

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF  
THE COUNCIL  
HELD ON THURSDAY, 23 MAY 2024 FROM 7.30 PM TO 9.55 PM**

**Members Present**

Councillors: Adrian Mather (Mayor), Carol Jewell (Deputy Mayor), Rohit Ahlawat, Jane Ainslie, Sam Akhtar, Martin Alder, Basit Alvi, Martijn Andrea, Mark Ashwell, Joseph Barley, Sarah Bell, Greg Bello, Adrian Betteridge, Rachel Bishop-Firth, Prue Bray, Marc Brunel-Walker, Rachel Burgess, Rob Comber, Stephen Conway, Chris Cooke, Dave Edmonds, George Evans, Paul Fishwick, Alex Freeney, Kay Gilder, Catherine Glover, Andrew Gray, Katrin Harding, David Hare, Peter Harper, Moses Iyengunmwena, Melanie De Jong, Pauline Jorgensen, Charles Margetts, Rebecca Margetts, Jordan Montgomery, Stuart Munro, Nagi Nagella, Majid Nagra, Stephen Newton, Andy Ng Siu-Hong, Beth Rowland, Yusra Salman, Imogen Shepherd-DuBey, Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey, Caroline Smith, Wayne Smith, Vishal Srinivasan, Alison Swaddle, Lou Timlin, Séona Turtle, Marie-Louise Weighill and Shahid Younis

**1. Election of Mayor**

Councillor Beth Rowland, the current Mayor, welcomed the recently elected Members.

The Mayor thanked all those who had invited her to their events during her time in Office. She detailed some of the highlights of her time as Mayor, such as the singers at Gorse Ride, interactions with schools and the Schools Trial Competition. She went on to thank the Deputy Mayor, her consorts, and officers for their help and hard work over the year.

Councillor Stephen Conway thanked Councillor Rowland for her work as Mayor.

The Mayor invited Alexander Barfield, the High Sherrif of Berkshire to give Council an introduction to his role.

The Mayor called for nominations for the office of Mayor for the 2024/25 Municipal Year. It was proposed by Councillor Mark Ashwell and seconded by Councillor Basit Alvi that Councillor Adrian Mather be elected as Mayor for the 2024/25 Municipal Year.

It was proposed by Councillor Pauline Jorgensen and seconded by Councillor Charles Margetts that Councillor Alison Swaddle be elected as Mayor for the 2024/25 Municipal Year.

Upon being put to the vote it was:

**RESOLVED:** That Councillor Adrian Mather be elected as Mayor for the 2024/25 Municipal Year.

Councillor Mather made the statutory acceptance of office pursuant to Section 83 of the Local Government Act 1972. He thanked Council for electing him as Mayor and the outgoing Mayor for her support.

## **2. Appointment of Deputy Mayor**

The Mayor called for nominations for the office of Deputy Mayor for the 2024/25 Municipal Year.

It was proposed by Councillor Beth Rowland and seconded by Councillor Prue Bray that Councillor Carol Jewell be appointed as Deputy Mayor for the 2024/25 Municipal Year.

It was proposed by Councillor Pauline Jorgensen and seconded by Councillor Charles Margetts that Councillor Shahid Younis be appointed as Deputy Mayor for the 2024/25 Municipal Year.

Upon being put to the vote it was:

**RESOLVED:** That Councillor Carol Jewell be appointed as Deputy Mayor for the 2024/25 Municipal Year.

Councillor Jewell made the statutory acceptance of office pursuant to Section 83 of the Local Government Act 1972. Councillor Jewell thanked Council for appointing her to the office of Deputy Mayor.

At this point in the meeting, Councillor Stephen Conway congratulated the new Mayor and Deputy Mayor. He went on to thank Phil Crieghton, editor of Wokingham Today, who was attending his final Council meeting, and wished him well in his future endeavours.

## **3. Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The Minutes of the meeting of Council held on 21 March 2024 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

## **4. Apologies**

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillor Norman Jorgensen.

## **5. Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Stephen Newton declared a Personal Interest in Item 14 Appointment to Outside Bodies, on the grounds that he was nominated to be a representative on the Berkshire Pension Advisory Panel, and his wife was a member of the Pension Fund.

## **6. Returning Officer's Report on May 2024 Elections**

The Council considered a report from the Returning Officer, which gave details of the results of the local elections held on 2 May 2024.

