

Agenda Item 70.

TITLE	Monitoring of Public and Member Questions
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on 28 March 2017
WARD	None Specific
DIRECTOR	Andrew Moulton, Head of Governance and Improvement Services

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

Overview and Scrutiny is a key part of the checks and balances which ensure that the Council and its partners make and implement effective decisions for all the residents of the Borough. Questions submitted to the Executive and Council give an indication of issues of interest and concern. These issues may generate review topics for the Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee considers the list of questions set out at Annex A and determine whether any of the issues raised should be considered for inclusion in the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programmes for 2017/18.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

At its meeting on 31 May 2016, the Committee considered a report containing suggestions for improving the Overview and Scrutiny process. One of the suggestions related to the monitoring of questions submitted to the Council's Executive and Council.

Members agreed that regular monitoring reports be submitted to the Management Committee.

Background

At its meeting on 31 May 2016, the Committee considered a report containing a number of suggestions aimed at improving the Overview and Scrutiny process and developing greater public interest and involvement. One of the suggestions related to the monitoring of questions submitted to the Executive and full Council meetings.

Members and residents regularly ask questions at the Executive and Council meetings. These questions indicate areas of interest and concern and may generate ideas for Overview and Scrutiny investigation. The Committee agreed to consider regular monitoring reports on the questions submitted. Annex A contains details of the public and Member questions raised at the Executive meetings on 26 January and 23 February 2017, the extraordinary Executive meeting on 15 March 2017 and the Council meeting on 23 February 2017 which may relate to issues for inclusion in the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programmes for the coming year.

Analysis of Issues

Members are requested to consider Annex A and to determine whether it contains issues requiring further consideration and inclusion in the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programmes for 2017/18.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.

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

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

None

List of Background Papers

None

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Questions to Executive on 26 January 2017

Public Questions

1. **Lloyd Watkins asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:**

Question

In February 2014 Council Officers were shown all the likely walking or cycling routes to the now Bohunt School in Wokingham. They were asked to ensure that all the routes were improved in order that the students could safely walk or cycle to school. On 1 September 2016 an Extraordinary Executive Meeting had to occur in order that some of the requested speed reductions would be in place for the school opening only 3 days later. Despite early engagement with the Council by concerned parents, not all the routes requested for safety improvements were addressed at the September Executive meeting. This leaves some routes untouched, in particular we have been repeatedly told that the route along Nine Mile Ride will be in place for September 2017 but there has been no local consultation on changes nor have any plans been published. When will the Council's plans for improvement along Nine Mile Ride be published in order that safe routes are provided by September 2017?

Answer

Development work for improvements along the Nine Mile Ride are programmed to be delivered by September 2017 and public engagement is planned for February and March of 2017.

2. **Jason Sutton asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:**

Question

There is a proposal to expand Aldryngton Primary School. Aldryngton is the smallest Primary School site in Earley. Spatial availability is a key consideration when determining which schools to expand. WBC commissioned a spatial study by ERM Architecture dated 7/9/2015 to compare Loddon, Radstock and Aldryngton Primary. The study's conclusions were very clear: "Aldryngton's Primary Campus is the least attractive campus for investment - there is a substantial deficit in campus area." With a recommendation Loddon and Radstock be taken forwards to a "Stage 1 Feasibility".

On 28 January 2016, the WBC Executive met and one of the items discussed was which Primary Schools to expand. This 'Spatial Study' was not provided to the Executive. Rather 'spatial analysis' was a category presented in Annex 2 of the document "Primary Strategy Implementation Plan Phase 1" contained on page 142 of the Report to the Executive. The stated conclusion in relation to Aldryngton was however described to the Executive as, "Sufficiency of space - space for 0.5FE expansion which would be relatively straightforward." The strategy also suggested that an activity of consultation had been performed with "parents, residents, schools and other stakeholders" with the next step being a detailed feasibility study on the selected schools. Why was the information supplied to the Council within the report not reflective of the findings of the original spatial report commissioned, was this information provided in error?

Answer

The ERM report conclusions were on the basis of the size of the site alone, while the "Primary Strategy Implementation Plan Phase 1" recommendations were informed by a number of factors. The most important factor was the assessment of the number of places required to meet the need in Earley. The best fit with projected need was the expansion of Loddon and Aldryngton Primary Schools to provide 45 additional places per year.

