

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE COUNCIL
HELD ON THURSDAY, 22 FEBRUARY 2024 FROM 7.30 PM TO 10.30 PM**

Members Present

Councillors: Beth Rowland (Mayor), Adrian Mather (Deputy Mayor), Jane Ainslie, Sam Akhtar, Keith Baker, Rachel Bishop-Firth, Laura Blumenthal, Prue Bray, Rachel Burgess, Anne Chadwick, Stephen Conway, David Cornish, Andy Croy, Phil Cunningham, David Davies, Lindsay Ferris, Michael Firmager, Paul Fishwick, Catherine Glover, Andrew Gray, David Hare, Peter Harper, Graham Howe, Chris Johnson, Clive Jones, Norman Jorgensen, Pauline Jorgensen, Sarah Kerr, Abdul Loyes, Morag Malvern, Charles Margetts, Rebecca Margetts, Andrew Mickleburgh, Jordan Montgomery, Stuart Munro, Alistair Neal, Stephen Newton, Ian Pittock, Jackie Rance, Ian Shenton, Imogen Shepherd-DuBey, Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey, Tony Skuse, Caroline Smith, Mike Smith, Wayne Smith, Bill Soane, Alison Swaddle, Marie-Louise Weighill and Shahid Younis

102. Apologies

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillors Gary Cowan, Peter Dennis, John Halsall and Pauline Helliard-Symons.

103. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 18 January 2024 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

104. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Andrew Gray declared a personal interest in Item 114.1 – Housing Revenue Account Budget 2024/25 – on the grounds that he owned a leasehold property in the Borough and the Council held the freehold.

105. Mayor's Announcements

The Mayor informed Members that she had attended the recent Chinese New Year celebrations in the Borough. During the traditional celebrations the Mayor had met a number of residents who had moved to the Borough from Hong Kong. These residents informed the Mayor that they had been made to feel welcome and had settled happily into the local community. This reflected well on the Borough and its residents.

106. Public Question Time

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

106.1 Paul Stevens asked the Executive Member for Planning and Local Plan the following question:

Residents are struggling to understand why the Local Plan Update (LPU) has still not been released, given that the public consultation on this proposal ended on the 24th January 2022, over two years ago. It has more recently been timetabled, by the

Executive Member for Planning and Local Plan, for publication in November 2023, yet we still have not seen it, nor do we have a new timetable for publication. When will we see the updated LPU?

Answer

As you are aware, the government published proposed reforms to national planning policy in December 2022 for consultation. Some of the proposals were on matters very important to our communities, especially the suggestion to allow past over delivery of housing to be taken into account when preparing local plans.

Our programme for the local plan, which proposed publication of the local plan in November, was based on when the government said it would confirm its national planning policy reforms. Unfortunately, the government missed its timetable several times, not confirming the changes in the Spring, or Autumn of 2023 but eventually in mid-December 2023.

Given the delay to publication of the expected national planning policy reforms, the alternative would have been to proceed without taking changes into account. Our judgement, like many other local authorities, was to wait for the government.

Now that the national policy reforms have been confirmed, Officers are actively reflecting on them and progressing work which will lead to a recommendation to Council on the local plan.

The formal programme will be updated through a future report to the Executive, however I would expect a report to be taken to Council on the next stage of the local plan in the summer.

Supplementary Question

You say that you want to give everyone the chance to get involved in the Planning process in your draft Statement of Community Involvement. Yet, whenever I come here and ask questions about the LPU I seem to be given excuses. Are you really interested in getting people involved in the Planning process?

Answer

Yes, and there will be that opportunity when it comes.

106.2 Peter Humphreys asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question:

The Coppid Beech P&R has been open for more than two months, I've passed it on at least two dozen occasions and am yet to see a single user. That's great in respect of carbon net zero but not so good for Council finances. In fairness, my wife did see a car in there, but it was a remote-controlled toy operated by a six-year-old – I suspect he didn't pay the parking fee.

Clearly the millions spent building the car park are lost but I'd like to know the full operating loss to date taking account of the budgeted income, actual income (if any) and running costs.

*Note: For Councillors' benefit a photo showing operating costs being incurred in the year **before** the P&R opened was included.*

Answer

Firstly, I wish to point out that on numerous occasions I highlighted to the previous administration that a Park & Ride facility located at Coppid Beech was a poor investment of funding. The business case was weak it required the car park to be 90% full to break even and only got through the benefit cost ratio scoring on potentially saving personal injury accidents between the Park & Ride and the town centre. Unfortunately, it went ahead, and this administration has now inherited this project.

Park & Ride sites have struggled since Covid nationally and locally and Mere oak, which was operating successfully before Covid, has gradually increased usage to 60% of its pre-pandemic level.

Coppid Beech usage as a car park for the frequent Lion 4 / X4 service into Wokingham and Bracknell town centres is anticipated to be low but opening it and to consider potential options for its usage were considered to be the best way forward at the moment.