The report outlined the election process, the results and the turnout for each Borough ward contested.

It was proposed by Councillor Imogen Shepherd-Dubey and seconded by Councillor Stephen Conway that the report of the Returning Officer be noted.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That the report of the Returning Officer be noted.

**7. Mayor's or Head of Paid Service Announcements**

It was noted that the Mayor's charity would be First Days. Emma Cantrell, CEO, gave a brief speech about the work of the charity.

**8. Statements from the Leader of the Council/Executive Members  
Leader of the Council, Councillor Stephen Conway:**

After yesterday's announcement of a General Election on 4<sup>th</sup> July, I expect many councillors' minds will be elsewhere. One of our number, the Leader of the Opposition, is herself a candidate, and two former colleagues who recently stood down as councillors will also be campaigning to become MPs, Clive Jones in Wokingham and Tahir Maher in Woodley and Earley. Even so, I hope, perhaps a vain hope, we can refrain from firing the opening shots of the General Election in the Chamber this evening and focus instead on the Council and our responsibilities as councillors.

The Council's Executive is smaller this year than the last. Executive responsibilities have been redrawn in places, as you can see from the paper before you. There is considerable continuity in personnel. Rachel Bishop-Firth, Prue Bray, Paul Fishwick, David Hare, and Imogen Shepherd DuBey remain in post. The most significant change is that two new colleagues are joining the Executive – Mark Ashwell as Executive Member for Economic Development, Sport, Leisure and the Arts, and Jordan Montgomery as Executive Member for Environment and Climate Emergency. I am delighted to have them on board, and I know that they will make a major contribution. I should also explain that as Lindsay Ferris stood down at the election, I decided that it would be unfair to ask somebody to take on the Planning Executive role, when we hope to bring the new Local Plan to Council for approval as soon as July. I have therefore added Planning to my own portfolio, at least for this year.

I want to take this opportunity to thank council officers at all levels of the organisation for their hard work and commitment. We councillors owe them a great debt of gratitude. They are one of the Council's greatest assets. I hope all councillors will always in their language and in their actions, respect officers' professional judgement, even when they dissent from it.

We have just been through a hard fought and tense local election campaign. While my preference, and I think that of most voters, is for a positive approach, there is no denying that elections usually involve pointed attacks on opponents and generate discord rather than harmony. My appeal to the Opposition is that we put the local elections behind us, and try after 4<sup>th</sup> July, if not before, to work together for a better Wokingham that we all want. I know from personal experience over many years, that opposition can be deeply frustrating, but the Opposition can play an important role, a noble role, especially if Opposition councillors are willing to engage with the ruling group, positively, responsibly and constructively.

The Council lost some very dedicated councillors of all parties in these recent elections, but it also gained many new councillors, 27 of them in fact, who will bring a fresh perspective and new ideas, and I welcome that very much. As Leader of

Council, I will do all I can to create conditions in which councillors of all parties can play a meaningful part in policy making. I want to call on all the experience and all the talent available to help us make the best decisions for the benefit of the people and the businesses of the Borough. I hope that the Council's overview and scrutiny committees can build upon the successes of last year when they played an important role in changing policies proposed to the Executive. Early involvement of the overview and scrutiny committees was key to their playing a constructive part, and I hope to see more of that in this coming year. I will try, as I did in the last municipal year to work collaboratively with councillors of other parties, and in that spirit, I have offered Chairs and Vice Chairs of various council committees to the Labour and the Conservative Groups. I have also sought to establish a new principle in the allocation of Outside Bodies representation. In the past this has nearly always been on a winner takes all basis. I want to allocate places on Outside Bodies in a fairer way. When an Outside Body is associated with a specific geographical area that is represented on the Council by one party only, then that party should have the right to nominate the Council representative.