The ERM conclusions were made against the Department for Education recommended space standard for school premises (known as Building Bulletin number 103), a space standard that is not met at many outstanding and good schools, or in many new and expanded school projects in towns and cities across the country.

The Executive report noted "the site is one of the more constrained" and this was why the recommendation was "that further work should be carried out with the school to determine the feasibility of expansion with a target of September 2017". All work to date indicates that the challenges presented by the constraints identified in the ERM report can be addressed and that expansion is feasible.

3. David Nader asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Question

There is a proposal to expand Aldryngton Primary School by increasing the intake by 15 as soon as this year. Your Committee approved the Primary School Planning Strategy 2016-2018 proposed by Children's Services on the 28th of January 2016. The Strategy included projections for the number of school places required in Earley for each year between 2015/2016 to 2021/2022 and it has been shown that the demand for both 2015/2016 and 2016/2017 intakes were overestimated in the Strategy report.

The Strategy report also shows that there will be 0.8% surplus school places in Earley this year and a 7 to 8% surplus school places in Earley for 2018/2019 to 2021/2022 without Aldryngton being expanded. Children's Services have said that the Council will make the final decision on whether to expand Aldryngton in the light of actual information on the demand for school places in 2017. However, the decision for expansion should be based on the mid-term to long term projections. Shouldn't the Committee review the decision to expand Aldryngton Primary School, which your data and projections suggests is not actually needed, based on more up-to-date data and projections before allowing a £4.8 million expansion project to go ahead?

Answer

While the information in the question concerning the roll projection data is correct, this can only form part of the picture when developing a strategy for ensuring sufficient school places. As an illustration of this, the roll projection for 15/16 appeared to demonstrate that adequate school places in Earley would be available. In reality, 30 Earley children, whose parents were hoping for a local school place, were diverted out of the area in order to obtain one.

Roll projections are very much led by numbers of live births in the area. This needs to be balanced against other less predictable factors such as housing churn where we have been seeing older families being replaced by families with younger children, the

impact of which increases demand for local school places. Therefore, the Council needs to review actual demand for Earley school places in March in order to have as much contextual information as possible as the basis for the decision on whether or not to expand the school.

This decision will be taken by the end of March 2017. If the evidence does not support expansion, and subject to the granting of planning permission for the expansion, the Council will be able to implement the proposal in the next three years without incurring further design costs - if demand rises in that time, for example. Therefore there is no good case for pausing the process at this point as this could lead to hardship for Earley families if there are too few places available to meet need in September 2017 and, just an example of statistics which might be useful for you, in reception at the moment (just at Aldryngton) there are 59 students on the waiting list.

4. Keith Malvern asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question

The December 2016 revenue monitoring report indicates that there has been an over achievement of £40,000 in the income from car parking. Bearing in mind the introduction of Sunday and evening charges was controversial will you consider reducing those charges particularly in Wokingham town whilst it is undergoing disruption due to regeneration work?

Answer

Parking is part of the Highways and Transport portfolio and, as such, its income is used to maintain and improve highways related services – including pothole repairs. I am sure you would agree with me that using any additional income to fix more potholes is better than adjusting a few parking fees. We will continue to provide good parking and to use its extra income to do more pothole repairs.

With regard to disruption during regeneration we will, of course, monitor its impact and take any appropriate action if necessary.

5. Imogen Shepherd-DuBey asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Question

Within the Chief Finance Officer's Report on Page 126 he refers to the Schools Funding situation in Wokingham.

Would the Exec Member comment on why Wokingham Borough's schools have been treated so poorly by the Conservative Government, so much so that it remains the lowest funded level of all local Authorities?

Answer

I am sure that you all know my views by now; that the schools funding formula is totally inequitable, unfit for purpose and long overdue its planned overhaul by this Conservative Government. We need a new system that does not just tinker around the edges. We need a new formula that will radically re-think how schools are funded, taking into account schools' autonomy, local staffing costs and recognition of differing pupil cohorts, including those with Special Education Needs and deprivation factors.

How can it be equitable when one school receives £8,587 per pupil on role and ours here in Wokingham just £4,166.51 per pupil on role.