Due to a change in working patterns the demand for park and ride nationally has reduced. Consequently, no income target was set for this financial year. To date there have been 78 parked vehicles using the site. 36% of users were using the EV charging bays. The cost of operating the site to date is £4,122, of which £1,343 is covered by grant funding. The largest proportion of cost to date relates to an annual maintenance charge for the parking machines. Income to date is £220, therefore the operating loss to the Council to date is £2,559.

When making the decision to open the park and ride it was made clear that if it is not used then it may close again. It is too early to decide on the site's future. However, it should be noted that there is month on month growth in the number of users parked. We are actively talking to partners and seeking opportunities to encourage further use of the site.

Supplementary Question

The gamble to build a speculative, zero use car park has clearly failed and I presume that there is no Plan B. The site has good bus and road connections and, thus, would be ideal for housing, thereby saving a few green fields from development. It should not be difficult to negotiate a change of use agreement and, maybe, a financial settlement with the developer who provided the current "white elephant". Is the Council planning to do this, or will the eyesore be preserved as a monument to folly?

Supplementary Answer

As I said in my response, we are considering all options at the present time.

106.3 John Sephton asked the Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure the following question. In Mr Sephton's absence, the question was put by Councillor Alison Swaddle:

Why can't the preliminary schedule for road cleaning be posted on the web site, which would enable the public to provide feedback. The routes and frequency should all be in accordance with both the consultation results from last year and the 2024-2025 budget. Aspirations are hard to monitor.

Answer

It is our intention to make the schedules available on our website. However, the new contract changes are still bedding in and we want to make sure that the revised routes have been fully tested over several cycles throughout the spring. We have the street cleansing data from the Autumn/Winter period which has been adjusted and we need to ensure the annual schedule is working efficiently before publishing this information. We expect the schedules to be uploaded in the summer.

107. Petitions

There were no petitions submitted.

108. Medium Term Financial Plan and Associated Reports:

The Council considered four reports which together comprised a single Agenda item:

- The Housing Revenue Account Budget 2024/25 as set out on Agenda pages 47 to 56;
- The Capital Programme and Strategy 2024/27 as set out on Agenda pages 57 to 96;
- The Treasury Management Strategy 2024/27 as set out on Agenda pages 97 to 150;
- The Medium-Term Financial Plan 2024/27 – including the Revenue Budget Submission 2024/25 as set out on Agenda pages 151 to 294.

The Mayor reminded Members that a total of 90 minutes would be set aside for the debate.

During the debate, it was moved by Councillor Prue Bray and seconded by Councillor Imogen Shepherd-Dubey that, in accordance with Rule 4.2.12.m, the time allowed for the Budget debate be extended by 20 minutes to allow all Members who wished to speak the opportunity to do so.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Budget debate be extended by 20 minutes.

108.1 Budget Statement by Councillor Stephen Conway the Leader of the Council

Madam Mayor,

We live in difficult times. Over the last two years, the Council has been confronted with the twin challenges of inflation and rising demand for statutory services, especially in adult and children's social care. Significant numbers of our residents are affected by the cost-of-living crisis, or grapple with serious mental and physical

health challenges. In these most testing of financial circumstances for all councils, we need to focus on two fundamental requirements – first, to do all we can to help those for whom life is a struggle now, and second, to lay the foundations for a better future.

Before I say more on how these two requirements have shaped the budget, I want to express my gratitude to the Chief Finance Officer, the senior officers in the Corporate Leadership Team, and staff across the Council for their hard work in preparing this budget. As always, Councillors are indebted to our professional officers, without whom we could do nothing. I am also grateful to my executive colleagues. While they have all played their part superbly, I particularly want to thank Imogen Shepherd-DuBey, the Executive Member for Finance.

My thanks are likewise due to the members of the all-party Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their thorough and thoughtful scrutiny of the draft budget. During the scrutiny process, which stretched over many months, Executive Members were required to answer questions on the budget lines for which they have responsibility. To reinforce that transparency, the approved budget papers will be published on the Council's website with a clear indication of which Executive Member is responsible for the different areas of the budget.

I am very grateful to members of the public for their support for our campaign for fairer funding by central government, especially the more than 1,000 Borough residents who wrote to the Secretary of State backing our cause. Sadly, the opposition did not support our campaign; indeed, they chose to defend the government's underfunding of Wokingham rather than stand up for Wokingham, as we have done. Opposition Members have persisted for many months with the politically motivated claim that Wokingham is well funded, conveniently forgetting that they argued the complete opposite when they ran the Council. They might want to ponder further whose side they are truly on – our residents' or the government's. Just as we are on our residents' side, so they are on ours. I'm pleased to say that their letter-writing was worth the time and effort: at the end of last month, we received the welcome news that the government had belatedly decided that, in view of our challenges with inflation and rising demand for statutory services, especially in adult and children's social care, we would be given an extra £1.6 million. Unfortunately, this extra core revenue funding, though it helps, is nowhere near what we need to tackle the pressures created by inflation and continuing increases in demand for social care.

Even after the government's latest contribution, we still have an extra savings challenge of £16 million for 2024/25. We intend to meet this challenge partly by using a small portion of the Council's earmarked reserves, which we believe can now safely be released, but mainly through further savings and efficiencies, such as reducing staff costs, including holding vacancies at a higher level than we have ever done before.

