charity engaging with men and boys to end violence against women and girls. Their mission is for all men to fulfil the White Ribbon Promise to never commit, excuse or remain silent about male violence against women and girls. It is not enough for men to not be violent towards women and girls. Men need to take responsibility for helping to make change happen. All men can help prevent physical, mental, or emotional violence against women and girls by speaking out whenever they encounter such behaviour. If men do not act to correct this, women and girls will continue not feeling safe to do many of the things men do without thinking, making us a morally corrupt and emotional poor society, as we trivialise the sickness that is any type of violence against women and girls.

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

- Seek White Ribbon Accreditation for the Organisation within the next 6 months and encourage all male councillors to take the White Ribbon pledge, never to take part in, condone or stay silent about violence against women. As part of this Wokingham Borough Council will appoint a male Councillor as an Ambassador for White Ribbon.

- Promote the Our Streets Now campaign to make street harassment of women a crime; ask the Chief Executive to write to the Home Secretary to ask them to make street harassment a specific crime; ask the Chief Executive to write to the four MPs who cover the Borough, as well as the Police and Crime Commissioner, to ask them to show their support for this campaign by signing the petition and by lobbying ministers to make street harassment a specific crime and encourage elected members and residents to sign the petition.
- Ask schools, academies and colleges in the Borough to each develop a clear policy on tackling physical, mental, emotional or spiritual harassment of female pupils or staff, separate to their bullying policy and ask them to include education to prevent public sexual harassment, as part of their PSHE education.

**Motion 480 by Rachel Burgess:**

**RESOLVED** That:

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

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

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

Wokingham Borough Council will:

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

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

**Motion 482 by Adrian Mather:**

**RESOLVED** That:

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

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

Community schemes encourage local generation and storage to match local demand thus relieving pressure on the grid. Local schemes would be given new impetus and be able to contribute more renewable energy if local people could buy their electricity directly from local suppliers.

79 But the disproportionate cost of meeting regulatory approvals makes it impossible to be a local energy supplier at a local scale and so, under the current system, this local energy gets sold back to the central grid.

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

Council Agrees to:

Resolve to support the Bill.

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

### **Motion 484 by Charles Margetts:**

#### **RESOLVED** That:


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

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

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

### **Motion 485 by Gary Cowan**

#### **RESOLVED** That:

 Wokingham Borough Council:

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

The Council agrees to:

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

### **Motion 489 by Laura Blumenthal:**

#### **RESOLVED** That:



At present, a Member taking leave to look after their new-born or newly adopted child could find themselves in breach of s85(1), Local Government Act 1972 (“if a member of a Local Authority fails, throughout a period of six consecutive months from the date of their last attendance, to attend any meeting of the Authority they will, unless the failure was due to some good reason approved by the Authority before the expiry of that period, cease to be a member of the Authority”).

It is therefore proposed that this Council agrees the following Motion with the intention of introducing a Leave Policy for Members who become parents. This Council therefore resolves that: The Assistant Director of Governance be commissioned to work with the Head of Legal and the Assistant Director of Human Resources, to draft a Leave Policy for Members who become parents, taking into account guidance issued by the LGA, for approval by Council at the earliest opportunity.

### **Motion 490 by Rachel Bishop-Firth:**

#### **RESOLVED That:**

Many Wokingham residents are facing severe and increasing financial hardship.

By September 2022:

- The cost of living was rising by 9.9% with some forecasts as high as 18.6% in the new year, while rises in pay and benefits fell far short of this.
- Typical household energy bills were expected to be over £2,500 a year.
- Interest rates had reached a 20 year high, putting added pressure on rents and mortgages.
- The removal of the temporary £20 a week uplift in universal credit had substantially reduced the income of those living on the lowest incomes.
- For many Wokingham residents, price increases will be a real concern. For residents on the lowest incomes who were already struggling to heat their homes and feed their families, they're a disaster. Many of these residents cannot increase their income through work, for example because they have full time caring responsibilities or are incapacitated.

Use of foodbanks was soaring even before the latest financial turmoil. Wokingham Foodbank distributed 4,811 crisis food parcels between April 2021 and March 2022, which was a 78% increase on the previous financial year.

Voluntary and community organisations are seeing a steep increase in residents approaching them for help over the course of this year, and they are already deeply concerned. They are seeing increased numbers of people who were previously coping financially but are now struggling.

Responding to this crisis adequately will take community-wide action and central government backing of the kind that we saw during the Covid crisis, at a time that council finances are also under enormous pressure because of inflation.

Wokingham Borough Council therefore declares a Cost of Living Crisis in the borough, and commits to doing all that we can to support our residents during this very difficult time. We commit that this will be one of the council's main priorities during the coming winter, and will work with the Hardship Alliance and the Hardship Alliance Action Group to support our residents.

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Officer response to the Recommendations from the Tree Protection and Biodiversity Task &amp; Finish Group</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on 16 November 2022
<b>WARD</b>	None Specific
<b>LEAD OFFICER</b>	Neil Carr, Scrutiny Officer

## **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

The report sets out the officer response to the recommendations made by the Tree Protection & Biodiversity Task & Finish Group.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

That the Committee note the officer response and consider any further action arising out of the Task & Finish Group's report.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Tree Protection & Biodiversity Task & Finish Group was established by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and met for the first time in August 2021. The Group agreed Terms of Reference including scrutiny of the Council's current policies and plans relating to Tree Protection and Biodiversity, the impact of the Environment Act 2021 and the emerging WBC Tree Strategy. The Group also carried out a case study relating to the loss of approximately 450 mature trees at Bearwood Lake.

The report and recommendations of the Task & Finish Group were presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on 17 March 2022. The Committee resolved that the Task and Finish Group's 13 recommendations to the Executive, as amended, should be approved.

In line with the Council's Constitution, the Task & Finish Group recommendations were then submitted to the Executive on 27 October 2022, together with officer comments. Overall, the recommendations were largely accepted by officers subject to a few cases where Officers explained their reasoning. The Executive resolved to accept the officer responses.

Members are also reminded that the Task & Finish Group was asked to consider a Council Motion on the pros and cons of declaring an Ecological Emergency. The Task & Finish Group's response to the Motion will be considered by full Council shortly.

## BACKGROUND

1.1 The Tree Protection and Biodiversity Task and Finish Group (the Group) was established by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and met for the first time in August 2021. The Group comprised Councillors Chris Bowring (Chairman), Michael Firmager (Vice-Chairman), Gary Cowan, Paul Fishwick and Jackie Rance. The Group agreed the following Terms of Reference:

- To scrutinise the Council's current policies and plans relating to tree protection and biodiversity in relation to the Council's statutory powers and duties, including the implications of the Government's Environment Bill (now the Environment Act).
- To review the Council's Planning and Development Control policies and procedures relating to tree protection and biodiversity and the opportunities arising from the Local Plan Update.
- To carry out a case study relating to the loss of c450 mature trees at Bearwood Lake. To consider the content and implications of the Council's emerging Tree Strategy.
- To consider the opportunities for improved partnership working with local stakeholders – residents, specialist and community groups, schools and Town and Parish Councils.
- To consider the implications of the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan and the opportunities for improved tree planting (250,000 trees across the Borough), tree protection and biodiversity.
- To consider examples of best practice in tree protection and biodiversity from across the country.
- To consider how progress is monitored, reported and communicated to Members and local stakeholders.
- To produce a report to the Executive with recommendations for improvement.

1.2 The Group met on 10 occasions and considered evidence from the following:

- Richard Bisset (WBC Lead Specialist Place Clienting)
- Laura Buck (WBC Green Infrastructure Special Project Manager)
- Professor Jo Clark (University of Reading – Department of Geography and Environmental Science)
- Katy Dagnall (Clerk, Finchampstead Parish Council)
- Duncan Fisher (WBC Ecology Officer)
- Alison Griffin (Wokingham & District Veteran Tree Association)
- Fran Hobson (WBC Service Manager – Community, Heritage, Green and Blue Infrastructure)
- Chris Hannington (WBC Trees and Landscape Manager)
- Katy Hughes (Clerk, Wokingham Without Parish Council)
- Professor Martin Lukac (University of Reading – Ecosystem Science, School of Agriculture)
- Lucy Moffat (Clerk, Twyford Parish Council)
- Jan Nowecki (Clerk, Wokingham Town Council)
- Emma Pilgrim (WBC Place Clienting)
- Councillor Ian Shenton (WBC – mover of the Council Motion on Ecological Emergency)
- Matthew Stanton (Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust).

- 1.3 The Task and Finish Group report was submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on 17 March 2022 (the report is at Annex A). The Group's recommendations to the Council's Executive are set out below together with the officer responses.