I am pleased that it is a Conservative Government that is heralding a change and has recognised that this practice of historical inequality in schools funding which has been applied over successive governments, including Labour and the Lib Dem Coalition, cannot continue. We have been in dialogue with Ministers about this, taking the opportunity of a national funding change to ensure our voice of Wokingham is heard in Westminster.

6. Liz McDaniel asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Question

Agenda Item 104 Disabled Children's Family Support and Short Breaks

Providers were audited in June last year and therefore the accounts information provided is now out of date. Has the Council taken into account that the present financial outlook for some small charities is currently very different than 8 months ago?

Answer

The information gathered last year was part of an assessment of individual providers offering short breaks. It was used as part of the information gathering on the range, scope and quality of providers.

It does not, however, have a direct bearing on the proposals set out in the report. These proposals focus on how providers are commissioned and deliver their services.

7. Sandra Stubbs asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Question

Agenda Item 104 Disabled Children's Family Support and Short Breaks

How are Wokingham Borough Council going to ensure that the views of all parents of Children with SEND, including those who currently do not access short breaks, are considered before any changes are made to the current system of short breaks?

Answer

The views of current and potential future users of short breaks are a core part of the proposals going forward.

During the reviews of individual providers during 2016 Officers met with parents and carers to discuss short breaks with a focus on their satisfaction with the services provided.

Officers also canvassed providers to seek out parents who would be willing to talk to the Council with their views on short breaks and separate discussions were had with them too.

Going forward, Reach has also presented us with a survey of parents, many of whom do not use short breaks. This will be a useful piece of evidence in determining future priorities for short breaks provision including the provision of information on the range of services available to eligible users.

The Council will meet with parents in March to consult and build upon these proposals in the report. Further events will be arranged depending on demand.

Officers will also use the SEND network and the CAN network to communicate and consult with parents on the proposals for short breaks.

8. Catherine McLeod asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Question

Agenda Item 104 Disabled Children's Family Support and Short Breaks

Families of children with SEND in the early years often struggle to cope with all the demands on them. Our families have told us that they do not want direct payments to replace short breaks funding, as they feel this would put undue extra pressure on them to manage payments. They also fear it would change the nature of their relationship with local voluntary sector providers - making it a financial transaction rather than about their children. How is the Council going to manage these concerns and the extra pressures on families and providers if there is a full shift to direct payments?

Answer

The majority of short breaks are already commissioned via a direct payment used by parents in Wokingham so we are simply looking to extend this.

It is part of a national direction of travel to move away from council commissioned block contracts and move to a more flexible arrangement offering choice and control for service users and a more personalised approach to commissioning.

However, the Council will be open to the views of parents on their preferences for how they access the short break services that are available and there is no pressure upon parents to move to direct payments. I believe that many people will prefer to take a direct payment as they will see the benefits of more choice and more control. Any arrangements adopted by the Council will enable both the Council and service users to purchase services from providers; in the event that people would prefer not to take a direct payment.

As the report outlines, the Council will be exploring the use of pre-paid cards (already a feature within adult social care, as Julian knows) to reduce any additional burdens upon parents wishing to take a direct payment. Pre-paid cards offer a simple transaction that can be expanded to the number of people willing to look at direct payments but we will of course discuss this directly with parents and gauge all of their views.

9. Catherine McLeod asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question on behalf of Jane Holmes who was unable to attend the meeting:

Question

Agenda Item 104 Disabled Children's Family Support and Short Breaks

Regarding the proposed withdrawal of funding to service providers for disabled children and replacing it with Direct Payments to families. What support is WBC going to put in place in order to help families navigate their way through the service provision available and to enable them to make the best decision for themselves? Without some sort of

gateway support, families are at risk of being isolated, unaware and of making the wrong decision - ie accessing a service provision out of area because they're not aware it exists closer to home. This as well as being overwhelmed by the paperwork, responsibility and stress that managing Direct Payments brings. This, of course, could have the effect of increasing pressure on the statutory authorities over time.

Answer

Direct payments are already the vehicle for the majority of Wokingham's provision of short breaks.

No one will be forced to adopt direct payments and the Council can continue to spot purchase for parents if they wish.