We would rather not have to increase the Council Tax by 4.99%, but experience shows us the folly of too heavy a reliance on reserves to cover current expenditure. Neighbouring Windsor and Maidenhead levied a nil percent Council Tax increase for several years, paying for services by running down reserves. Short-term popularity

was put above long-term financial viability. The Conservatives, who ran Windsor and Maidenhead until last May, presided over this folly, and the new Liberal Democrat administration is having to weather the current storm with hardly any reserves left to help. I should add that the government's calculations of our overall spending power assume that we will raise Council Tax to the cap that ministers have set.

The government, in short, has eased the pressure on us slightly, but that pressure remains very considerable. A great deal of hard work by officers and senior councillors has been required over many months to produce the balanced budget in the papers before you.

I want to return now to the two strategic imperatives that have underpinned that hard work. First, helping those who are most in need. We have acquired a new care home to increase our own provision for the elderly and infirm. We are repurposing some of the council's own properties to give the homeless a roof over their head and provide accommodation for care leavers. We are increasing the number of places within the Borough for children with special educational needs, mainly through the delivery of two new schools, funded by a successful bid for a government grant.

We are working alongside our partners in the voluntary and charitable sector to support local people during the current cost-of-living crisis. We have used a significant portion of the extra money received from government to relieve the pressure on adult and children's social care, removing from the draft budget the most challenging and risky of the savings targets in those directorates. We are also putting more money in the General Fund Balances – the Council's general use reserve – to be available to help those of our residents who are experiencing the greatest hardship, as well as to protect the Council against unforeseen additional costs in adult and children's services, where demand and the costs of meeting it can rise dramatically and without warning.

If the needs of the present are very much in our minds, we have also sought to build for the future. We have funded invest-to-save initiatives, including prevention and early intervention measures, which will lessen demand and, therefore, costs to the Council and Council Tax payers in years to come. We have also entered into major partnerships that will enable us to secure more external resources to help make our Borough a better place to live and work.

Our new care home will not only increase our capacity to deliver care for the elderly but will also help us to control future adult social care costs. Our repurposing some of the Council's estate to help house the homeless will reduce the bill for expensive emergency bed and breakfast accommodation. Our investment in new Special Educational Needs schools will increase in-Borough provision and so reduce the costs of home-to-school transport. Investment in our mainstream schools will allow them to expand, which will give the Borough's young people the education they deserve, as well as help to reduce pressure on the home-to-school transport budget. We have invested in a new solar farm at Barkham, which will connect to the grid in 2026, helping with our climate emergency agenda while generating a healthy income for the Council – about three times as much as the previous administration estimated.

In the pursuit of longer-term benefits, we have established a strategic partnership

with the University of Reading, which will enable us to draw on its expertise to help with our local Climate Emergency response, our Town Centre Strategy, and our education, employment and skills ambitions. The University and the Council will be able to bid jointly for funds for projects of common interest. At the same time, we have played a pivotal role in the creation of the Berkshire Prosperity Board, which brings together the six Berkshire unitary councils in a partnership that will be able to bid for substantial government funding for cross-authority infrastructure projects – the kind of funding we could not hope to acquire on our own.

There is not time for me to talk about other very positive features of this budget, but my Executive colleagues will be able to speak about some of the important initiatives in their own areas of responsibility.

Madam Mayor, I commend this compassionate, responsible, and forward-looking budget to colleagues. I hope all councillors will support it. While other councils are going to the wall, we are devoting additional resources to helping those most in need, putting our finances on a more sustainable footing, and at the same time laying the foundations for a better future for our Borough.

108.2 Budget Statement by Councillor Pauline Jorgensen, Leader of the Conservative Group

Madam Mayor,

I would like to start with an item of agreement. I too would like to thank all the officers for their help and hard work in producing this Budget. I would also like to thank the Executive Members for answering lots of questions in Scrutiny, which was very useful. Also the supporting officers, but...

In April Liberal Democrats promised residents they would “offer financial competence and compassion.” They have done neither.

Failing to deliver Bohunt Sixth Form, allowing building costs to spiral and telling teenagers in July they will need to find alternative Sixth Form places for September, is not competence or compassion. Telling businesses it is “too easy to blame Wokingham Borough Council” for a fall in shoppers when the Council has doubled parking charges and funded free Christmas bus travel to take shoppers out of the Borough is not competence or compassion. Letting flats at Carnival Hub sit empty and half finished, allowing building costs to increase is not competence and failing to finish these flats for people trying to get on to the housing ladder is not compassion. It is...

- failure to act,
- failure to take responsibility,
- failure to put Wokingham Borough residents above short term political opportunism.

Liberal Democrats are all talk and little action. Many successes, they’ve claimed come from work by previous Conservative administrations, with the Lib Dems always trying to claim the credit. Every poor choice, and Lib Dems blame everyone but

themselves. They repeatedly warn the Council is on the “brink of bankruptcy”. Yet last year, the Council’s Chief Financial Officer’s report said that the Council’s Finances were in good shape under the previous Conservative administration. In 2020, under the Conservatives, Wokingham Borough was rated in the top 20 for financial sustainability by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy.