My own priorities are ones that I hope councillors of all parties can sign up to. First, sound Council finances, without which the Council can do nothing positive in the years to come. There will be more work to reduce future budgetary pressures through prevention, early intervention and invest to save measures, such as increasing in Borough provision for Special Educational Needs, which will cut our future home to school transport costs. We will also be pursuing new ways to create extra income, such as our own solar farms. The new one in Barkham went fully operational and will produce nearly £3million of revenue a year to use on services for residents and businesses. Second, focusing help on those who need it most, such as the frail elderly, adults with learning difficulties, and children with disabilities, as well as those experiencing acute hardship. Third, working with others in the voluntary and charitable sector, faith groups, business, education, health care and the Youth Council, and different local authorities to pull knowledge, experience, and resources to tackle the challenges we face, together. To give just one example, we hope to call on the Henley Business School and the new Berkshire Prosperity Board to help us to formulate a Town Centre Strategy. The days when the Council could do it all on its own have gone. Constrained finances are encouraging us to do what I have always felt we should do anyway, embrace the opportunities that working with other can bring. My vision is of a greener, and more prosperous Wokingham where everyone, whoever they are, can play their part. Just as we need to tap the talents, all of the talents, in this Council Chamber, so we need to tap all of the talents in our community. I will work with anyone who shares this vision.

**Leader of the Opposition Councillor Pauline Jorgensen:**

At our last Council we said goodbye to a number of councillors standing down. I would like to add to that, my thanks to some of the councillors of all parties who work really hard, and lost their seats in the elections, for various reasons. The electorate is an interesting beast, and you can never guarantee the result of an election. So, I would like to thank all the hard working, experienced councillors that we have lost in the last election. I would also like to say I have the happier task of welcoming new councillors. In the Conservative group, I want to welcome Joseph, George, Yusra, Moses, Rohit, Kay, Vishal, Dave and Sèona. Well done in your elections and I look forward to working with you.

I would also like to thank Beth, the previous Mayor for her service. I really clearly remember her having her head shaved in Woodley Precinct not long after she became Mayor. I think she has done a very good job in the community, and I would like to thank her for her service and her efforts.

And finally, I would like to thank the High Sherrif for a fascinating speech. I have learnt more about High Sheriffs than I ever thought I would hear. And of course, Emma Cantrell, who does a fantastic job with First Days, and I would really encourage all the councillors to take her up on her offer. I have been to speak to her. I have tried to help, and I think it is a really great charity. I encourage people to go along and see what they do.

Despite the new ward boundaries, the Conservative group still remains by far the second largest in the Council. Across the Borough our vote share went up last year, and for the third time Wokingham Borough voters have delivered a council with no overall control, despite much anticipated predictions that the Liberal Democrat administration would gain a majority. Indeed, we understand that Ed Davey had to relocate his last-minute election rally away from Wokingham when it became clear that the Liberal Democrats would not win a majority.

Over the last two years the Conservative group has voiced its concerns about the Administration's policies. We have called for action on stopping unsustainable development, and for the Liberal Democrats to publish their draft Local Plan. We have opposed the introduction of fortnightly bin collections and have successfully reversed the reduction in the emptying of public litter bins. We have called for greater investment in road repairs and have repeatedly represented the views of residents who oppose the punishing hikes in parking charges. This was reflected in the outcome of the election.

In Earley where residents were concerned about fortnightly bin collections and the state of the roads, we gained two seats. In Woodley where residents were most concerned about the cost of parking and the state of the roads. In Barkham and Arborfield, the local people were concerned about the lack of action on development and reacted angrily to the Liberal Democrat and Labour cynical decision not to publish the draft Local Plan until after residents had voted. Residents there, and in Earley, do not want the development at Hall Farm, and we have been clear that we will oppose it. Finchampstead residents told us that they were worried about development as well, but they were also outraged about the incompetence of the removal of local litter bins last summer, and also for that matter, about California Crossroads. The Liberal Democrats have previously insisted that bins were collected weekly, under their new policy, when they knew full well that household waste and non food recycling, which most people class as bins, will not be taken away every week, and residents know this too. We won all three seats in Finchampstead.

The Liberal Democrat Administration and the Labour group, whose councillors provide them with a working majority, must recognise that they need change direction. I believe the Borough needs a majority Conservative administration, but while the Liberal Democrats remain in power, our duty as Conservatives is to try and

push the Administration on the right course that delivers for residents. We will continue to offer robust scrutiny as we have done. Over the last few years, the reaction of Liberal Democrats to questioning, challenges, and representation of residents' concerns has been confected outrage, deflection, and attempts to reduce questions. They tried to remove 150 litter bins without consultation, and then claim no decision had been made. Petitions from residents have been ignored or branded as spurious. Legitimate criticism has been called 'fake news,' and in July 2022 they admitted that they want to be able to control the debate. Even when this Council voted to overturn fortnightly bin collections, the Executive simply dismissed it and ploughed on anyway.