In terms of support already available to parents to navigate the short breaks market:

- The CAN network coordinator works with families to signpost to service provision and answer questions and concerns about services to help with the choice
- The Council's Special Educational Needs and Disability Information Advice and Support Service is a statutory service which is run at 'arm's length' from the Council and it offers advice, information and assistance to parents.
- Within the Executive Report tonight you will see that we are proposing to develop a preferred provider list which would be quality assured by the Council, with information on the range of services available on the Council's normal information sources. As part of the consultation we will discuss with parents how this should work and other actions we need to undertake to ensure parents are informed.
- Pre-paid cards offer the benefit of reducing the requirements of parents wishing to take out direct payments. We will also discuss this directly with parents.

Member Questions

1. Gary Cowan asked the Executive Member for Planning and Regeneration the following question:

Question

With reference to the Judgment in the case of Gladman Vs WBC case number Case No: CO/1455/2014 heard in July 2014 what were the implications of the judgement for Wokingham Borough Council both the pros and the cons.

Answer

Gladman Development Ltd (GDL) was seeking, through the High Court, to quash the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (MDD) on the basis that the Inspector who examined the MDD Local Plan did not take into account the National Planning Policy Framework, in respect of whether the housing target for the Borough was appropriate.

The implications of the judgement for Wokingham Borough Council all fall under your pros heading. The judgement agreed with the Council that:

- while the MDD did not assess housing need, it did not have to do this or to set a new housing target;
- the MDD did not have to determine whether the number of dwellings to be provided under the Core Strategy would be sufficient to meet an Objectively Assessed Need (OAN);

- The MDD should not be quashed (in whole or in part) because it only had to allocate the right amount of land to meet the Core Strategy requirements and to do this in the most appropriate sites. It only had to allocate sites for the provision with which it was dealing and did this adequately;
- the authority has a 5 year housing supply;
- The Council has a duty to review matters including Development Plan Documents and housing numbers. At the time of the decision, the Council was in the process of preparing a Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) which could lead to a review of the housing need. This is the appropriate mechanism to review housing requirements;
- WBC had adopted the right version of the plan.

The judgment did not have any negative implications for Wokingham Borough Council I therefore have nothing to list under your cons heading.

The only thing I can think of is that the MDD challenge has now been superseded by an Objectively Assessed Need (OAN) of our housing numbers – this was reflected in the judgement. This is a technical assessment and evidence base. The Council has not signed up to providing this estimated need. This will be a process addressed through the Local Plan review.

2. Michael Firmager asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question

Could the Executive Member for Highways and Transport explain what enhancement of services is expected this year (2017) following the platform extension at Wokingham Station?

Answer

The platform extension at Wokingham Station is part of the £800m Wessex Capacity Upgrade programme that will make the South West franchise into a 10 car railway on the suburban lines into Waterloo and that includes the services from Reading through Wokingham. The Wessex Capacity Upgrade includes the rebuilding of the former International Station at Waterloo for domestic services, and that is for completion by December next year as well as traction power supply upgrades and platform extensions to allow trains to be extended from 8 to 10 cars and we expect the first 10 car trains to be introduced on the Reading services later this summer.

This will give us a 25% increase in carriages and something like a 35% increase in capacity but please note that capacity is measured as the number of standard class seats on a train plus the room for standing. The 10 car trains will have no more seats than an 8 car train will have as the 2+3 seating arrangement is replaced by a 2+2 seating arrangement; where they remove the bench of three that was not a popular layout. These are not new trains but they are the trains we had on the Reading services until a couple of years ago prior to their rebuilding and extension using former Gatwick Express carriages and they are now painted a new shiny blue colour.

Therefore we will get more capacity on the trains but will have to wait until December next year before the planned increase in train frequency will deliver more seats. One side effect of having longer trains will be that passengers will have to walk slightly

further down the platform because it is a longer train at the station. Basically that is the information we have.

3. Lindsay Ferris asked the Executive Member for Planning and Regeneration the following question:

Question

Who within WBC (Senior/Middle Officers and Councillors (by name/role)) knew about the Application for the Grazeley Garden Settlement **at the time** of the submission to the DCLG in July 2016?

Answer

Just to clarify we were given four weeks to pull together an initial draft expression of interest for the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and it was not an application it was a confidential expression of interest.