When the Conservative Group left office, the Council’s Core Spending Power was £151 million. The Council’s Core Spending Power for this coming year is £174.8 million thanks to Council tax payers and increased government grants. With an extra £23.8 million the Lib Dems tell us they still don’t have enough. While we receive less revenue support grants than other areas, it’s fiction that Wokingham Borough Council has less money than other councils to spend on services. Our Core Spending Power per household is more than any other Council in Berkshire apart from Slough, and more than most Unitary Councils in England.

It is right for any administration to lobby Government for their area, but it is shameful to misrepresent the Council’s financial position to residents. And it is not right to cause alarm to residents and staff by peppering communications with references to bankruptcy and redundancy.

Despite having more money to spend than other councils, the Liberal Democrats can’t live within their means. They have lost control of the Council’s finances and are plugging the gaps by taking from reserves. Lib Dems made a big fuss about reserves when they were in opposition – now they plunder away. Last year to pay for their wheelie bins and this year to plug yet another budget gap. This demonstrates more than anything else that reserves were at a healthy level under the Conservatives, and the Liberal Democrats know it.

Over the last two years, the Liberal Democrats have made it clear where their spending priorities are, and they are the wrong priorities. Not surprising when this administration actively chooses not to listen to local people when they express a view. As Lib Dem Executive Members see it, in their words, “a consultation is not a referendum”.

How do Lib Dems ignore residents? Let’s recount the ways:

Consultation supporting all-out elections which would have cut costs significantly – IGNORED.

Petition from over 4,000 residents against doubling of car park charges – IGNORED.

Businesses crying out for a reversal of the parking charge increase – IGNORED.

Petition from over 800 residents to stop redevelopment of California Crossroads – IGNORED.

Consultation on bin collections, where only 24% per cent agreed they like fortnightly waste collections – IGNORED.

Petition from over 1700 residents on Hall Farm – IGNORED.

Petition of nearly 2,000 residents to keep weekly bin collections – IGNORED... and branded spurious.

Petition for a pedestrian crossing outside Crosfields School, delivered to the Council nearly a year ago - IGNORED.

And, in response to my question about a crossing after an accident, instead of acting, the Liberal Democrat Executive Member said “accidents do happen”

The administration gave the game away about their approach to our roads when the Executive Member for Highways said that they wanted to stop “inappropriate journeys”. Leave aside the breath-taking arrogance in thinking that councillors and officers have a right to decide what an appropriate journey is. It makes it plain for all to see that the Liberal Democrats are driven by an ideological obsession with stopping people from using cars and we see more of that tonight.

That’s why the Liberal Democrats doubled car park charges, despite clear opposition from residents. The refusal to change course demonstrates that this administration doesn’t care about the negative impact these charges have had on businesses or jobs. We’ve already made clear that a future Conservative administration would reverse these increases. The Liberal Democrats have also consistently underfunded road repairs, despite receiving about £1m extra from the Government to fix potholes this year. Under a Conservative administration, we would again increase spending on road repairs as we did when we had control, maximising available grants and renewing a focus on reducing congestion.

On waste, rather than investing more in enabling recycling, the Liberal Democrats have instead reduced household waste collections to every two weeks. It’s not a better service for residents, it’s not an efficiency because the lorry is coming every week without collecting all the bins, and it’s not guaranteed to produce any savings. A Conservative administration would reinstate weekly waste collection and expand the range of items included in recycling.

We also saw the farce last summer of the Liberal Democrats’ attempts to scrap some public bins and reduce collection of others. Of course, the inevitable result was rubbish blowing across our streets and parks and heaps of discarded dog poo bags. The administration only stepped in to put a stop to the ridiculous situation after the Conservatives forced their hand. But this Liberal Democrat administration has such contempt that it tried to claim that no decision had been made – even though bins across the Borough were earmarked for removal and covered over to prevent public use.

Two years on from the election of this Liberal Democrat administration, and where is your local plan? Failing to deliver a Local Plan is opening the Borough up to speculative development, and it’s costing taxpayers money to defend appeals and handle the consequences of inappropriate development.

We’re glad to see that this budget finally includes reductions in some HR costs, which we called for in last year’s budget, as well as a reduction in the use of consultants. However, it’s clear from the budget papers that where one use of consultants goes down, another increases for the resident’s parking zones project.

In the months following the elections in 2022 and 2023, the administration announced and implemented disastrous policies that they conveniently forgot to tell the public about before residents had their say at the ballot box. Increasing parking charges, scrapping public litter bins, and bin collection moving to fortnightly, were all absent from the Liberal Democrats’ manifestos and election literature. So if the Liberal Democrats are still in charge of this Council after the votes have been counted in May, what horrors will they have in store for summer 2024?

Ultimately, this Liberal Democrat Budget can't be passed without votes from Labour councillors. Labour's support for this Liberal Democrat administration may not be a formal coalition this year, but it is no less necessary to drive through unpopular policies which ignore residents' wishes and stoke up people's fears. Next time Labour try to distance themselves in a leaflet or on the doorstep or in this chamber from another Liberal Democrat disaster, remember that it was Labour that made it all possible.