As a responsible Opposition we also believe in providing support, and working together where we agree. This Council needs to continue pressing for housing numbers that are sustainable for Wokingham Borough. We had success when we were in power in reducing the housing targets, and we will support future efforts, even though my offer was ignored by the previous Leader. I am sure Councillor Conway may have a different approach. We are deeply concerned about Keir Starmer's proposals to roll back protection on the Green Belt, effectively overriding local planning decisions, and what that may mean for Wokingham. Residents are the best judge of what housing is needed in their area, not Ministers and officials of any persuasion in Whitehall. I am also happy that a Conservative Member will become Vice Chair for the Licensing and Appeals Committee.

The Conservatives believe in putting residents at the heart of Council policy. What we want, and what local people want, are strong finances, action on planning, working with communities, ensuring people are free to choose, not forced to meet ideological whims of politicians. We will continue to fight for this in Opposition, building on our work in the last two years of being the voice of residents on the Council, and we will continue to put forward a positive plan for making Wokingham an even better place for residents, local businesses, and future generations.

## **9. Public Question Time**

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

### **9.1 Andrew Mickleburgh asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:**

#### **Question**

Individuals and families move to and leave our Borough to settle elsewhere for many reasons. They are also very heterogeneous. For instance, some may have moved to or from another local authority. Others have moved from or to a different country. Many are children, some of whom have special educational needs or disabilities (SEND). Some 'new arrivals' may already have an Education and Health Care Plan from their previous Local Authority. Those from abroad sometimes have a close equivalent, fully recognized by their previous country of origin.

What processes are in place to ensure that families and children in both of the above categories who are now residents of our Borough can access uninterrupted SEND support that they had been assessed as necessary in their previous place of

residence?

**Answer**

We are proud that Wokingham Borough is regarded as a great place to live and learn, and this draws families to live here.

When a child arrives in Wokingham and is known to us, the local authority's school admissions team follow the national school admissions code and allocate school places quickly and fairly. If a pupil moves out of the Borough, officers from Wokingham will notify and liaise with the other local authority where a child moves into to make sure the school place needs of the child concerned is known to and followed up by them.

With regard to pupils with an EHC Plan, there is a statutory process that both the former ('old') local authority and Wokingham Borough have to act on which is acted on by the SEND Team) have to follow, which is articulated most clearly in the SEND Code of Practice (January 2015).

Under this guidance, where a child or young person with an EHC Plan moves into Wokingham Borough, the old local authority must transfer the Plan to us, either on the day of the move, or within 15 working days of when the family notified them of the move.

This plan is received by the SEND Team, and we begin a process of either reviewing the Plan or completing a new EHC needs assessment, in the rare occasion and in discussion with families, if the child that has moved in has an EHC Plan that has not been updated for several years.

Conversely, the same rule and practice apply when a child with an EHC Plan moves from Wokingham Brough to another local authority area.

For those children with SEND who arrive in Wokingham from abroad, there will be a period of time where their SEND needs are assessed prior to the EHC Plan being agreed, and in practice it means that such pupils will typically enter the education system via the mainstream admissions process. All Wokingham maintained schools, have prospective pupils with exceptional and/or social needs within their admissions policy, and have an associated focus on providing an inclusive and stimulating environment for all learners. So, the first step into the education system provides pupils with access to education, as a potential transition point on to more specialised provision. Additionally, in exceptional circumstances where a child has evident and substantial special educational needs, they will put in place a holistic package of support to ensure that their needs are fully catered for, whilst the EHC process is ongoing.

**9.2 Mike Smith asked the Leader of the Council the following question. Due to his inability to attend his question was put on his behalf by Councillor Stephen Newton:**

**Question**

In a lot of recent social, press and election media; various suggestions were made

that Wokingham Borough Council could carry out like rolling back of carpark charge increases, continuing with weekly bin collections, and spending a great deal more on road repairs - Please could you tell me if any of these suggestions are deliverable and affordable?

**Answer**

No, I do not believe that the pledges made by the Opposition in the recent elections were either deliverable or affordable, but I suspect that they were never intended to be delivered or afforded, as I do not think that the Opposition ever believed that they would be in a position where they would have to honor those pledges. And so, it transpired. Despite Pauline's valiant efforts to make defeat look like victory, the Conservatives fell back to 19 seats on the Council, their lowest number ever. They are now further from a return to power than they were when they lost in 2022 and lost again in 2023.