Recommendations	Officer Response
<p>1. That an annual update report be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and full Council, covering the updated Biodiversity Action Plan, Tree Strategy, Local Nature Recovery Strategy, Biodiversity Net Gain Process, Flood Risk Management and any other issues relating to the protection and enhancement of biodiversity across the Borough.</p>	<p>Officer will develop a suitable Biodiversity Update report format to be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee annually.</p>
<p>2. That, as part of the Biodiversity Action Plan update, the Council work with partners and specialist groups to produce an updated audit and baseline with SMART targets for future actions on biodiversity across the Borough.</p>	<p>Officers are already working on an updated Biodiversity Action Plan with key stakeholders that will include SMART targets.</p>
<p>3. That the Council aim to achieve 20% Biodiversity Net Gain, where possible, judging each planning application on its individual merits.</p>	<p>Officers are supportive in principle of a 20% Biodiversity Net Gain target (which is above the proposed mandatory target of 10%). It should be noted that this target would need to be agreed through the Local Plan Update process. As part of this process the Council will require a suitable evidence base to show that this level of biodiversity net gain alongside other requirements does not make potential development sites unviable and, therefore, undeliverable.</p>
<p>4. That Members and officers receive training on the Council's powers and duties relating to tree protection and biodiversity and the implications of recent changes in legislation.</p>	<p>Officers welcome the opportunity to support members and deliver training on the Council's duty and powers in relation tree management. The Council's tree officers will continue to regularly attend training sessions to keep their knowledge on trees and landscapes and the legislation surrounding this subject up to date.</p>

<p>5. That the Local Plan Update and supporting documents be consistent with the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework (2021) relating to climate change, flooding and conserving the natural environment.</p>	<p>The Local Plan Update will be consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework (2021)</p>
<p>6. That officers contact reservoir owners in the Borough and request that WBC receive early notice of any potential works under the Reservoirs Act, with a view to developing a communications plan in advance.</p>	<p>Officers in the drainage team can work with the Emergency Planning team to encourage early notification. However, it must be noted that the Council is not the regulatory or governing body in relation to reservoir works and the Reservoirs Act, and therefore is unable to take any enforcement action where a reservoir owner does not provide early notification.</p>
<p>7. That local Members and Parish Councils receive updates on the ongoing discussions with the owner of the Bearwood Lake site on potential mitigation measures for the felled trees and water run-off.</p>	<p>Officers are engaging with the landowner on some potential replanting opportunities and will ensure that members and the parish council are updated once a plan is developed.</p>
<p>8. That officers liaise with Town and Parish Councils and community groups to improve monitoring and compliance with planning requirements relating to tree planting on new developments</p>	<p>Officers value and welcome input from Town and Parish Councils and community groups and will actively engage with them to improve monitoring and compliance.</p>
<p>9. That officers consider the implementation of area-wide TPOs on new, large-scale development sites.</p>	<p>Officers will consider the use of area based TPO in line with national guidance and where appropriate.</p>
<p>10. That the Tree Strategy and the 250,000 tree project be underpinned by an Action Plan setting out short term, medium term and long term actions.</p>	<p>The draft Tree Strategy will include policies on the retention and replacement of trees open spaces and highway verges and an Action Plan setting out short term, medium term and long term goals.</p>
<p>11. That officers work to develop improved partnership working, engagement and communication with key partners, including Town and Parish Councils, the Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association, schools, specialist and community groups.</p>	<p>Officers will work to develop and improve partnership and engagement with key partners in the local community within the existing resource constraints.</p>

12. That officers work with partners and specialist groups to encourage and empower residents in improving the local environment, for example by supporting residents to take the lead on local initiatives.	Officers will work with partners and specialist groups to encourage and empower residents in improving the local environment within the existing resource constraints.
13. That the Council's website and communication channels be used to provide improved information and guidance on tree protection and biodiversity issues and signposting to specialist groups.	Officers are in the process of updating the information on the website.

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

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

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

### Other Financial Information

It is assumed at this stage all costs arising from this work will be contained within existing budgets. However, if further resources are required they will be reported back to the Executive for consideration

### Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

N/A

### Public Sector Equality Duty

This report has had due regard to the public sector equality duty and where applicable and available has included information relating to impacts upon people with protected characteristics and inequality.

### **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**

As stated in the report, there are major benefits in tackling ecological and climate emergency issues jointly. There are strong interdependencies and opportunities for joint working.

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

<b>List of Background Papers</b>
None

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# **WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL**

## **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

### **TREE PROTECTION & BIODIVERSITY TASK & FINISH GROUP**

### **REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**MARCH 2022**

#### **Task & Finish Group Members:**

Councillor Chris Bowring (Chairman)

Councillors Michael Firmager (Vice-Chairman), Gary Cowan, Paul Fishwick and Jackie Rance.

## CONTENTS

		Page
Foreword	Councillor Chris Bowring	3
Section 1	Executive Summary	4
Section 2	Recommendations	5
Section 3	Background	7
Section 4	Tree Protection & Biodiversity	11
Section 5	Ecological Emergency Motion	19
Section 6	Conclusions and Next Steps	25
Section 7	References	26

## **TREE PROTECTION & BIODIVERSITY TASK & FINISH GROUP**

### **Foreword by Councillor Chris Bowring**

Welcome to the report of the Tree Protection & Biodiversity Task & Finish Group. The Group was established in 2021 by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee to review the Council's existing approach to tree preservation and biodiversity and to examine the impact of new initiatives such as the Environment Act which received Royal Assent in late 2021.

Subsequently, at the full Council meeting in November 2021 a Motion was debated which proposed that the Council declare an Ecological Emergency alongside its earlier declaration of a Climate Emergency. The Task and Finish Group was asked to review the Motion and report back to Council with its views. We considered the linkages between the Climate Emergency and the proposed Ecological Emergency declaration and examined progress already being made.

The context for the Group's work is the rapid global decline in biodiversity which is linked to the ongoing Climate Emergency. Globally, we have lost 60% of wild invertebrates and over 70% of insects since 1970. The global picture is reflected in the UK which is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world. Britain has lost more of its biodiversity than almost anywhere else in western Europe and more than the rest of the G7 countries. 15% of UK species are threatened with extinction. A recent report found that the rural hedgehog population in Britain had fallen by between 30% and 70% since 2000.

The Council's Vision for the Borough is "A great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business". A key part of making the Borough a great place to live is the provision of access to our country parks, parks, open spaces, rivers and nature reserves. In order to protect and enhance these attractions we need to work to ensure that new housing development is well planned with appropriate infrastructure including the provision of green spaces and appropriate tree planting. The report looks at ways to ensure that the Council is able to work with partners, community groups and residents to deliver on its Vision for the future of the Borough.

Finally, I would like to thank the members of the Task and Finish Group for their hard work and support and the officers and witnesses who provided a wealth of insights and ideas.

Chris Bowring  
March 2022

## Section 1 - Executive Summary

- 1.1 The world is experiencing a rapid decline in biodiversity which is intertwined with the ongoing Climate Emergency. The UK is one of the most nature depleted countries in the world with 15% of its species threatened with extinction. The Borough is facing significant pressure from new housing development underpinned by supporting infrastructure such as new roads, community facilities and schools.
- 1.2 The Council's Vision for the Borough is "A great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business". In order to be a great place to live we need to protect and enhance our open spaces, country parks and nature reserves for the benefit of every resident.
- 1.3 The Task and Finish Group was established by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee in order to review a range of issues relating to tree protection and biodiversity. These included the Council's existing powers and duties, the impact of new legislation and the opportunities for improved engagement and partnership working. We also looked at a case study relating to the felling of c450 trees at Bearwood Lake.
- 1.4 At the November 2021 Council meeting a Motion was considered which recommended that the Council declare an Ecological Emergency. Council referred the Motion to the Task and Finish Group for consideration and comment. The Group's views are set out in the report and will be submitted to full Council.
- 1.5 The Group received evidence from WBC officers and a range of external witnesses representing Town and Parish Councils, the Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association, the University of Reading and the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust.
- 1.6 The Group considered existing policies and plans such as the Local Plan (currently being updated), the Biodiversity Action Plan and the emerging Tree Strategy. We also considered opportunities such as the introduction of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (from 2023) for new developments. The Council will be required to report annually on the level of net gain delivered. We noted the challenges facing the in-house Trees and Landscape team and welcomed the additional resources agreed in the 2022/23 Budget.
- 1.7 The Group considered linkages to the Climate Emergency Action Plan which included the project to plant 250,000 trees across the Borough over the next five years. We noted the opportunities for engagement with key partners, community groups and residents in delivering the tree planting project.
- 1.8 The Group's report will be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee for consideration prior to being considered by the Executive. The section relating to the Ecological Emergency Motion will be submitted to full Council.

## **Section 2 - Recommendations**

- i) That an annual update report be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and full Council, covering the updated Biodiversity Action Plan, Tree Strategy, Local Nature Recovery Strategy, Biodiversity Net Gain Process, Flood Risk Management and any other issues relating to the protection and enhancement of biodiversity across the Borough;**
- ii) That, as part of the Biodiversity Action Plan update, the Council work with partners and specialist groups to produce an updated audit and baseline with SMART targets for future actions on biodiversity across the Borough.**
- iii) That the Council aim to achieve 20% Biodiversity Net Gain, where possible, judging each planning application on its individual merits.**
- iv) That Members and officers receive training on the Council's powers and duties relating to tree protection and biodiversity and the implications of recent changes in legislation.**
- v) That the Local Plan Update and supporting documents be consistent with the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework (2021) relating to climate change, flooding and conserving the natural environment.**
- vi) That officers contact reservoir owners in the Borough and request that WBC receive early notice of any potential works under the Reservoirs Act, with a view to developing a communications plan in advance.**
- vii) That local Members and Parish Councils receive updates on the ongoing discussions with the owner of the Bearwood Lake site on potential mitigation measures for the felled trees and water run-off.**
- viii) That officers liaise with Town and Parish Councils and community groups to improve monitoring and compliance with planning requirements relating to tree planting on new developments.**
- ix) That officers consider the implementation of area-wide TPOs on new, large-scale development sites.**
- x) That the Tree Strategy and the 250,000 tree project be underpinned by an Action Plan setting out short term, medium term and long term actions.**
- xi) That officers develop a management policy relating to the maintenance of open spaces and highway verges, the draft policy to be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee for consideration.**
- xii) That officers work to develop improved partnership working, engagement and communication with key partners, including Town and Parish Councils, the Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association, schools, specialist and community groups.**

- xiii) That officers work with partners and specialist groups to encourage and empower residents in improving the local environment, for example by supporting residents to take the lead on local initiatives.**
- xiv) That the Council's website and communication channels be used to provide improved information and guidance on tree protection and biodiversity issues and signposting to specialist groups.**
- xv) That progress against the Task and Finish Group's recommendations be reviewed within 12 months.**