Madam Mayor, last year's budget was a poor offering for residents. This year little has changed. It is less for more.

- Bins will be collected less often
- another real terms cut in road maintenance, despite an increase in Government funding
- cuts to street cleaning and grass cutting
- Loss of one leisure centre and failure to deliver Arborfield Swimming pool
- And a Local Plan they are too scared to show residents before the election.

In return, people will pay 4.99% more Council Tax, and fees and charges will rise by an eye-watering 8% - double the rate of inflation. The people of this Borough, the residents outside this building who daily have to live with the consequences of this Liberal Democrat administration, deserve better. In May, residents will get their chance to elect a Conservative administration that will always put the community first, will restore sound administration of the Council's finances, and will deliver the best for Wokingham Borough.

109. Housing Revenue Account Budget 2024/25

It was proposed By Councillor Stephen Conway and seconded by Councillor Prue Bray, that the Housing Revenue Account Budget, 2024/25, as set out on Agenda pages 47 to 56 be approved.

Voting on the item was as follows:

For	Against	Abstain
Jane Ainslie		
Sam Akhtar		
Keith Baker		
Rachel Bishop-Firth		
Laura Blumenthal		
Prue Bray		
Rachel Burgess		
Anne Chadwick		
Stephen Conway		
David Cornish		
Andy Croy		
Phil Cunnington		
David Davies		
Lindsay Ferris		
Michael Firmager		

Paul Fishwick		
Catherine Glover		
David Hare		
Peter Harper		
Graham Howe		
Chris Johnson		
Clive Jones		
Norman Jorgensen		
Pauline Jorgensen		
Sarah Kerr		
Abdul Loyes		
Morag Malvern		
Charles Margetts		
Rebecca Margetts		
Adrian Mather		
Andrew Mickleburgh		
Jordan Montgomery		
Stuart Munro		
Alistair Neal		
Stephen Newton		
Ian Pittock		
Jackie Rance		
Beth Rowland		
Ian Shenton		
Imogen Shepherd-Dubey		
Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey		
Tony Skuse		
Caroline Smith		
Mike Smith		
Wayne Smith		
Bill Soane		
Alison Swaddle		
Marie-Louise Weighill		
Shahid Younis		

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the Housing Revenue Account budget for 2024/25 (Appendix A) be approved;
- 2) Council house dwelling rents be increased by up to 7.7% effective from 1st April 2024, in line with the Council's Rent Setting Policy that was approved by Executive on 26th October 2023;
- 3) garage rents be increased by 8.33%, effective from April 2024;
- 4) Shared Equity Rents be increased by 7.7% effective from April 2024;

- 5) Tenant Service Charges be increased over the next three years to achieve full cost recovery, effective from April 2024;
- 6) the Housing Major Repairs (Capital) Programme for 2024/25, as set out in Appendix B, be approved;
- 7) sheltered room guest charges for 2024/25 remain unchanged at £9.50 per night per room.

110. Capital Programme and Strategy 2024-27

It was proposed By Councillor Stephen Conway and seconded by Councillor Prue Bray, that the Capital Programme and Strategy, 2024/27, as set out on Agenda pages 57 to 96 be approved.

Councillor Andy Croy requested that a separate vote be taken on Recommendation 5).

Voting on Recommendations 1), 2), 3), 4) and 6) was as follows:

For	Against	Abstain
Jane Ainslie	Sam Akhtar	
Rachel Bishop-Firth	Keith Baker	
Prue Bray	Laura Blumenthal	
Rachel Burgess	Anne Chadwick	
Stephen Conway	Phil Cunnington	
David Cornish	David Davies	
Andy Croy	Michael Firmager	
Lindsay Ferris	Peter Harper	
Paul Fishwick	Graham Howe	
Catherine Glover	Norman Jorgensen	
Andrew Gray	Pauline Jorgensen	
David Hare	Abdul Loyes	
Chris Johnson	Charles Margetts	
Clive Jones	Rebecca Margetts	
Sarah Kerr	Stuart Munro	
Morag Malvern	Jackie Rance	
Adrian Mather	Wayne Smith	
Andrew Mickleburgh	Bill Soane	
Jordan Montgomery	Alison Swaddle	
Alistair Neal	Shahid Younis	
Stephen Newton		
Ian Pittock		
Beth Rowland		
Ian Shenton		
Imogen Shepherd-Dubey		
Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey		
Caroline Smith		
Mike Smith		

Marie-Louise Weighill		
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Voting on Recommendation 5) was as follows:

For	Against	Abstain
Jane Ainslie	Rachel Burgess	Sam Akhtar
Rachel Bishop-Firth	Andy Croy	Keith Baker
Prue Bray	Andrew Gray	Laura Blumenthal
Stephen Conway	Tony Skuse	Anne Chadwick
David Cornish	Marie-Louise Weighill	Phil Cunnington
Lindsay Ferris		David Davies
Paul Fishwick		Michael Firmager
Catherine Glover		Peter Harper
David Hare		Graham Howe
Chris Johnson		Norman Jorgensen
Clive Jones		Pauline Jorgensen
Sarah Kerr		Abdul Loyes
Morag Malvern		Charles Margetts
Adrian Mather		Rebecca Margetts
Andrew Mickleburgh		Stuart Munro
Jordan Montgomery		Jackie Rance
Alistair Neal		Wayne Smith
Stephen Newton		Bill Soane
Ian Pittock		Alison Swaddle
Beth Rowland		Shahid Younis
Ian Shenton		
Imogen Shepherd-Dubey		
Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey		
Caroline Smith		
Mike Smith		