Now with the local elections over, and once the General election is past us, there is, I hope, an opportunity to reset the dial, and for the Opposition to adopt a different approach from the one that Pauline showcased in her speech this evening. I hope that they will take that opportunity. I would welcome, and I will do all that I can to facilitate, their playing a more constructive role in the Council's business.

**9.3 Tony Johnson asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question:**

**Question:**

During

the Election Period, The Times published an article titled "Worst-performing councils in England revealed — where does yours rank?" based on information provided by the Office of Local Government (Oflog).

They rated councils for Finance, Waste, Roads, Social Care and Planning and Wokingham placed 34<sup>th</sup> overall out of England's 317 principal Councils - ahead of 12 of the 14 neighbouring councils within 20km (~12 miles).

Wokingham ranked 12<sup>th</sup> for Planning, 45<sup>th</sup> for Social Care and 275<sup>th</sup> for Roads.

Would the Executive Member with responsibilities for Roads like to make any observations as to that ranking of 275<sup>th</sup> out of 317?

**Answer**

As you probably know, there are different kinds of councils, providing different services. District councils do not do Roads. The Times has chosen to give every authority that does not deliver a service the average score for that service.

In the case of Roads, 190 authorities appear to have been given the average score. This means that the ranking given to those authorities which do provide Roads is distorted. This is a fundamental flaw, awarding average scores to councils who do not deliver a particular service automatically rates them higher than half of the councils that do deliver those services. This portrays a very misleading picture of the state of Wokingham's roads – and many others and has been criticised



by the Local Government Association.

A truer picture can be obtained from the actual data. The 'Roads' data reported against covers 2022-23 and is obtained from the DfT covering road condition statistics for Motorways, and A roads as well as non A roads. In November 2023 when the DfT published the latest data Wokingham roads were among the best maintained.

The statistics show that Wokingham Borough Council carried out maintenance on around 9% of its A roads, compared to an average of around 5% nationally – that's almost double the national average. For non-A roads, the council did maintenance work on 4.5% of its roads, compared to an average of around 2.5% nationally, which is again almost double the national average.

Data is available for 119 local authorities for A roads and 118 local authorities for non-A roads, putting Wokingham well into the top 20 for maintenance work carried out on the Council's road network.

There are no other factors other than the DfT data for 'roads' contained within the Times assessment and therefore we believe the assessment and ranking given to Wokingham roads by the Times is fundamentally flawed.

**Supplementary Question:**

I am aware that the Chair of the LGA slammed the messengers, The Times and Oflog, in his letters to Michael Gove, but he did acknowledge that the data should be used to ask questions. Locally there has been civil unrest over what Wokingham has spent on one road junction recently, and as all of you who have campaigned will know, great dissatisfaction over what it has not spent.

However, when this Council received extra monies from Central Government in February, there was no scrutiny meeting before the budget councils, so the public do not know where the new money went. And despite the complaint that the measure was unfair, my question to you all via the Executive Member, is what do you returning Members, as well as new Members plan to do to improve Wokingham's miserable roads, and hence its ranking, and how are you going to know that you have been successful?

**Supplementary Answer:**

The Government have given us £418,000 additional money from the cancellation of the HS2 project. £418,000 will resurface 0.37% of our road network. It is a drop in the ocean.

The national average is declining, and it has been declining for many years, and you only have to look at the ALARM survey which comes out every year. Currently, the backlog for England and Wales is £16.3billion, up £2.1billion in one year. That is down to a failure by this current government, over the last decade, giving the right funding to all, all highways authorities across this country.

**10. Petitions**

There were no petitions received.

## **11. Member Question Time**

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

### **11.1 Rebecca Margetts asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question:**

#### **Question:**

With more than 2700 cases of Whooping cough reported across England so far in 2024, more than 3 times the amount recorded in the whole of last year, what are Wokingham Borough Council doing to highlight the importance of vaccinations and to make sure our residents know how to access their jabs?

#### **Answer**

As you know whooping cough, is a contagious bacterial infection that causes a characteristic cough. It is most serious for very young babies. It is a statutory notifiable disease, that peaks cyclically every 3 to 5 years. Unfortunately, like many Tory election messages, there has been much misinformation about this peak, in the media.