## Section 3 - Background

- 3.1 The world is experiencing a significant decline in biodiversity with a million animal and plant species facing extinction. This is happening alongside and is linked to the ongoing Climate Emergency. As reported by the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee, the global position is reflected in the UK which is one of the most nature depleted countries in the world. Of the G7 countries, the UK has the lowest level of biodiversity remaining.
- 3.2 In 2018, the Government published its 25 year Environment Plan, setting out the ambition to improve the natural environment within a generation. This was followed by the “state of nature” target aimed at halting the decline in nature by 2030. The UK State of Nature report (2019) highlighted the major pressures on nature in the UK as unsustainable forms of agriculture and woodland management, climate change, urbanisation, pollution, hydrological change and invasive non-native species.
- 3.3 In November 2021, the Environment Act received Royal Assent. The Act focuses on clean air, restoring natural habitats, increasing biodiversity, reducing waste and making better use of our resources. Specific measures in the Act include:
- Establishing the new Office for Environmental Protection;
  - Levelling up access to green infrastructure;
  - Improving air quality – developing Clean Air Zones;
  - Biodiversity Net Gain – mandatory improvement to biodiversity of at least 10% for developments;
  - Reducing waste – supporting a circular economy.
- 3.4 Wokingham Borough Council’s (WBC) approach to biodiversity and tree protection is framed within a number of statutory duties and local policies, including:
- The Town and Country Planning Act 1990;
  - The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF);
  - The Hedgerow Regulations 1997;
  - The Local Plan – currently being updated;
  - The WBC Biodiversity Action Plan;
  - The WBC Climate Emergency Action Plan.

3.5 The Tree Protection and Biodiversity Task and Finish Group (the Group) was established by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and met for the first time in August 2021. The Group comprised Councillors Chris Bowring (Chairman), Michael Firmager (Vice-Chairman), Gary Cowan, Paul Fishwick and Jackie Rance. The Group agreed the following Terms of Reference:

- To scrutinise the Council's current policies and plans relating to tree protection and biodiversity in relation to the Council's statutory powers and duties, including the implications of the Government's Environment Bill (now the Environment Act).
- To review the Council's Planning and Development Control policies and procedures relating to tree protection and biodiversity and the opportunities arising from the Local Plan Update.
- To carry out a case study relating to the loss of c450 mature trees at Bearwood Lake.
- To consider the content and implications of the Council's emerging Tree Strategy.
- To consider the opportunities for improved partnership working with local stakeholders – residents, specialist and community groups, schools and Town and Parish Councils.
- To consider the implications of the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan and the opportunities for improved tree planting (250,000 trees across the Borough), tree protection and biodiversity.
- To consider examples of best practice in tree protection and biodiversity from across the country.
- To consider how progress is monitored, reported and communicated to Members and local stakeholders.
- To produce a report to the Executive with recommendations for improvement.

3.6 The Group met on 10 occasions and considered evidence from the following:

- Richard Bisset (WBC Lead Specialist Place Clienting)
- Laura Buck (WBC Green Infrastructure Special Project Manager)
- Professor Jo Clark (University of Reading – Department of Geography and Environmental Science)
- Katy Dagnall (Clerk, Finchampstead Parish Council)
- Duncan Fisher (WBC Ecology Officer)
- Alison Griffin (Wokingham & District Veteran Tree Association)
- Fran Hobson (WBC Service Manager – Community, Heritage, Green and Blue Infrastructure)
- Chris Hannington (WBC Trees and Landscape Manager)



- Katy Hughes (Clerk, Wokingham Without Parish Council)
  - Professor Martin Lukac (University of Reading – Ecosystem Science, School of Agriculture)
  - Lucy Moffat (Clerk, Twyford Parish Council)
  - Jan Nowecki (Clerk, Wokingham Town Council)
  - Emma Pilgrim (WBC Place Clienting)
  - Councillor Ian Shenton (WBC – mover of the Council Motion on Ecological Emergency)
  - Matthew Stanton (Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust).
- 3.7 At the November 2021 Council meeting, a Motion was considered proposing that the Council declare an Ecological Emergency alongside its declaration of a Climate Emergency (2019). The Council referred the Motion to the Group for consideration, followed by a report back to the Council with recommendations for action. The Council Motion is considered in Section 5 of the report.
- 3.8 The November 2021 Council meeting also approved a Motion relating to an application for Tree Cities of the World status in the following terms:
- “Building on our commitment to planting 250,000 new trees, this Council commits to achieving ‘Tree Cities of the World’ status for our Borough as part of the creation of a Borough wide Tree Strategy. This will be done by:
- 1) Maintaining clear responsibility within the Council for the care of trees across our Borough.
  - 2) Agreeing a policy for the care and management of our forests and trees across the Borough. This must include standards for tree care, where and when they apply and penalties for non-compliance.
  - 3) Working with external partners to create and maintain an inventory of the local tree resource so that effective long-term planning for planting, care and removal can be established.
  - 4) Setting aside an annual budget for the implementation of the tree management strategy and management plan.
  - 5) Holding an annual celebration of our Borough’s trees and acknowledging the residents schools, charities and Council staff that contribute to our city tree programme.
  - 6) Creating a ‘Garden Forest’ programme to allow residents the opportunity to plant some of our 250,000 new tree commitment in their own gardens.
  - 7) Developing a continuous education process aimed at informing residents of the importance of trees, tree planting and tree protection and how best to care for the trees in their own gardens and communities.

- 8) Committing to planting a Covid-19 memorial wood within the Borough, of native trees, as a long-lasting memorial to those who have lost their lives during the 2020-21 Pandemic.

Once the above conditions are met an application for Tree Cities of the World status should be made as soon as possible.”

- 3.9 As stated above, the Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting in July 2019. The supporting Climate Emergency Action Plan includes a number of targets relating to biodiversity and tree protection, including:
- Planting 250,000 trees throughout the Borough by 2025 – this project is supported by the emerging Tree Strategy, considered later in the report. The Council had received a £300k grant from the Woodland Trust to support the project;
  - Carbon sequestration by design – improving carbon sequestration rates in future land management decisions;
  - Transition to low intensity land management – including wildflower grassland and hedgerow restoration;
  - A programme of carbon sequestration opportunities such as community garden schemes.
- 3.10 Following the initial drafting of its report, the Group shared the draft with relevant Executive Members and invited feedback on its conclusions and draft recommendations. The Group’s final report will be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee in March 2022. The section relating to Ecological Emergency will be submitted to full Council for consideration.
- 3.11 For information – the report talks about biodiversity and ecology. Biodiversity is defined as the variety of natural life and habitats on the planet. Ecology is the relationship between living things, including humans, and their physical environment.

## Section 4 – Tree Protection & Biodiversity

### Powers and Duties

4.1 The Group received an initial briefing on the range of powers and duties which enable Wokingham Borough Council to protect the biodiversity of the Borough. These include:

- The Town and Country Planning Act 1990 which sets out the Council's role as the Local Planning Authority, including the power to protect trees by the use of Tree Preservation Orders (TPO).
- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which states that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment. Development resulting in the loss of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and veteran trees) should be refused unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists.
- Local Plan – planning permission will be granted for proposals that maintain or enhance the quality of the environment. Development proposals should protect or enhance Green Infrastructure Networks, protect existing trees, hedges and other landscape features.
- The Hedgerow Regulations 1997 state that anyone wishing to remove a hedgerow must apply for permission from the Council.
- WBC Biodiversity Action Plan 2012/24 – the Action Plan aims to:
  - Raise awareness of the issues impacting on local biodiversity;
  - Outline targets and actions which will enhance biodiversity in the Borough;
  - Encourage and support community engagement; enabling local action to deliver targets;
  - Encourage management practices sympathetic to wildlife; promoting “good practice” and providing guidance;
  - Ensure policies are in place for the protection, management and enhancement of the local wildlife resource.

We noted that the Biodiversity Action Plan was coming to the end of its timeline and was due to be updated. This provided an opportunity to produce an up-to-date assessment of the state of biodiversity across the Borough. The updated Action Plan should include SMART targets and be reported to Members on a

regular basis. We supported the idea of an annual update on tree protection and biodiversity, similar to the annual update on the Climate Emergency Action Plan.

**Recommendation – That an annual update report be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and full Council, covering the updated Biodiversity Action Plan, Tree Strategy, Local Nature Recovery Strategy, Biodiversity Net Gain Process, Flood Risk Management and any other issues relating to the protection and enhancement of biodiversity across the Borough.**

**Recommendation – That, as part of the Biodiversity Action Plan update, the Council work with partners and specialist groups to produce an updated audit and baseline with SMART targets for future actions on biodiversity across the Borough.**

We noted that the core team working on tree protection and diversity issues at WBC was the Trees and Landscape Team within the Place and Growth directorate. As an example of the volume of work involved in the service, we heard that there are 1,482 TPOs in the Borough in addition to 414 area TPOs. Approximately 1.8 million trees are protected. The Council's tree officers are consulted on over 1,000 planning applications each year. We heard that the 2022/23 Budget process included provision for additional posts within the team. This would help to meet the extra demands from legislation (such as reporting on Biodiversity Net Gain) and allow increased focus on issues such as monitoring and enforcement of planning obligations and strengthening community engagement and partnership working.

## **Environment Act 2021**

- 4.2 The Environment Act received Royal Assent in November 2021. The Act outlines statutory targets in four priority areas – air quality, biodiversity, water and waste. A key element in the Act is the requirement for Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) within the planning process. BNG was created to ensure that new developments result in the natural environment being in a measurably better state. BNG requires a minimum 10% gain in biodiversity using measurable techniques developed by Natural England. Habitats should be secured for at least 30 years via planning obligations or conservation covenant. There will be a national register for net gain delivery sites. BNG will become mandatory in 2023 and is currently being shaped through a consultation published by DEFRA, Natural England and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.
- 4.3 We noted that some councils have already committed to achieving 20% BNG. Going beyond 10% was seen as a sensible target. However, it was felt that this should be addressed on a case by case basis. The Council could set out a target to achieve 20%, where possible, but retain the flexibility to negotiate a lower target based on the relevant circumstances. We also noted the view that the level of Biodiversity Net Gain achievable may be different in urban versus rural developments.