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the Capital Strategy for 2024 - 2027 (Appendix A), be approved;
- 2) the three-year Capital Programme for 2024/27 (Appendix B) be approved, noting that approval is sought for 2024/25 schemes only;
- 3) the draft Vision for Capital investment over the next five years (Appendix C), be approved;
- 4) the use of developer contribution funding (S106 and CIL) for Capital projects as set out in Appendix D, be approved - approval is sought up to the project budget.
- 5) the Deputy Chief Executive (S151 Officer) exercise, where possible, the flexible use of Capital receipts policy, as issued by the Secretary of State under section

15(1)(a) of the Local Government Act 2003;

- 6) delegation for the delivery (including awarding and signing of the contract) of the South Wokingham Distributor Road to the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Place & Growth, in agreement with Lead Member for Finance and Lead Member for Highways, be approved, subject to the scheme being fully funded from Homes England Grant and Developer Contributions.

111. Treasury Management Strategy 2024-27

It was proposed By Councillor Stephen Conway and seconded by Councillor Prue Bray, that the Treasury Management Strategy, 2024/27, as set out on Agenda pages 97 to 150 be approved.

Voting on the item was as follows:

For	Against	Abstain
Jane Ainslie	Sam Akhtar	
Rachel Bishop Firth	Keith Baker	
Prue Bray	Laura Blumenthal	
Rachel Burgess	Anne Chadwick	
Stephen Conway	Phil Cunnington	
David Cornish	David Davies	
Andy Croy	Michael Firmager	
Lindsay Ferris	Peter Harper	
Paul Fishwick	Graham Howe	
Catherine Glover	Norman Jorgensen	
Andrew Gray	Pauline Jorgensen	
David Hare	Abdul Loyes	
Chris Johnson	Charles Margetts	
Clive Jones	Rebecca Margetts	
Sarah Kerr	Stuart Munro	
Morag Malvern	Jackie Rance	
Adrian Mather	Wayne Smith	
Andrew Mickleburgh	Bill Soane	
Jordan Montgomery	Alison Swaddle	
Alistair Neal	Shahid Younis	
Stephen Newton		
Ian Pittock		
Beth Rowland		
Ian Shenton		
Imogen Shepherd-Dubey		
Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey		
Tony Skuse		
Caroline Smith		
Mike Smith		
Marie-Louise Weighill		

RESOLVED: That Council note the Treasury Management Strategy as set out in

Appendix A including the following additional appendices:

- Prudential Indicators (Appendix B);
- Annual Investment Strategy 2024/25 (Appendix C);
- Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) policy (Appendix D).

112. Medium Term Financial Plan 2024-2027 including Revenue Budget Submission 2024/25

It was proposed By Councillor Stephen Conway and seconded by Councillor Prue Bray, that the Medium Term Financial Plan, 2024/27, including the Revenue Budget Submission, 2024/25, as set out on Agenda pages 151 to 294, be approved.

It was proposed by Councillor Tony Skuse and seconded by Councillor Andrew Gray, that a new Recommendation 1) be inserted into the recommendations in the report, as follows:

- 1) approve an additional item in the appropriate part of the MTFP: “Woodley Town Centre CCTV System”, to the value of £15,000. The £15,000 matches the £15,000 of funding secured from the Police and Crime Commissioner’s office. The consequential of this amendment to be reflected in all other financial reports.

Councillor Stephen Conway confirmed that the proposed amendment was acceptable.

In line with the requirements of the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) England (Amendment) Regulations 2014, a recorded vote was taken. Individual votes were taken on each of the, now four, Recommendations as follows:

Recommendation 1)

Approve an additional item in the appropriate part of the MTFP: “Woodley Town Centre CCTV System”, to the value of £15,000. The £15,000 matches the £15,000 of funding secured from the Police and Crime Commissioner’s office. The consequential of this amendment to be reflected in all other financial reports.

For	Against	Abstain
Jane Ainslie		
Sam Akhtar		
Keith Baker		
Rachel Bishop-Firth		
Laura Blumenthal		
Prue Bray		
Rachel Burgess		
Anne Chadwick		
Stephen Conway		
David Cornish		
Andy Croy		

Phil Cunnington		
David Davies		
Lindsay Ferris		
Michael Firmager		
Paul Fishwick		
Catherine Glover		
Andrew Gray		
David Hare		
Peter Harper		
Graham Howe		
Chris Johnson		
Clive Jones		
Norman Jorgensen		
Pauline Jorgensen		
Sarah Kerr		
Abdul Loyes		
Morag Malvern		
Charles Margetts		
Rebecca Margetts		
Adrian Mather		
Andrew Mickleburgh		
Jordan Montgomery		
Stuart Munro		
Alistair Neal		
Stephen Newton		
Ian Pittock		
Jackie Rance		
Beth Rowland		
Ian Shenton		
Imogen Shepherd-Dubey		
Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey		
Tony Skuse		
Caroline Smith		
Mike Smith		
Wayne Smith		
Bill Soane		
Alison Swaddle		
Marie-Louise Weighill		
Shahid Younis		

Recommendation 2)

The Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2024/27, included in the Budget Submission for 2024/25 and the Summary of Budget Movements (SOBM), be approved.