The whooping cough vaccine provides high levels of protection against severe disease. Despite the increase, the number of notifications in Wokingham Borough has remained in the low single digits each week, accounting for approximately 1% of the cases in the South East. My wife, a local GP, has seen one confirmed case.

The whooping cough vaccine is given as part of the routine childhood vaccination schedule delivered at primary care. There is good uptake of these vaccines in Wokingham Borough, consistently above the national target for the first dose, of 95%.

It is also important for pregnant women to get vaccinated against whooping cough, as they pass immunity onto their babies. The WBC Public Health Team continuously to closely monitor immunisation uptake rates in association with partners in the Health Protection and Resilience Partnership Board.

National immunisation programmes are commissioned by NHS England. The local authority public health team promotes awareness and encourages uptake of these programmes, but without frightening people.

In tandem with the recent national childhood immunisations campaign, the WBC Public Health Team have issued communication messages through our networks, such as residents' and school newsletters, as well as in customer-facing settings such as children's centres and libraries. The health visiting and school nursing service, commissioned by the public health team, also promote all childhood vaccinations as they deliver their services in the community. The Director of Public Health has written directly to all GPs in the Borough to ask for their support in delivering vaccinations for those due or catching up.

#### **Supplementary Question:**

I think it is a shame that the Member there had to turn it into a political question when it was genuinely a question about what the Council is doing as a Borough to

represent its residents and the best thing for their care. So, it is a shame that you had to turn it into that.

David, I am pleased to hear of the progress that is being made to encourage these vaccinations, and as you said it is most important for pregnant women. How can you, and will you be moving this forward reporting back to the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee about how you are progressing with this is we have any further cases?

**Supplementary Answer:**

We will certainly be reporting back as to how we are progressing and so on, and certainly it is those two important groups, the children, and the pregnant women who we will focus on. As you might know, certainly our uptake with pregnant women is above the national average. It is still quite low, it is still only 70%, but the national average is below 60%, so we are better, but we are not good enough. We will go on showing and increasing this, if at all possible.

**11.2 George Evans asked the Executive Member for Planning and the Local Plan the following question:**

**Question:**

My

residents in Arborfield Green have been asking when they can expect to start to see facilities and amenities across the development such as the sports pavilion. Some are long overdue, and they are crucial to help form the community that residents were promised. Can you please provide me with an update on what steps the Council is taking to ensure there are no more delays to delivery of promised infrastructure?

**Answer**

Thank

you for your question, George. It provides with an opportunity to thank Ian Pittock, the councillor for Barkham until the recent local elections, for his determined efforts to see key infrastructure for Arborfield Green brought forward. I should extend my thanks to the council officers who have worked with the developers to secure long-delayed community facilities.

Officers have been working closely with Crest Nicholson, and the other stakeholders to refine detailed proposals for the sports facilities in line with WBC and Sport England requirements. Revised plans have recently completed a period of statutory consultation and a Reserved Matters application will be determined in the coming weeks. Subject to planning approval, works should commence this summer with the new facilities available or brought into operation for the 2025/26 season.

Detailed plans for the village centre at Arborfield Green (including a new Sainsbury's supermarket) were approved in October 2023 and February 2024 respectively. The District Centre proposals are the product of extensive pre- and post-application engagement over a period of 18 months. Enabling works commenced earlier this year. Sainsbury's have exchanged contracts on the supermarket site, and it is anticipated that construction activities will start this autumn, in parallel with a wider village centre development.

You may also be aware George, that an Arborfield Community Centre Working Group has been formed with residents, parish council representatives, Borough Council officers, and Ward Members, and it is has been meeting for several months to gather views on the best way that the community centre could be put into use. I hope that helps answer your question.

**Supplementary Question:**

One key piece of infrastructure that you did not mention there that residents in Arborfield were promised, is the swimming pool. The previous Conservative administration put money in the Medium Term Financial Plan for this, but it disappeared earlier this year. What can I tell my residents in Arborfield about this? Will they be getting their swimming pool, and if so, when?

**Supplementary Answer:**

I understand that it disappeared from the Medium Term Financial Plan quite some time ago, rather longer than you are suggesting. I will happily decide, or work with you, and work out the best way forward on that subject, so if you would you like to meet me at your earliest convenience and mine, we can discuss this matter.

**11.3 Joseph Barley asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question:**

**Question:**

The proposed pedestrian crossing at Biggs Lane would provide greater safety for students travelling to and from school in my ward, can you please update me if any progress has been made regarding this proposal?