Whilst mandatory BNG is a positive step, it is important that damage to habitats is avoided wherever possible. If BNG is agreed it should be delivered to a high standard, in the right place and in a manner which can be monitored and reported. We noted that the resource implications for WBC arising out of the Act were not yet clear as the provisions would be rolled out over the next two years. We also felt that Members and officers would benefit from training on changes to legislation and the wider powers and duties relating to tree protection and biodiversity.

The Environment Act also included provisions relating to:

- Water management – a new power relating to Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) which may, for example, result in improvements in biodiversity on the River Loddon.
- Modification of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006, including the duty for local authorities to conserve and enhance biodiversity. The Act included a requirement for councils to produce reports on the actions taken to enhance biodiversity. This would be met through reporting on the Biodiversity Action Plan.
- Local Nature Recovery Strategy – a spatial strategy that will establish priorities and map proposals for actions to drive nature recovery and wider environmental benefits. The strategy could be Borough-wide or county-wide. Discussions were ongoing with the other Berkshire unitaries.
- Species Conservation Strategies – a new mechanism to safeguard the future of species at greatest risk – this could help to build on current work to protect the three species protected in the Thames Basin Heaths – the Dartford Warbler, Nightjar and Woodlark.

**Recommendation – That the Council aim to achieve 20% Biodiversity Net Gain, where possible, judging each planning application on its individual merits.**

**Recommendation - That Members and officers receive training on the Council’s powers and duties relating to tree protection and biodiversity and the implications of recent changes in legislation.**

### **Local Plan Update**

- 4.4 The Group noted the ongoing process to update the Borough’s Local Plan. The new Local Plan will run up to 2038, meaning that it will be a key document in planning for new homes, schools, community facilities and roads. Crucially it will also be key in protecting and enhancing biodiversity across the Borough. We expect that the Local Plan will be adopted by the end of 2023. Members also noted the revised NPPF (2021) and felt that the Local Plan Update and its supporting documents should be consistent with the NPPF provisions relating to meeting the challenge of climate change and flooding (chapter 14) and conserving and enhancing the natural environment (chapter 15).

**Recommendation – That the Local Plan Update and supporting documents be consistent with the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework (2021) relating to climate change, flooding and conserving the natural environment.**

### **Bearwood Lake**

- 4.5 The Group considered a case study of the events at Bearwood Lake relating to the felling of c450 trees at Bearwood Lake in February 2021. It was confirmed that this matter first came to the Council's attention on 8th December 2020 when officers received a copy of a Regulation 14(2)(a), notification from Reading Football Club, notifying of their intention to fell TPO trees around Bearwood Lake dam in order to comply with the Reservoirs Act 1975. The Council acknowledged receipt of the notification and requested a copy of the Reservoir Engineers report deeming the tree removal works to be necessary. In February 2021, the tree removal works began on site and officers received a number of queries from residents, Members and neighbouring Parish Councils asking whether the works had been approved by WBC.
- 4.6 Officers confirmed that the same response has been provided to Members, the Parish Councils and residents, stating that officers did not approve these works as approval was not required from the Local Planning Authority in order for a landowner to carry out works under a 14(2); the trees being exempt from the need for application under Regulation 14(1)(c) of the Tree Preservation Regulations (2012). Bearwood Lake lies next to land currently developed into training grounds for Reading Football Club. Planning permission for these works was granted in 2015. It was confirmed that the Environment Agency and Forestry Commission had been involved in discussions in the run up to the felling of the trees on the site and had not raised any objections.
- 4.7 Members concluded that it was clear that the landowners would have been aware that the expert advice over time was moving towards removal of the trees on site. As a result, there should have been time to contact the Council and ensure that local stakeholders were aware of the situation and the reasons behind the felling of the trees. The failure to communicate effectively led to the public outcry when the trees were felled. It would have been sensible to plan the works in advance, with proper public notice and discussion about communication and potential mitigation measures.
- 4.8 Members considered the lessons learned from this issue and the implications for other reservoirs in the Borough. The key point of learning related to the need for early communication with the relevant stakeholders. It was felt that other reservoir owners (including the relevant WBC officers) should be contacted and asked to ensure that WBC received early notice of any potential works under the Reservoirs Act, with a view to developing a communications plan in advance. As part of this process it was important to ensure that reservoir owners were aware of their responsibilities to communicate with local stakeholders.

- 4.9 The Group were informed that officers continued to hold discussions with the landowner over replacement trees and other vegetation in order to mitigate for the felled trees. We felt that Members and the Town and Parish Councils should receive feedback on the progress of these discussions.

**Recommendation – That officers contact reservoir owners in the Borough and request that WBC receive early notice of any potential works under the Reservoirs Act, with a view to developing a communications plan in advance.**

**Recommendation – That local Members and Parish Councils receive updates on the ongoing discussions with the owner of the Bearwood Lake site on potential mitigation measures for the felled trees and water run-off.**

Note: Gary Cowan informed the Group that he was in discussion with WBC officers about an issue relating to the Bearwood Lake site. As this matter had not been resolved, Councillor Cowan was unable to support the Group's findings in relation to Bearwood Lake, as set out in the report.

### **Tree Strategy**

- 4.10 The Group received an update on the emerging Tree Strategy which aimed to provide improved direction and focus on tree management across the Borough. The Strategy will set out the benefits that trees and woods can deliver for health, amenity, climate change and water management. It will be a key document in the Council's ambition to protect and enhance the biodiversity of the Borough. The Strategy will set out the Council's response to its statutory duties under the Town and Country Planning Act, NPPF and the Environment Act. The Strategy will cover the management of Council owned trees, the replanting policy, new planting schemes (including the 250,000 tree project) and woodland management.
- 4.11 The Group received feedback on the early engagement survey which took place in November 2021 to gather views from residents, Town and Parish Councils and other stakeholders on the key issues to be addressed in the Strategy. The key areas that were highlighted by the survey included:
- The use of TPO's to protect the current stock of trees to prevent felling of trees, including advice on how to apply for TPO's, how reports of mature tree felling are investigated by WBC and what measures will be taken if TPO's are breached;
  - Developer responsibility to ensure new planting schemes are maintained and cared for appropriately;
  - Prevention measures to reduce felling of mature trees for development and outlining how the Tree Strategy and Local Plan will work together, considering the ratio of trees felled, trees planted and how this will be measured. Clarification on who takes on management of mature trees on sites that are developed;
  - WBC canopy cover;

- Woodland management;
- Responsibility of utility suppliers carrying out work around trees;
- Replanting policy and maintenance policy for current stock of Council-owned trees as well as newly planted trees;
- Street tree policy outlining how these trees are managed and maintained;
- Species recommendation and advice for planting new trees – right tree, right place including permission requirements and process for residents seeking to plant on WBC-owned land;
- Income potential from coppiced wood, biodiversity gains, etc.;
- Community involvement opportunities.

4.12 An important issue highlighted by the survey was the maintenance of newly planted trees on new developments. Much concern had been expressed by Members, residents and Town and Parish Councils about the significant number of young trees which did not survive on new developments. It was felt that developers should be more accountable for these losses. Members were reminded of the work of the earlier Task and Finish Group on Estate Infrastructure which had received evidence about the loss of trees on development sites. That Task and Finish Group recommended that the Council work with developers to focus on measures to minimise the loss of newly planted trees. One issue considered was the use of a “Green Bond”, i.e. a bond paid to the Council by developers to ensure that agreed tree planting and maintenance was carried out. We were heartened to hear that officers were now seeking to introduce the Green Bond concept and that additional officer resource was planned to monitor landscape compliance on new developments.

**Recommendation – That officers liaise with Town and Parish Councils and community groups to improve monitoring and compliance with planning requirements relating to tree planting on new developments.**

4.13 Maintenance of newly planted trees would also be a key issue for the 250,000 tree planting project over the next five years. We were informed that each planting scheme within the project would include a three year young tree maintenance programme to ensure that the tree are given every chance to become established within their environment. There would be opportunities to work with local communities and Town and Parish Councils to develop “tree warden” or “tree champion” roles which could draw on the pool of volunteers who were keen to contribute to the process.

4.14 The Group considered the merits of applying area-wide TPOs to trees on new development sites. We noted the officer position that national guidance promoted the identification of specific trees and groups of trees in preference to area classification. However, we felt that there was some merit in pursuing area-wide classification on large scale developments. This would provide initial protection for all the trees on site. Further investigations would then identify the trees which should be protected in the long term. We felt that this process would help to avoid the situation where important trees were cut down before the Council and local stakeholders were able to act.



**Recommendation – That officers consider the implementation of area-wide TPOs on new, large-scale development sites.**

- 4.15 Members noted that there were a number of ongoing tree planting and protection initiatives across the Borough led by Town and Parish Councils, the Wokingham Veteran Tree Association and various other voluntary and community groups. The Tree Strategy and the 250,000 tree project provided an exciting opportunity for the Council to build on existing partnerships and networks across the Borough. We noted the challenge of planting 250,000 trees in a five year period and felt that the project should be underpinned by an Action Plan with specific actions over the short, medium and longer term

**Recommendation – That the Tree Strategy and the 250,000 tree project be underpinned by an Action Plan setting out short term, medium term and long term actions.**

### **Grounds Maintenance**

- 4.16 The Group received an update on the Council's grounds maintenance contract including measures to improve biodiversity through the development of longer grassed and wildflower areas. The current grounds maintenance contract ran until 2026 with an option for a five year extension. Officers had worked with the contractor, Viola, to improve flexibility within the contract including the creation of longer grassed areas and the timing of mowing of highway verges. This was clearly a matter of public interest with residents holding different views about the benefits of longer grassed areas. We noted that officers were considering the development of a policy relating to grass cutting, including verges, which would provide more clarity for residents on the approach in different parts of the Borough. Once developed, the policy would be the subject of consultation with Town and Parish Councils and community groups.