For	Against	Abstain
Jane Ainslie	Sam Akhtar	
Rachel Bishop-Firth	Keith Baker	
Prue Bray	Laura Blumenthal	
Rachel Burgess	Anne Chadwick	
Stephen Conway	Phil Cunnington	
David Cornish	David Davies	
Andy Croy	Michael Firmager	
Lindsay Ferris	Peter Harper	
Paul Fishwick	Graham Howe	
Catherine Glover	Norman Jorgensen	
Andrew Gray	Pauline Jorgensen	
David Hare	Abdul Loyes	
Chris Johnson	Charles Margetts	
Clive Jones	Rebecca Margetts	
Sarah Kerr	Stuart Munro	
Morag Malvern	Jackie Rance	
Adrian Mather	Wayne Smith	
Andrew Mickleburgh	Bill Soane	
Jordan Montgomery	Alison Swaddle	
Alistair Neal	Shahid Younis	
Stephen Newton		
Ian Pittock		
Beth Rowland		
Ian Shenton		
Imogen Shepherd-Dubey		
Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey		
Tony Skuse		
Caroline Smith		
Mike Smith		
Marie-Louise Weighill		

Recommendation 3)

The Statutory Resolution that sets out the 2024/25 Council Tax levels (as set out in Appendix A to the report) be approved.

For	Against	Abstain
Jane Ainslie		Sam Akhtar
Rachel Bishop-Firth		Keith Baker
Prue Bray		Laura Blumenthal
Rachel Burgess		Anne Chadwick
Stephen Conway		Phil Cunnington
David Cornish		David Davies
Andy Croy		Michael Firmager
Lindsay Ferris		Peter Harper

Paul Fishwick		Graham Howe
Catherine Glover		Norman Jorgensen
Andrew Gray		Pauline Jorgensen
David Hare		Abdul Loyes
Chris Johnson		Charles Margetts
Clive Jones		Rebecca Margetts
Sarah Kerr		Stuart Munro
Morag Malvern		Jackie Rance
Adrian Mather		Wayne Smith
Andrew Mickleburgh		Bill Soane
Jordan Montgomery		Alison Swaddle
Alistair Neal		Shahid Younis
Stephen Newton		
Ian Pittock		
Beth Rowland		
Ian Shenton		
Imogen Shepherd-Dubey		
Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey		
Tony Skuse		
Caroline Smith		
Mike Smith		
Marie-Louise Weighill		

Recommendation 4)

In the event that there are any changes to the provisional precept of the Fire Authority or parishes, arising from their precept setting meetings being held before the end of February 2024, the Deputy Chief Executive (S151 Officer) is delegated authority to enact all relevant changes to the MTFP, Statutory Resolution and Council Tax levels.

For	Against	Abstain
Jane Ainslie		
Sam Akhtar		
Keith Baker		
Rachel Bishop-Firth		
Laura Blumenthal		
Prue Bray		
Rachel Burgess		
Anne Chadwick		
Stephen Conway		
David Cornish		
Andy Croy		
Phil Cunnington		
David Davies		
Lindsay Ferris		

Michael Firmager		
Paul Fishwick		
Catherine Glover		
Andrew Gray		
David Hare		
Peter Harper		
Graham Howe		
Chris Johnson		
Clive Jones		
Norman Jorgensen		
Pauline Jorgensen		
Sarah Kerr		
Abdul Loyes		
Morag Malvern		
Charles Margetts		
Rebecca Margetts		
Adrian Mather		
Andrew Mickleburgh		
Jordan Montgomery		
Stuart Munro		
Alistair Neal		
Stephen Newton		
Ian Pittock		
Jackie Rance		
Beth Rowland		
Ian Shenton		
Imogen Shepherd-Dubey		
Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey		
Tony Skuse		
Caroline Smith		
Mike Smith		
Wayne Smith		
Bill Soane		
Alison Swaddle		
Marie-Louise Weighill		
Shahid Younis		

RESOLVED That:

- 1) an additional item in the appropriate part of the MTFP:
“Woodley Town Centre CCTV System”, to the value of £15,000, be approved.
The £15,000 matches the £15,000 of funding secured from the Police and Crime Commissioner’s office. The consequential of this amendment to be reflected in all other financial reports.