Councillors David Sleight, Chris Singleton, Keith Baker, Chris Bowring, Malcolm Richards and myself were alerted as Conservative members of the Local Plan Update Steering Group.

For the avoidance of doubt we need to point out that there was, and there should be, no assumption that being alerted infers that support for the expression of interest was either sought of, or given by, the Conservative members at this time. Since then Members, especially those whose wards would be affected, have been participating in the ongoing debate.

The Officers who were aware of the expression of interest were the Chief Executive (Andy Couldrick), Director of Environment (Heather Thwaites), Heads of Services within Environment (Mark Cupit, Josie Wragg, Alex Deans, Sarah Hollamby and Clare Lawrence) and relevant staff within the directorates as well. In addition a small number of staff from other Council directorates were also aware.

4. Richard Dolinski asked the Executive Member for Planning and Regeneration the following question:

Question

In their latest newsletter in Emmbrook, the Liberal Democrats are claiming that there will be 17,000 more houses in Wokingham, quote "on top of approximately 13,000 currently being built". Could the Executive Member tell me whether this figure is correct?

Answer

It is not correct and it is a gross misrepresentation of the actual situation. They claim that the identified need is for 17,000 homes on top of the 13,000 homes already planned for within the Local Plan. I can only see this as a blatant and scurrilous attempt to scaremonger just before an election.

Comparing the Objectively Assessed Need, the OAN study with the existing Local Plan, the study identified a need for approximately 200 more homes per year from 2016 on top of the 13,000 homes currently planned for. This is a total of approximately 4,000 more homes, not 17,000, up to 2036 on top of the 13,000 already planned for.

Hopefully the electorate will hold them to task for this gross misrepresentation.

5. Clive Jones asked the Executive Member for Planning and Regeneration the following question:

Question

Recently three teams of professional people have been seen working and taking measurements around the land known as Area DD in Lower Earley. No doubt they are preparing reports for developers, Wokingham Borough Council or both.

Can you explain what these people have been doing?

Answer

Area DD was always zoned for some form of development right from the start of the formation of Lower Earley. There are no proposals as to what might be put there yet and it needs to be appropriate to the site so as not to cause problems to the existing residents. The survey currently being undertaken is to look at one option which is the suitability for housing or sheltered housing for the elderly. The land is quite high and held in place by retaining walls, as you probably know, and therefore any development on the site needs to be carefully considered from structural terms, hence the surveying.

6. Prue Bray asked the Executive Member for Economic Development and Finance the following question:

Question

When the Revenue Monitoring report appeared in the agenda for October's Executive meeting, there was a projected overspend of £494,000. The Exec member for Finance is recorded in the minutes as saying that "it was hoped that some of this overspend would be clawed back by the end of the year." In January's agenda, the Revenue Monitoring report shows the projected overspend has reached £812,000, 65% higher than in October. What has the Executive member for Finance done about the overspend, other than just hoping for the best?

Answer

The reason for the increase in forecast overspend to £812k is explained by the fact we are now clearer that the Department of Health do not intend to pay us the income we were led to believe we would receive. In October's Executive monitoring report we were still hopeful that we would receive the £722k from the Department of Health that we had applied for and we had good grounds for considering that they would give us and it was therefore included in our income projections. We did however note that there was a risk that it may not be forthcoming and this is what has happened. If this figure was treated in the same way in both reports the £812k reported in January would be reduced to £90k; which is actually an 82% reduction in the overspend reported in October.

7. Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey asked the Executive Member for Environment the following question:

Question

Does WBC plan to require all new SUDS systems given to WBC to be provided with the necessary funding, or require the operator to pay for yearly inspections by WBC?

Answer

Wokingham Borough Council requires a developer to pay a commuted sum to the Council on the adoption of the Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) feature to cover

its future maintenance requirements. Commuted sums are financial contributions made by third parties to the Local Authority as compensation for taking on the future maintenance responsibility for newly created highways and drainage improvements. They are usually secured through legal agreements made with the developers and landowners under sections 38 or 278 of the Highways Act 1980 and is a single payment that is invested over an agreed period of time.