**Recommendation – That officers develop a management policy relating to the maintenance of open spaces and highway verges, the draft policy to be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee for consideration.**

### **Partnership Working**

- 4.17 The Group received evidence from two key partners – the Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association (WDVTA) and the Town and Parish Councils. The WDVTA had mapped around 8,500 veteran trees (trees of 1 metre diameter) across the Borough over the past 15 years. The WDVTA website contained a significant amount of data about veteran trees which was publicly available. As many of the veteran trees in the Borough had now been mapped, the WDVTA was refocussing more on the role of "tree champion" with a view to protecting existing trees. In relation to the 250,000 tree project, it was felt that involvement of the public was a good idea and should be underpinned by clear information and consistent communications. A large element of the project would involve whip planting (2ft high trees) so it would be important to communicate the expected standards including soil, weeding around trees and general

maintenance. Planting new trees near to mature trees would enable them to piggyback on the improved soil conditions created by the older trees.

- 4.18 The Town and Parish Council representatives confirmed a strong commitment to work with WBC on tree and biodiversity issues. They had their own landholdings and funding sources and were keen to move forwards in a stronger partnership. To this end they were keenly interested in the emerging Tree Strategy. The Towns and Parishes felt that the TPO process was effective and the WBC webmaps were useful. However, it was recognised that WBC had limited resources for the wide range of ongoing work and the additional requirements from new legislation. WBC officers had attended Town and Parish Council meetings to discuss the 250,000 tree project. This engagement was welcomed and it was hoped that more frequent and constructive dialogue would be mutually beneficial. We did note, also, that the request for closer working relationships was a recurring theme in our discussions with WDVTA and the Town and Parish Council representatives.

**Recommendation - That officers work to develop improved partnership working, engagement and communication with key partners, including Town and Parish Councils, the Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association, schools, specialist and community groups.**

**Recommendation - That officers work with partners and specialist groups to encourage and empower residents in improving the local environment, for example by supporting residents to take the lead on local initiatives.**

- 4.19 The Group noted the potential for community engagement and involvement on tree protection and biodiversity issues. The Town and Parish Council representatives gave examples of resident involvement such as crowdfunding to fund tree planting schemes. We were also informed that hundreds of residents had come forward to request a tree for planting on their property as part of the 250,000 tree project. We felt that the Council could play a greater role in providing information and guidance for residents on issues such as home composting, soil management and rainwater harvesting. The Council website and publications such as the Wokingham Borough News could be used to provide advice and signposting to specialist groups in the Borough. A lot of positive work was ongoing and it was important to celebrate successes.

**Recommendation - That the Council's website and communication channels be used to provide improved information and guidance on tree protection and biodiversity issues and signposting to specialist groups.**

## Section 5 – Ecological Emergency Motion

- 5.1 The pressures of climate change, intensive agriculture, unsustainable use of resources and continuous development are causing significant pressures on biodiversity locally and nationally. The result is a risk to local wildlife and longstanding habitats, simply put it is the decline of nature all around us. At its meeting in November 2021, the Council considered a Motion proposing the declaration of an Ecological Emergency alongside the Climate Emergency declaration from July 2019. The Motion was submitted by Councillor Ian Shenton in the following terms:

This Council formally declares an Ecological Emergency and will:

- 1) Address ecological issues alongside climate emergency actions and ensure that opportunities to gain co-benefits from addressing both the climate and ecological emergencies are maximised.
- 2) Add ecological implications alongside those for climate in committee and Council reports.
- 3) Ensure the delivery of biodiversity and environmental enhancements through our planning policy and development control functions by providing guidance through a biodiversity supplementary planning document.
- 4) Strive to enable the development of a 20% mandatory biodiversity net gain policy for Wokingham through the new local plan.
- 5) Create a Developing Nature Toolkit and direct developers to use the toolkit to assist them in demonstrating a net gain in biodiversity, to be used from the very outset of planning new developments, and ideally at the time of selecting sites to acquire for development.
- 6) Re-establish the Wokingham Biodiversity Forum to allow the Council to collaborate effectively with partners and the wider community.
- 7) Where possible, embed ecological initiatives within all Council work areas, including Covid-19 recovery projects and programmes.
- 8) Promote woodland planting and rewilding in the right places and with the right species, peatland restoration, natural flood management, wild flower meadows, and habitat creation and restoration.
- 9) Work with local, county, regional and national partners to increase wildlife habitats, green infrastructure and natural capital in Wokingham Borough ensuring robust connectivity between them.
- 10) Manage Council services, buildings and land in a biodiversity-friendly manner, including by reviewing the use of harmful chemicals, such as

pesticides and taking opportunities to create new wildlife habitats and corridors.

- 11) Provide advice for local communities and businesses on how to incorporate biodiversity, green infrastructure and natural capital into Neighbourhood Plans and other initiatives.
- 12) Encourage residents to take biodiversity measures in their own homes by, for example, wildlife gardening and home composting.
- 13) Working collaboratively with the Berkshire Local Nature Partnership, Wokingham Biodiversity Forum, a cross party working group and other stakeholders, produce a local nature recovery strategy and associated action plan with an annual progress report to full Council.

5.2 In terms of national context, a number of Councils have declared Ecological Emergencies or have declared a combined Climate and Ecological Emergency. These Councils include Brighton, Bristol, BCP (Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole), Cambridgeshire, Camden, Doncaster, Dorset and Sutton. It is worth noting that the vast majority of Councils have declared a Climate Emergency but a much smaller number have declared an Ecological Emergency.

5.3 As an example, Bristol was the first local authority to declare a standalone Ecological Emergency, in January 2020. The Council worked with partners to develop an Ecological Emergency Strategy with the following strategic goals:

- Space for Nature – at least 30% of land in Bristol to be managed for the benefit of wildlife by 2030;
- Pesticides – reduce the use of pesticides in Bristol by at least 50% BY 2030;
- Pollution – 100% of Bristol’s waterways to have water quality that supports healthy wildlife by 2030;
- Wider footprint – people and businesses to reduce consumption of products that undermine the health of wildlife and ecosystems around the world.

5.4 There were a range of views within the Group about the merits of declaring an Ecological Emergency. Whilst declaring an emergency would be a high profile statement of intent there was also a view that it could result in duplication of effort and could take focus away from the Climate Emergency declaration. Based on the experience from other local authorities, the options appeared to be to declare a standalone Ecological Emergency or declare a combined Climate and Ecological Emergency (with amendments to the existing Climate Emergency Action Plan). Alternatively, Council could decide not to declare an emergency but request that ongoing work on tree protection and biodiversity (described in the report) be brought together into an annual update report to Council, similar to the annual Climate Emergency update.

5.5 The Group's views on each of the specific points within the November Council Motion are set out below:

- Address ecological issues alongside climate emergency actions and ensure that opportunities to gain co-benefits from addressing both the climate and ecological emergencies are maximised.

**Our views** - It was agreed that there were major benefits in tackling ecological and climate emergency issues jointly. There were strong interdependencies and opportunities for symbiotic working. A key challenge would be to maximise the impact of limited staff resources and budgets.

- Add ecological implications alongside those for climate in Committee and Council reports.

**Our views** – It was agreed that the inclusion of ecological impacts in key decision reports would help to ensure that these issues became part of the Council's day to day operations, not an afterthought. Reports currently included a section on Climate Emergency Impact. This could be extended to Climate and Ecological Impact. As with the Climate Emergency issue, it was important that this was not seen as a tick box exercise but a proper assessment of the impact of key decisions.

- Ensure the delivery of biodiversity and environmental enhancements through our planning policy and development control functions by providing guidance through a biodiversity supplementary planning document.

**Our views** – the Environment Act was now in place (with a two year lead in period for some of the provisions) and the Council was working on an update to the Local Plan. Biodiversity and environmental improvements should be key elements in the Local Plan. Officers advised the Group that this issue was already under consideration by the Council's Growth and Delivery Policy Team. It was felt that development of a supplementary planning document (SPD) could take time and that any future changes would have to go through a consultation process. It may be more effective, therefore, to achieve this outcome through a policy or strategy rather than a SPD. Whilst noting the officer comments on the challenge of developing an SPD, we felt that the Council should seriously consider this option in order to maximise the robustness of the Council's position.

- Strive to enable the development of a 20% mandatory biodiversity net gain policy for Wokingham through the new local plan.

**Our views** - The Environment Act included the target of 10% biodiversity net gain. A number of Councils were seeking to achieve 20%. Going beyond 10% was seen as a sensible target. However, it was felt that this should be addressed on a case by case basis. The Council

could set out a target to achieve 20% where possible but retain the flexibility to negotiate a lower target based on the relevant circumstances. We also noted the view that the level of Biodiversity Net Gain achievable may be different in urban versus rural developments. Making 20% a mandatory target could make some proposed developments unviable. It was also felt that the ambition could be to increase the target at a later date.

- Create a Developing Nature Toolkit and direct developers to use the toolkit to assist them in demonstrating a net gain in biodiversity, to be used from the very outset of planning new developments, and ideally at the time of selecting sites to acquire for development.