**Answer**

Thank you, Joseph, for your question. As I am sure you are aware there is already a safe permanent crossing provided on Biggs Lane, near to Princess Marina Drive. This was provided by the developer as part of the new housing development in the area and was agreed to be sufficient to support safe access across Biggs Lane for the school and surrounding residential areas.

Following planning consent being granted for the Arborfield SDL including the primary school on Baston Road, Farley Hill School on Church Lane has been relocated to this new location. This relocated intake of children may require different infrastructure needs to what has already been delivered.

The request for a new crossing received has been discussed with former Councillor Pittock and Barkham Parish Council.

The Council have carried out surveys in the area which have indicated that a crossing does not currently meet the criteria for a delivery. However, as the school continues to expand its intake we will also increase whereby the assessment can be revisited in future.

It should be noted that existing crossings already exists, including a controlled crossing near Princess Marina Drive which provides users with a choice of crossing to use. This request has therefore been added to the list of crossings which will be

monitored as this new school expands.

Should external funding become available from the parish council we would support a scheme to be developed and programmed for delivery provided that it met the criteria for a crossing.

**Supplementary Question:**

It is a shame to hear that this particular crossing according to the Executive Member has not been able to pass said criteria at this current stage. Given the information that he has available, would he be able to provide a firm date as to when this crossing could potentially be in place for students?

**Supplementary Answer:**

Firstly, an assessment has got to be done again, whilst we are in the additional intake at the school. There will be additional intake after September, so it would be prudent to actually do a survey after that particular period. It has then got to meet the criteria for going into the construction pool. Once it gets into that pool, it then has to await funding to come forward. We have a small amount of funding to deliver a certain number of crossings per year. There is quite a long list of crossings, so it has got to wait its turn.

If external funding does become available from Barkham Parish Council or anybody else, and it has met the criteria, it could then be delivered earlier.

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

**Question:**

Can

you update me on progress with the planned 6th form at Bohunt School. This is due to open in September and is being advertised on the school website.

*It was clarified that the question referred to September 2025.*

**Answer**

I was at a loss to understand why you believed that it was due to open in September. I think you have just clarified that, so that is really helpful. The latest information on the website is a letter that was sent to parents last November which said that, "the sixth form is likely to open to its first cohort in September 2025".

So, the opening date for the sixth form is something that is entirely determined by the school, as an academy, so it is not something that we as a local authority can provide any guarantees on. However, it is our understanding that the school intends to open the sixth form to its first cohort in September 2025 as per that letter, and that this has been the position for at least the last 6 months since that letter has been sent.

**Supplementary Question:**

My supplementary was actually regarding Year 7 places, which is part of this deal. I was told by someone at Bohunt that WBC plans to offer those places from September this year, and that is perfectly possible as long as the formal agreement

is completed between the educational trust and WBC.

So, my question was, I know how valued those places would be to people in my ward and other people in the area. My question was really, would you please push officers to make sure that this formal agreement is in place, and that these places can be offered in September 2024 as promised?

**Supplementary Answer:**

I know that negotiations with the school have been ongoing. As usual with these things it has not been all plain sailing, but progress has been made. I am very unwilling to promise something which is not entirely within my control, but I can promise you best endeavours to do that, yes.

**11.5 Moses Iyengunmwena asked the Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure the following question:**

**Question:**

In January the Guardian reported a 115% increase in people seeking professional help in dealing with rat infestations.

Just last week there were articles in the Reading Chronicle and the Maidenhead Advertiser about problems with rats in those areas. The article in the Maidenhead Advertiser, said "The Royal Borough is unsure where responsibility lies for tackling rat problems on land it is responsible for."

Can the Executive Member tell me what plans and procedures the Council has in place to deal with rodent infestations in areas the Council is responsible for such as car parks, parks, and Council owned properties?

**Answer**

The Council will advise residents to consult the British Pest Control Association (BCPA) website for advice and details of local contractors that will undertake pest treatment services.

If the resident believes a rodent infestation is coming from a neighbouring property and discussions with the neighbor have not resolved the matter, they can report it to it to Environmental Health of the Wokingham ASB team.