- 2) the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2024/27, including the Budget

Submission for 2024/25 and the Summary of Budget Movements (SOBM), be approved;

- 3) the Statutory Resolution that sets out the 2024/25 Council Tax levels (as set out in Appendix A to the report), be approved;
- 4) in the event that there are any changes to the provisional precept of the Fire Authority or parishes, arising from their precept setting meetings being held before the end of February 2024, the Deputy Chief Executive (S151 Officer) is delegated authority to enact all relevant changes to the MTFP, Statutory Resolution and Council Tax levels.

Note: The Statutory Resolution is attached as an Appendix to the Council Minutes.

113. Council Plan Extension 2024-25

Council considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 295 to 324, which set out a proposal to extend the current Council Plan for one year and the rationale for making changes to the plan.

The report stated that the Council Plan set priorities and direction for its work. As the plan needed to be aligned to the emerging Community Vision (expected in June 2024) there would be a gap between the current plan ending and a new plan starting. The transitional (interim) Council Plan would take effect from 1 April 2024 and would be published alongside a SMART delivery plan for 2024 /25. The proposed transitional Council Plan 2024/25 was appended to the report.

It was proposed by Councillor Stephen Conway and seconded by Councillor Prue Bray, that the recommendation in the report be approved.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Council Plan extension, 2024/25, be approved.

114. Establishment of a Joint Committee - The Berkshire Prosperity Board

Council considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 325 to 333, which set out proposals to establish a Joint Committee (to be known as the Berkshire Prosperity Board). The aim of the Board was enable the Berkshire Authorities to transform Berkshire's productivity through responsive, agile collaboration. This would involve presenting a stronger case for investment, collective lobbying of the Government and other agencies and developing an advantageous position in readiness for potential devolution proposals.

The report set out the proposed constitution and governance structure for the Board and sought authority for the Chief Executive to engage in developing a legally binding agreement with the other Berkshire Authorities. It was proposed that the Council act as the Lead Authority (Accountable Body) for the Board. Subject to approval, the first Board meeting would take place in May 2024. The Board would meet four times a year with each of the Berkshire Authorities leading on one of the proposed thematic workstreams – health and inequalities, education and skills,

affordable housing, sector development, strategic infrastructure and Net Zero.

It was proposed by Councillor Stephen Conway and seconded by Councillor Prue Bray, that the recommendations in the report be approved.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

RESOLVED That Council approve:

- 1) the establishment of a fully constituted Joint Committee (to be known as the Berkshire Prosperity Board) from May 2024 to deliver a Berkshire-wide vision for inclusive green and sustainable economic prosperity;
- 2) the proposed constitution for the Joint Committee as set out in Appendix A - Functions and Procedure Rules for a Joint Committee, Appendix B - Responsibilities of the accountable body and Appendix C - Governance structure is approved subject to review by each member Council within 6 months;
- 3) that the Chief Executive be delegated to reach a legally binding Agreement between the member Authorities setting out the supporting arrangements and responsibilities between the Authorities, particularly that between the Lead Authority, known as the Accountable Body and the other member Authorities and go through the relevant democratic process if required. Such Agreement also to be approved by the s151 Officer.
- 4) that Wokingham Borough Council act as the Accountable Body for the Prosperity Board.

115. Approval of a Period of Absence from Meetings by Councillor Gary Cowan

Council considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 335 to 336, which sought approval for a period of absence from meetings by Councillor Gary Cowan.

The report stated that, if a Member failed to attend any meeting of the relevant Authority throughout a period of six consecutive months, they ceased to be a Member of the Authority (subject to certain exceptions). However, the Authority could approve a Member's non-attendance for specified reasons.

Due to ill health, Councillor Cowan had not been able to attend any meetings since his attendance at Council on 21 September 2023. It was uncertain whether Councillor Cowan would be able to attend any meetings in the upcoming months. Consequently a request had been submitted to approve an extension to the six month rule to enable Councillor Cowan to remain in office until his current term of office ended in May 2024.

It was proposed by Councillor Stephen Conway and seconded by Councillor Prue Bray, that the recommendations in the report be approved.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

RESOLVED That Council:

- 1) note that Councillor Gary Cowan has not been able to attend meetings of the Council in person, due to ill health, since his attendance at Council on 21 September 2023;
- 2) approve Councillor Cowan's non-attendance at meetings of the Council, due to ill-health, until his current term of office ends in May 2024, pursuant to Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972.

116. Re-Designation of Polling Places

Council considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 337 to 346, which gave details of proposed changes to designated Polling Places in advance of the elections to be held on 2 May 2024.

The report stated that alternative venues were required to replace two previously agreed locations – St John's Ambulance HQ, Woodley and Whiteknights Primary School, Shinfield.

It was proposed by Councillor Stephen Conway and seconded by Councillor Prue Bray, that the recommendations in the report be approved.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

RESOLVED That:

- 1) St John's Church, Woodley be designated as the polling place for polling district KCEb and KDEb, in Bulmershe and Coronation Ward, instead of the St John's Ambulance, HQ, Woodley;
- 2) Shinfield Players Theatre be designated as the polling place for polling district SAE2a, in Shinfield Ward, instead of Whiteknights Primary School;
- 3) the Assistant Director Governance be delegated authority, in consultation with the relevant Ward Member(s) to re-designate any polling place in the Borough which becomes unavailable.