For SuDS features that are not adopted by the Council, arrangements need to be made with other Risk Management Authorities (such as Thames Water or town and parish councils) for the adoption of the SuDS or the developer will be required to make arrangements for a management company to conduct regular inspections and maintenance.

The SuDS Strategy requires developers to submit information to the Council clearly defining the maintenance of the SuDS for the entire lifetime of the development, as well as the agreements demonstrated to be in place to ensure these arrangements do not lapse.

An example of where this strategy has recently been implemented is the proposed system of attenuation ponds which make up part of the drainage for the Nine Mile Ride extension. Wokingham Borough Council will be adopting these features and an appropriate commuted sum has been agreed to cover the cost of future maintenance.

Questions to Executive on 23 February 2017

Public Questions

- 1. Laura Titchiner asked the Executive Member for Environment the following question:**

Question

What measures are being put in place to minimise noise and air pollution from the M4 specifically the elevated carriageway to the west of Junction 10? I am a resident of Winnersh and, since having my baby, have become increasingly concerned with the air and noise pollution coming from the M4 and A329. The M4 around here is on an elevated carriageway with no noise or pollution barriers in place. I believe this is very detrimental to the health and wellbeing of local residents. I would like to petition the council and highways agency to implement acoustic barriers along the raised section of the M4. I'd like to propose that these barriers be coated in photocatalytic paint or concrete to assist in reduction of pollution. In my opinion this work should be carried out in a joint effort to manage the impact of the M4 Smart motorways scheme and the Air quality management plan that Wokingham is required to undertake.

Answer

It is simplest to address this in three parts, the impact of the M4 Smart Motorway, noise impact of M4/A329 and air quality impact of M4/A329 as the legislation and areas of responsibility are different.

M4 SMART Motorway Project:

As a Council we raised concerns about traffic modelling and requested that Highway's England go above and beyond normal requirements for noise mitigation. The Secretary of State concluded in Sept 2016 that:

- The Enhanced Noise Mitigation Study had been applied consistently throughout the proposed development and an overall minor improvement in the noise environment would result from low noise surfacing and the provision of acoustic fencing, and
- There would be no significant effect on air quality and the development would be at low risk from non-compliance with the EU Air Quality Directive. However, it was accepted that there were uncertainties in precise traffic forecasting which may mean that the ability of local authorities to comply with EU air quality objectives may be impacted upon. In light of this, the Secretary of State imposed a requirement within the Development Consent Order to ensure that Highways England monitor actual concentrations of NO₂ and if there is a worsening of air quality then mitigation must be prepared in consultation with the relevant LPA.

Current Air Quality Monitoring:

The Environmental Health Team has responsibility for the monitoring of air quality. We monitor for Nitrogen Dioxide in over 50 locations across the Borough. Only one location in Winnersh has exceeded the Annual National Air Quality Objective since 2011.

Details are on the website: <http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/business-and-licensing/health-and-safety/environmental-health/> and clicking on Air Quality.

The M4 itself is an air quality management area and measurements show compliance with the objective.

Noise:

The Council does not have the powers to deal with noise from road traffic under nuisance legislation. Noise is a consideration when assessing development control applications and there is a specific noise policy which developers should have regard to.

Noise maps of major transport sources (M4, A329(M) and A329) have, however, been created by independent consultants on behalf of DEFRA.

In locations with the highest noise levels nationally an action plan (produced by the noise making authority) is needed to address noise issues, and these are assessed by the Environmental Health Team. Seven action plans have been received by the Team relating to the M4 which include suggestions such as low noise road surfaces and new or extended barriers.

2. David Nader asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Question

My question relates to traffic safety around Aldryngton Primary School and the proposal to expand the school by 105 places.

As you will be aware, the area immediately outside of the school is already extremely congested at pick-up and drop-off times. There are over 2,000 children from two schools (Aldryngton Primary School and Maiden Erlegh School), parents, siblings, shoppers, visitors to the library and community centre all converging on a small site at these times.

A new Tesco Express is due to open within 50 metres of the school very soon. When the proposal to build a Tesco Express was discussed at the Planning Committee, two local Councillors, Ken Miall and David Chopping expressed concerns about the impact on congestion and traffic safety.