**Our views** – the development of a toolkit in principle was supported and it was noted that a Nature Toolkit was being developed nationally. However, officers advised us that such a toolkit would be of more use for authorities which did not have a strong team in place to provide ecological advice. The shortage of ecologists was seen as a national problem in achieving the new Biodiversity Net Gain target. It was estimated that two thirds of local authorities did not have in-house capacity. WBC was fortunate to have a strong in-house team with an experienced Ecology Officer who would be supported by a new postholder from April 2022. Consequently, the Council's in-house team were able to go beyond the level of support provided by the toolkit in terms of expert advice to developers. Whilst recognising the current strength of the Council's team we did note that there could be a risk if the current postholder was to leave the organisation. Accordingly, appropriate training and contingency planning should be put in place to ensure the resilience of the team.

- Re-establish the Wokingham Biodiversity Forum to allow the Council to collaborate effectively with partners and the wider community.

**Our views** – It was confirmed that the forum was currently dormant and work was under way to re-establish it. This would be led by one of the new postholders in the Trees and Landscape Team. The aim was to reinvigorate the forum with a clear vision, strengthened terms of reference, streamlined membership and effective reporting lines.

- Where possible, embed ecological initiatives within all Council work areas, including Covid-19 recovery projects and programmes.

**Our views** – we noted that this work was already ongoing. The Ecology Officer liaised with other departments such as Highways and Property. There was a recognition that this work could be extended, depending on resources, to widen the understanding of ecological impacts in key service areas.

- Promote woodland planting and rewilding in the right places and with the right species, peatland restoration, natural flood management, wild flower meadows, and habitat creation and restoration.

**Our views** – It was confirmed that some of these initiatives were being pursued through, for example, the Council’s grounds maintenance contract, the flood alleviation programme and the 250,000 tree planting project. We noted the potential for working with Town and Parish Councils and landowners to develop wildlife corridors. We were given the example of a potential development which could deliver a corridor running through the site with public access to the riverside.

- Work with local, county, regional and national partners to increase wildlife habitats, green infrastructure and natural capital in Wokingham Borough ensuring robust connectivity between them.

**Our views** – Work was ongoing to develop a Borough-wide Tree Strategy which included the planting of 250,000 trees as part of the Climate Emergency Action Plan. Improving the natural capital of the Borough would deliver benefits to residents. For example, woodland can deliver benefits such as flood risk reduction and carbon capture. Officers provided examples of ongoing partnerships with the Woodland Trust, the Forestry Commission and other partners.

- Manage Council services, buildings and land in a biodiversity-friendly manner, including by reviewing the use of harmful chemicals, such as pesticides and taking opportunities to create new wildlife habitats and corridors.

**Our views** – we were informed that this was an issue requiring additional focus in areas such as procurement, development of performance indicators and contract reviews such as the Highways contract. The Council’s Procurement team was working on this issue. We noted the example of Bristol City Council which has set a target to reduce the use of pesticides by at least 50% by 2030.

- Provide advice for local communities and businesses on how to incorporate biodiversity, green infrastructure and natural capital into Neighbourhood Plans and other initiatives.

**Our views** – we supported this idea in principle. Officers advised us that this was additional work which would require additional resources. Other specialist bodies may be better placed to provide this advice. WBC could support these bodies with grant funding

- Encourage residents to take biodiversity measures in their own homes by, for example, wildlife gardening and home composting.

**Our views** – we noted that the Council already carried out many positive initiatives relating to biodiversity across the Borough. We felt that there

was an argument for a strengthened communication/engagement role which could improve connections and communication with the wide range of stakeholders including Town and Parish Councils, community groups, schools and residents keen to become involved in voluntary work which helped to preserve access to nature. We considered the example of residents moving in to new build accommodation. As part of the development topsoil was removed and stored enabling the building works to proceed. The storage and compaction of the soil removed any life meaning that residents had challenges with their new gardens. It was suggested that WBC could provide advice to developers on the management of soil on sites and could also provide advice to residents about measures to restore life in their gardens. Such advice could be included in the Wokingham Borough News and the Council's website. Further advice could relate to activities such as rainwater harvesting and home composting.

- Working collaboratively with the Berkshire Local Nature Partnership, Wokingham Biodiversity Forum, a cross party working group and other stakeholders, produce a local nature recovery strategy and associated action plan with an annual progress report to full Council.

**Our views** – we noted that, as set out above, work was ongoing to reinvigorate local partnerships. Discussions were ongoing with the other Berkshire unitaries about the production of a Berkshire-wide Local Nature Recovery Strategy. The proposed annual progress report to Council was supported. The report should be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee prior to its submission to Council.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL**

- i) That Council consider the Task and Finish Group's evidence relating to the Council Motion and determine whether or not to declare an Ecological Emergency.**
- ii) That Council note the progress made in relation to the specific points set out in the Council Motion and the proposals for future action.**
- iii) That, notwithstanding the decision on Ecological Emergency, Council receive an annual update report on progress relating to tree protection and the protection and enhancement of biodiversity across the Borough.**



## Section 6 - Conclusions and Next Steps

6.1 In considering its report, the Group noted several themes relating to tree protection and biodiversity across the Borough. Firstly, the significant ongoing pressure on the Borough from new development and population growth. The Borough's population is estimated to increase from 174,945 in 2020 to 184,300 in 2030. The requirement to deliver up to 800 homes each year together with infrastructure such as roads, schools and community facilities will be a major challenge. Hopefully, the implementation of Biodiversity Net Gain will ensure that the impact of new development is mitigated.

Secondly, we were impressed by the knowledge and commitment of the Council's officers who gave evidence to the Group. We were also heartened to hear that additional resources have been made available to the in-house team which will assist in areas such as increased monitoring and enforcement of planning obligations and support to key partners. Whilst the Council had a robust set of policies and plans in place we highlighted the opportunity for the Local Plan Update to ensure that tree protection and biodiversity were seen as key considerations within the planning process.

Thirdly, the opportunities for improved partnership working and community engagement. We heard from key stakeholders about the number of residents and community groups who were keen to engage with the Council on tree protection and biodiversity issues. There was also an opportunity to work more closely with schools to encourage children and young people to develop an awareness of the importance of protecting our natural environment. Whilst noting that the Council's resources are limited we saw opportunities for greater communication and engagement, including signposting to specialist groups in the Borough.

6.2 The Group's report will be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee prior to consideration by the Council's Executive. The section of the report relating to the Council Motion on Ecological Emergency will be submitted to full Council for consideration.

## Section 7 - References

- A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment – HM Government - 2018
- Biodiversity in the UK: bloom or bust? – House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee – 2021
- Local Government Association – Evidence to the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee – 2021
- UK State of Nature Report – National Diversity Network – 2019
- National Planning Policy Framework - 2021
- Bristol One City Ecological Emergency Strategy & Action Plan 2020
- BCP Council – Climate & Ecological Emergency Action Plan 2021
- Camden Council Climate & Ecological Emergency – Biodiversity Strategy for Camden 2021
- WBC Biodiversity Action Plan 2012
- WBC Climate Emergency Action Plan 2019 (updated annually)
- WBC Local Plan Update: Revised Growth Strategy Consultation - 2021

# WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL EXECUTIVE FORWARD PROGRAMME

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THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES (EXECUTIVE ARRANGEMENTS)(MEETINGS AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION)(ENGLAND)  
REGULATIONS 2012

## Executive Forward Plan - October to January 2023

Updated 08 November 2022

Ref No.	Subject for Decision	Decision to be taken by	List of Documents to be submitted to the Decision Maker for consideration and Background Documents	Contact Details (Director/ Author)	Responsible Lead Member	Statement as to whether the item is likely to be considered in private and if so the reasons why / Explanation for any deferment of item
<b>EXECUTIVE MEETING – 27 OCTOBER 2022</b>						
WBC 1305	<b>Lease for Learning Disability Respite Centre</b> Purpose: To approve lease to continue occupancy of the Learning Disability Respite Centre at Loddon Court	Executive	Heads of Terms of Lease	Director, Adult Social Care and Health - Matt Pope, Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers/ Jenny Lamprell	Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services - David Hare	N/A Contains financially sensitive information
WBC 1306	<b>Officers' response to the recommendations from the Tree Protection and Biodiversity Task &amp; Finish Group</b> Purpose: This report sets out the Officer response to the 15 Recommendations set out in section 2 (Attachment 1) Tree Protection & Biodiversity Task & Finish Group, Report and Recommendations, March 2022	Executive		Director, Place and Growth - Steve Moore/ Andy Glencross	Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure - Ian Shenton	N/A
WBC1304	<b>Rent Setting Policy</b>	Executive	Rent Setting Policy and	Director, Place and	Deputy Leader of	N/A

Agenda Item 60.