In the first instance the ASB Team will send out an information sheet to the householders to control waste materials and undergrowth to reduce rodent activity. If a site visit is required, this will be arranged by the ASB team who will visit the location and offer advice on how residents can prevent rats and monitor for improvements. As an indication of service demand there were 1,491 enquires for the 9 months of the previous financial year (the final quarter figures will be provided shortly) of which all were responded to, or advice or signposting provided (noting some of the enquiries could be multiple enquiries).

Each case is looked at on an individual basis, the council officers will work with the

residents/ landowner to alleviate the problem however if the case is severe or the property owner takes no action then the Council can serve a notice on the resident under the Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949 and undertake works in default.

Council owned open green spaces - If rat infestation is reported the site will be visited and if necessary, any foliage or harborage will be cut back. The Grounds Maintenance team do not bait open spaces, the same process will be applied on carparks.

Tenants would have to discuss and pest problems directly with their landlord, and again we can provide advice if required.

**Supplementary Question:**

The Executive Member seems to be shifting responsibility to residents. My supplementary question is this.

The same Guardian article said that councils reducing bin collections across the UK, meant that rats are thriving. In January the I newspaper reported that councils reducing the frequency of bin collections is fuelling rat infestations. Natalie Bungay, Technical Manager at the British Pest Control Association, said any move to reduce the frequency of collections is good news for pests and could spell big problems for householders.

So, did the Council consider the impacts on pests and vermin when the decision was made to move to fortnightly waste collections?

**Supplementary Answer:**

Yes, this was considered by officers, and was also discussed within the relevant scrutiny groups during the development of the new policy. What is believed by officers and believed by ourselves is that the move to the two weekly collections in accordance with the new wheelie bins will improve the situation with pests. Having strong and permeable wheelie bins that are not susceptible to foxes and rats ripping open the current blue bags, which we all know is a recurring issue, will help reduce the number of pests that take advantage of these very easily chewable bags which are currently in place.

**12. Political balance of the Council and allocation and appointment to seats on committees and boards**

The Council considered a report on the political balance of the Council and the appointment to the Council's Committees and Boards, in accordance with the wishes of the Groups.

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

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) that the representation of the political groups on the Council, as advised to the Chief Executive, is 27 Liberal Democrat Group Members, 19 Conservative Group Members and 8 Labour Group members be noted.
- 2) the appointment and composition of Committees and Boards as set out in Para 2.1. be approved.
- 3) the allocation of seats on Committees and Boards on the basis that, of the 95 seats (as set out in Para 3.4), 48 be allocated to the Liberal Democrat Group, 33 be allocated to the Conservative Group and 14 to the Labour Group, be approved.
- 4) the proposals submitted by the respective Group Leaders and that those Members be appointed to the Committees and Boards as set out in Appendix 1 be approved.
- 5) it be noted that the Constitution states that the Chair of the Standards Committee will be appointed at Annual Council and agrees that as with all other committees the Chair will be appointed at the first meeting of the Standards Committee.
- 6) the appointment of the Independent Persons to assist the work of the Standards Committee and the co-opted Parish/Town Council Representatives as set out in Appendix 1, be noted.
- 7) the elected Member representatives on the Wokingham Borough Wellbeing Board, as set out in Appendix 1, as nominated by the Leader of Council in accordance with Section 194 of the Health and Social Care Act 2012, be noted.

## **Appendix 1 - Committees and Boards**

### **13. Appointments to Joint Committees, Panels, Working Groups and other Bodies**

The Council considered a report on the appointment to Joint Committees, Panels, Working Groups and Other Bodies.

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

Where more nominations had been received than places, individual votes were taken. Upon being put to the vote, it was:

#### **RESOLVED** That:

- 1) it be agreed that the principles of proportionality be applied where Members are appointed to Joint Committees, Panels, Working Groups or other bodies and approves the proposals submitted by the respective Group Leaders, of Members to be appointed to these bodies as set out in Appendix 2;
- 2) it be agreed that the following exceptions apply to applying the principles of proportionality i) where either one or two members are sought for a particular body, that nominations are sought from each political group.

## **Appendix 2 - Panels, Working Groups and Forums**

### **14. Appointments to Outside Bodies**

The Council considered a report on the political balance of the Council and the



appointment to Outside Bodies.

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

Where more nominations had been received than places, individual votes were taken.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

**RESOLVED** That the Member appointments to Outside Bodies as set out In Appendix 3, be agreed.

### **Appendix 3 - Outside Bodies**