	Purpose: Rent Setting policy requires annual approval from Executive to ensure we are regularising the current annual rent setting process and adhering to the Rent Standard 2020.		equality impact assessment	Growth - Steve Moore/ Harrison Wilks	the Council and Executive Member for Housing - Stephen Conway	
WBC1295	<b>Capital Monitoring 2022/23 - Q2</b> Purpose: To consider the Capital Monitoring position at the end of Quarter 2	Executive	Capital Monitoring 2022/23 - Quarter 2	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers/ Mark Thompson	Executive Member for Finance - Imogen Shepherd-DuBey	N/A
WBC1296	<b>Revenue Monitoring 2022-23 Q2</b> Purpose: To consider the revenue budget position at the end of Quarter 2	Executive	Revenue Budget Monitoring Report 2022/23 - Quarter 2	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers/ Mark Thompson	Executive Member for Finance - Imogen Shepherd-DuBey	N/A
WBC 1311 116	<b>Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Partnership Joint Committee</b> Purpose: To give approval for the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care System (BOB ICS) to establish an Integrated Care Partnership (ICP) through a Joint Committee and to agree Wokingham Borough Council representation on the ICP.	Executive		Director, Adult Social Care and Health - Matt Pope/ Andrew Moulton	Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services - David Hare	N/A
WBC 1307	<b>Climate Emergency Impact Assessment Tool</b> Purpose: This report outlines the importance of implementing an assessment tool around climate emergency issues and considerations, in order to do as much as possible to reach the	Executive	Cover Report Detailed Report Tool Template Tool Guidance	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers/ Andrew Collins	Executive Member for Climate Emergency and Resident Services - Sarah Kerr	N/A

	goal of net zero by 2030. It highlights the benefits implementing this tool will bring to the community, the environment and the council through multiple aspects and details exactly how this can be realistically achieved.					
WBC 1309	<b>Care Home Purchase</b> Purpose: To receive approval	Executive		Director, Adult Social Care and Health - Matt Pope/ Wesley Hedger	Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services - David Hare	N/A the identity of the property(ies) and the sum that the Council is prepared to pay must remain exempt until contracts have been exchanged.
WBC 1308	<b>Annual Report 2021-2022</b> Purpose: Annual Report for the year April 2021 to March 2022	Executive		Chief Executive - Susan Parsonage/ Will Roper	.Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Business and Economic Development- Clive Jones	N/A
WBC 1310	<b>Draft Tree Strategy Public Consultation</b> Purpose: To seek Executive approval to begin an 8-week public consultation on the Draft Tree Strategy.	Executive	Draft Tree Strategy	Director, Place and Growth - Steve Moore/ Laura Buck	Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure - Ian Shenton	N/A
WBC 1312	<b>Revenue Monitoring 2022/23 Q3</b> Purpose: To consider the revenue budget position at the end of Quarter 3	Executive	Revenue Budget Monitoring Report 2022/23 - Quarter 3	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers/ Mark Thompson	Executive Member for Finance - Imogen Shepherd-DuBey	N/A
WBC 1314	<b>Chief Finance Officer Report 2023-24</b> Purpose: Provide strategic oversight for the 2023-24 budget setting	Executive		Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers/ Mark Thompson	Executive Member for Finance - Imogen Shepherd-DuBey	N/A
WBC 1313	<b>Capital Monitoring 2022/23 - Q3</b> Purpose:	Executive	Capital Monitoring 2022/23 - Quarter 3	Deputy Chief Executive -	Executive Member for Finance -	N/A

	To consider the Capital Monitoring position at the end of Quarter 3			Graham Ebers/ Mark Thompson	Imogen Shepherd-DuBey	
WBC 1302	<b>Adult Social Care Strategy and Social Care Futures</b> Purpose: For Executive to approve amendments to the Council's Adult Social Care Strategy to incorporate Social Care Future.	Executive		Director, Adult Social Care and Health - Matt Pope/ Iftkhar Ahmed, Jenny Lamprell	Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services - David Hare	N/A

**Members of the Executive:-**

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

**Note:**

Unless the matter has been listed as being likely to be discussed in private, copies of the reports associated with the above decisions will be available no earlier than five days before the meeting at the Council Offices, Shute End, Wokingham; on the Council's website; by contacting a member of the Democratic Services Team on 0118 974 6053 or by emailing [democratic.services@wokingham.gov.uk](mailto:democratic.services@wokingham.gov.uk)



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**WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL  
INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISIONS FORWARD PROGRAMME**

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**Individual Executive Member Forward Plan - November 2022 Update 1**

Updated 08 November 2022

Ref No.	Subject for Decision	Decision to be taken by	List of documents to be submitted to the Decision maker for consideration and Background documents	Contact Details (Director/ Author)	Statement as to whether the item is likely to be considered in private and if so the reasons why/ Explanation for any deferment of item
<del>IMD</del> 2022/15	<b>Wokingham Borough Council response to the Finchampstead draft Neighbourhood Plan consultation</b> <b>Purpose:</b> To agree Wokingham Borough Council's formal response to the Finchampstead draft Neighbourhood Plan (Regulation 16) consultation. <b>Date 15 Nov 2022</b> <b>Meeting Room and Time FF11 at 11:30am</b>	Executive Member for Planning and Local Plan - Lindsay Ferris		Director, Place and Growth - Steve Moore/ James McCabe	N/A
IMD 2022/16	<b>WBC Response to Twyford Neighbourhood Plan Consultation</b> <b>Purpose:</b> To agree Wokingham Borough Council's formal response to the Twyford draft Neighbourhood Plan (Regulation 16). <b>Date 16 Nov 2022</b> <b>Meeting Room and Time FF11 at 9am</b>	.Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Business and Economic Development- Clive Jones	Enclosure 1 - WBC Twyford NDP Response	Director, Place and Growth - Steve Moore/ Ben Davis	N/A

<p>IMD 2022/17</p>	<p><b>Consideration of Rebate of Fees for Taxis and Private Hire Vehicle Licences 2021/22</b> <b>Purpose:</b> To consider the decision of the Licensing and Appeals Committee on 23 June 2022 to recommend a reduction relating to certain licence fees charged in 2021/22 <b>Date 5 Dec 2022</b> <b>Meeting Room and Time David Hicks 1 at 11am</b></p>	<p>Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure - Ian Shenton</p>		<p>Director, Place and Growth - Steve Moore/ Ed Shaylor</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>IMD 2022/18</p> <p>122</p>	<p><b>Corporate CRM System Procurement</b> <b>Purpose:</b> To approve a business case to procure a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to help to build a picture and manage the interactions a customer has with the Council. A CRM is vital to support the automation and streamlining of processes. It is a key enabler for efficiency and can help to improve the customer experience. Due to the value of the 5-year contract, there is a requirement to procure in line with the Councils procurement regulations and constitution. This decision is being taken via IEMD as to take to the Executive is not practical and delay will have negative financial consequences for the Council. <b>Date 7 Dec 2022</b> <b>Meeting Room and Time LGF3 at 1pm</b></p>	<p>Executive Member for Climate Emergency and Resident Services - Sarah Kerr and Executive Member for Finance – Imogen Shepherd-DuBey</p>	<p>IEMD Briefing Paper</p>	<p>Chief Executive - Susan Parsonage/ Glynn Davies</p>	<p>N/A</p>

**Members of the**

**Executive:-** Clive Jones  
Stephen Conway  
Rachel Bishop-Firth  
Paul Fishwick  
Prue Bray  
Lindsay Ferris  
David Hare  
Sarah Kerr  
Ian Shenton  
Imogen Shepherd-DuBey

Leader of Council and Executive Member for Business and Economic Development  
Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Housing.  
Equalities, Inclusion and Fighting Poverty  
Active Travel, Transport and Fighting Poverty  
Children’s Services  
Planning and Local Plan  
Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services  
Climate Emergency and Resident Services  
Environment, Sport and Leisure  
Finance

Note: Unless the matter has been listed as being likely to be discussed in private, copies of the reports associated with the above decisions will be available no earlier than five days before the meeting at the Council Offices, Shute End, Wokingham; on the Council's website; by contacting a member of the Democratic Services Team by emailing [democratic.services@wokingham.gov.uk](mailto:democratic.services@wokingham.gov.uk)



## **DRAFT WORK PROGRAMMES 2022/23**

**Please note that the Work Programme is a 'live' document and subject to change at short notice. The information in this Work Programme, including report titles is draft and is subject to approval by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee.**

**The Overview and Scrutiny Committees will consider their work programmes at the first meeting in the new Municipal Year.**

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE 2022/23 WORK PROGRAMME

DATE OF MEETING	ITEM	PURPOSE OF REPORT	REASON FOR CONSIDERATION	CONTACT OFFICER
18 January 2023	<b>Leader and Chief Executive</b>	To discuss progress on corporate priorities and emerging issues for 2023	Regular Update	Susan Parsonage
	<b>Q2 2022/23 Performance</b>	To consider the KPI performance report for Q2 2022/23	Work Programme	Will Roper
	<b>Equality Plan</b>	To scrutinise progress on the WBC Equality Plan	Update	Emily Higson
	<b>Refugees and Asylum Seekers</b>	To consider the impact on the Borough of refugees and asylum seekers, including arrivals from Ukraine	Committee Request	Steve Moore
	<b>Customer Excellence</b>	To scrutinise progress on the corporate Customer Excellence Programme	Committee Request	Jackie Whitney
	<b>Website Development</b>	To input into the discovery phase for the development of the upgraded WBC website	Committee Request	Sally Watkins
	<b>O&amp;S Work Programmes</b>	To commence the consultation process for developing the O&S Work Programmes for 2023/24	Annual Item	Neil Carr
	<b>Executive Forward Programme</b>	To consider the Executive Forward Programme and identify any issues for Scrutiny	Regular Update	Neil Carr
	<b>O&amp;S Work Programmes 22/23</b>	To consider the work programmes for the four Overview and Scrutiny Committees	Work Programme	Neil Carr
	<b>Action Tracker</b>	To consider the regular Action Tracker report	Regular Update	Neil Carr

<b>DATE OF MEETING</b>	<b>ITEM</b>	<b>PURPOSE OF REPORT</b>	<b>REASON FOR CONSIDERATION</b>	<b>CONTACT OFFICER</b>
<b>22 February 2023</b>	<b>Q3 2022/23 Performance</b>	To consider the KPI performance report for Q3 2022/23	Work Programme	Will Roper
	<b>Waste Strategy</b>	To scrutinise progress relating to the emerging Waste Strategy	Work Programme	Richard Bisset
	<b>Adoption of Estate Infrastructure</b>	To scrutinise the process and reporting of the adoption of estate infrastructure	Committee Request	Neil Carr
	<b>Air Quality</b>	To scrutinise progress against the Council's Air Quality improvement targets	Committee Request	Steve Moore
	<b>O&amp;S Work Programmes 2023/24</b>	To consider progress on the consultation process for developing the O&S Work Programmes for 2023/24	Annual Item	Neil Carr
	<b>Executive Forward Programme</b>	To consider the Executive Forward Programme and identify any issues for Scrutiny	Regular Update	Neil Carr
	<b>O&amp;S Work Programmes 22/23</b>	To consider the work programmes for the four Overview and Scrutiny Committees	Work Programme	Neil Carr
	<b>Action Tracker</b>	To consider the regular Action Tracker report	Regular Update	Neil Carr

## CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2022/23 WORK PROGRAMME

DATE OF MEETING	ITEM	PURPOSE OF REPORT	REASON FOR CONSIDERATION	RESPONSIBLE OFFICER / CONTACT OFFICER
4 January 2023	<b>Travel Assistance Policy Implementation</b>	Update on outcomes from implementation of the Travel Assistance Policies (formerly Home to School Transport policies).	Challenge item	Children's Services / Sal Thirlway
	<b>Report and Q&amp;A with the Executive Member for Children's Services</b>	To receive an update from the Executive Member for Children's Services.	Regular update	Councillor Prue Bray
	<b>Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership Report</b>	To receive information about the work of the Partnership	Information item	Children's Services/ Helen Watson
	<b>Schools Causing Concern – Part 2</b>	To consider the work being undertaken to support schools causing concern in a part 2 session.	Standing item	Children's Services / Sal Thirlway
	<b>CSO&amp;S Forward Plan</b>	To consider the forward plan of the Committee.	Standing item	Democratic Services/ Luciane Bowker

128



<b>DATE OF MEETING</b>	<b>ITEM</b>	<b>PURPOSE OF REPORT</b>	<b>REASON FOR CONSIDERATION</b>	<b>RESPONSIBLE OFFICER / CONTACT OFFICER</b>
<b>22 March 2023</b>	<b>Key Performance Indicators</b>	To monitor the performance of the service.	Challenge item	Children's Services / Helen Watson
	<b>Report and Q&amp;A with the Executive Member for Children's Services</b>	To receive an update from the Executive Member for Children's Services.	Regular update	Councillor Prue Bray
	<b>Care Leavers CAMHS Provision Update</b>	To receive an update on the implementation and delivery of the CAMHS provision for Care Leavers	Challenge item	Children's Services / Adam Davis
	<b>Schools Causing Concern – Part 2</b>	To consider the work being undertaken to support schools causing concern in a part 2 session	Standing item	Children's Services/ Sal Thirlway
	<b>CSO&amp;S Forward Plan</b>	To consider the forward plan of the Committee	Standing item	Democratic Services/ Luciane Bowker

Unscheduled items:

- Fostering Transformation Update – January or March

## COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE OF MEETING	ITEM	PURPOSE OF REPORT	REASON FOR CONSIDERATION	CONTACT OFFICER
EXTRAORDINARY 29 Nov 2022	<b>MTFP</b>	To receive a strategic overview of the draft MTFP	Work programme	Graham Ebers
	<b>Bus Service Update</b>	To receive an update on bus services within the Borough	Committee Request	Rebecca Brooks
	<b>LCWIP Update</b>	To receive an update on the development of the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan.	Committee Request	Chris Easton
	<b>Work Programme</b>	To consider the work programme for the Committee for 2022-23	Standing Item	Democratic Services

130

DATE OF MEETING	ITEM	PURPOSE OF REPORT	REASON FOR CONSIDERATION	CONTACT OFFICER
19 Dec 2022	MTFP	To receive a strategic overview of the draft MTFP	Work programme	Graham Ebers
	<b>Arts &amp; Culture Strategy Update</b>	To receive an update on the Arts & Culture Strategy, including how every effort is being made to include as many groups and communities as possible	Work programme	Rhian Hayes
	<b>Work Programme</b>	To consider the work programme for the Committee for 2022-23	Standing Item	Democratic Services

**Task & Finish Group** - To investigate the differences between Council managed social housing provision and preferred housing association managed homes. Members are concerned that there is a two-tier system, with good services offered by WBC managed homes compared to that offered by housing associations.

## HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD PROGRAMME

DATE OF MEETING	ITEMS	PURPOSE OF REPORT	REASON FOR CONSIDERATION	RESPONSIBLE OFFICER / CONTACT OFFICER
25 January 2023	Autism Strategy	Challenge item	Challenge item	Adult Social Care
	NHS Continuing Healthcare	Update	Update	Lewis Willing
	Continence service	Update	Update	BHFT
	Healthwatch update	Challenge item	Challenge item	Healthwatch Wokingham Borough
	ASC KPIs	Challenge item	Challenge item	Matt Pope

132

DATE OF MEETING	ITEMS	PURPOSE OF REPORT	REASON FOR CONSIDERATION	RESPONSIBLE OFFICER / CONTACT OFFICER
27 March 2023	Healthwatch update	Challenge item	Challenge item	Healthwatch Wokingham Borough
	ASC KPIs	Challenge item	Challenge item	Matt Pope

**Currently unscheduled topics:**

- 2022 - Update on ICS and implications for Wokingham Borough
- South Central Ambulance Service
- Westcall
- Update on Burma Hills and Wokingham Medical Centre

## Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee – Action Tracker 2022/23

<b>O&amp;S Management Committee – 17 March 2022</b>		
Agenda Item	Action	Update
Minutes of Previous Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agreed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completed</li> </ul>
Q3 21/22 Performance Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional information requested by Members to be circulated to the Committee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completed</li> </ul>
Business Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrange a Member training session on the service and its impact on the organisation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing</li> </ul>
Tree Protection & Biodiversity Task & Finish Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recommendations to be submitted to the Executive</li> <li>• Recommendations on Ecological Emergency to be submitted to Council</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing - Oct</li> <li>• Ongoing - Sept</li> </ul>
Overview and Scrutiny Work Programmes 2022/23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refer work programmes to each O&amp;S Committee to allocate items to meetings</li> <li>• Any additional items to be considered at the June 2022 Management Committee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completed</li> <li>• Completed</li> </ul>
Council Motions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual update report to November meeting of the Management Committee</li> <li>• Details of Motions plus progress to be set out on the WBC website</li> <li>• Stand-alone report on air pollution to be submitted to the Management Committee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing</li> <li>• Ongoing</li> <li>• Ongoing – in work programme</li> </ul>

<b>O&amp;S Management Committee – 13 June 2022</b>		
Agenda Item	Action	Update
Minutes of Previous Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agreed</li> <li>• Performance follow-up data to be circulated to all O&amp;S Members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completed</li> <li>• Completed</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business Change training to be delivered</li> <li>• Council Motions – set out on WBC website – update to November meeting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing</li> <li>• Ongoing</li> </ul>
Q4 2021/22 Performance Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional information requested by Members to be circulated to all O&amp;S Members</li> <li>• HOSC recommended to consider suitability of KPIs and impact of increasing complexity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completed</li> <li>• Completed</li> </ul>
Scrutiny Improvement Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Executive-O&amp;S Protocol to be circulated to all O&amp;S Members</li> <li>• Committee to receive regular updates on changes to national legislation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completed</li> <li>• Ongoing</li> </ul>
Work Programme 2022-23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Members to notify Democratic Services of top three work programme priorities</li> <li>• Leader and Chief Executive to be invited to attend the July meeting</li> <li>• Member training programme to include Equalities and Climate Emergency</li> <li>• Community and Corporate O&amp;S to scrutinise the Local Plan, the LCWIP, Bus Strategy and Bus Improvement Enhanced Partnership</li> <li>• Work programme include item on Refugees and Asylum Seekers (September 2022)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completed</li> <li>• Completed</li> <li>• Ongoing</li> <li>• Completed</li> <li>• Completed</li> </ul>
Action Tracker Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include historic items not yet completed</li> <li>• Each O&amp;S Committee to develop its own Action Tracker</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing</li> <li>• Ongoing</li> </ul>

<b>O&amp;S Management Committee – 7 July 2022</b>		
Agenda Item	Action	Update
Minutes of Previous Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agreed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completed</li> </ul>
Leader of the Council and Chief Executive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invite Leader and CEX to future meetings (suggest 6 monthly)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing</li> </ul>
Climate Emergency O&S Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report to September meeting with more information on issues raised by Members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing</li> </ul>

Climate Emergency Action Plan – Progress Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Member comments to be fed into CEAP</li> <li>• Andy Croy/Sarah Kerr meet with officers to consider accuracy of data</li> <li>• Report on Barkham Solar Farm project to September meeting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completed</li> <li>• Completed</li> <li>• Ongoing</li> </ul>
Work Programme 2022-23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chair/Vice-Chair to agree draft work programme for discussion at next meeting</li> <li>• Draft terms of reference for Task &amp; Finish Group on corporate performance to next meeting</li> <li>• Consider potential item on the proposed Public Spaces Protection Order</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing</li> <li>• Ongoing</li> <li>• Ongoing</li> </ul>
Action Tracker Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Noted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completed</li> </ul>

<b>O&amp;S Management Committee – 5 October 2022</b>		
<b>Agenda Item</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Update</b>
Minutes of Previous Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agreed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completed</li> </ul>
Q1 2022/23 Performance Monitoring Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Circulate written responses to questions not answered at the meeting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing</li> </ul>
Climate Emergency O&S Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council recommended to agree to establish O&amp;S Committee</li> <li>• Set up first meeting of the Committee – 4 partnership + 3 Conservative Members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completed</li> <li>• Ongoing</li> </ul>
Barkham Solar Farm Business Case	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refer OSMC “in principle” support for project to the Executive</li> <li>• Recommend to Executive that WBC lobby the Government and Energy Companies re charges for grid connection</li> <li>• Circulate written responses to questions not answered at the meeting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completed</li> <li>• Completed</li> <li>• Ongoing</li> </ul>
Corporate Performance Task & Finish Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set up Task &amp; Finish Group – 3 Partnership + 2 Conservative Members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completed</li> </ul>

Work Programme 2022-23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrange extraordinary meeting to scrutinise utility companies – Thames water and SSE</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing</li> </ul>
Action Tracker Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Noted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completed</li> </ul>