Both schools share a narrow access road between the Silverdale Parade shops. You will be aware that two primary school children were seriously injured on 17 January on the pavement of this narrow access road. One of the children needed to be airlifted to the John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford.

In a feasibility report commissioned by WBC it is noted, and I quote, "the local highway network is very constrained during the start and end of the school day," it is further noted that pupil drop-off and pick up is a "key issue" which requires mitigation. It is strange that this report does not feature in the formal Planning Application to expand Aldryngton. In a Council meeting on the 21st of July 2016, this report was discussed with Judith Ramsden who noted, and I quote, "credible measures to manage school run traffic are required."

Respondents to the Planning Application are concerned that the Transport Statement that was published with the application is not based on the Council's own projection for surplus school places in Earley if Aldryngton is expanded and assumes that only 26 more children will be driven to school as a result of the expansion. The Council itself projects an 11% surplus of places in Earley with the expansion of Aldryngton and Loddon from 2018. The Transport Statement also fails to take into account the opening of Tesco.

The Councillors of the Earley Town Council Planning Committee, who are residents of the local area themselves and have first-hand experience of how bad the existing situation outside of the school is, have voted unanimously to refuse the planning application of Aldryngton expansion as they found it extremely difficult to mitigate the impact of the expansion on the local traffic situation.

To summarise, there is a commonly held view by local Councillors that even without expansion, congestion and traffic safety are a concern around the school. This point is re-enforced by a WBC feasibility report and the report's findings were highlighted by Judith Ramsden. WBC's own projections predict that with expansion many more pupils would travel from out of catchment.

Given these facts, and apologies for directing them to you [Councillor Dolinski] rather than the individual concerned, how do you justify the statement made on BBC Berkshire that congestion would be reduced by expanding Aldryngton?

Answer

Currently some Earley children are allocated school places outside their area, and these children are almost inevitably driven to school. Congestion can be reduced by additional

capacity because it will mean that more children will be allocated schools within walking distance of their homes.

Looking at your list of specific issues I observe that some, such as the impact of the new Tesco Express are addressed in the planning application for the scheme. Without seeking to repeat the information provided to support the planning application I note that:

- after expansion I expect all children allocated a place at the school to live within walking distance of the site;
- that the incident on 17th January was not, as far as we know, related to congestion;
- that the two transport reports were for different purposes, both supported expansion but the second was written specifically to be part of the planning application;
- that I expect the planning consent, should it be granted, to condition traffic and transport management requirements, based on the Transport Statement recommendations; and
- that the views of Earley Town Council will be formally communicated to the Wokingham Planning Committee, who will give them proper and due weight when making their decisions.

More generally, I note that the Council's traffic study recommends that the proposals are manageable and without substantial impact on local traffic. We will continue to work with the school and the community to address the problems associated with parents who wish to drop and collect their children at the school gates.

3. Toshiko Tani asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Question

The council is proposing to expand Aldryngton Primary School by 33% from 315 pupils to 410 pupils. Parents, local residents as well as the school itself have raised a number of questions and concerns, many of these have not yet been addressed by the Council.

For example, we continue to find it difficult to understand why a £4.8 million expansion is necessary despite the Council's own projection of 11% surplus school places from 2018 to 2021 in Earley if the expansion goes ahead.

No concrete measures have been presented by the council to mitigate the impact of expansion on the already worrying congestion in the area surrounding the school. Furthermore, the Executive appears to have been misled by erroneous information at the time of approving Aldryngton Primary as a candidate for expansion in January 2016. For example, the findings of a WBC commissioned spatial study that found that Aldryngton is "the least attractive campus for investment" was misrepresented to the Executive.

We have been told by Children's Services that they are planning to have the Executive Meeting in February delegate their final decision making authority on the Aldryngton expansion to the Director of People Services, Judith Ramsden.

Considering how controversial the expansion proposal is, we do not see it as appropriate that the final decision is made in a forum not open to the public. We have serious concerns about whether our voices will be reflected at all in the decision making process and find it absolutely necessary to monitor reasoning applied for the council to reach a decision.

Please confirm that you will not allow such delegation to happen and that the final decision on the expansion will be made in a forum open to the public such as at the Executive Meeting, for the sake of transparency and to allow proper democratic participation.

Answer

Thank you for your very detailed question and indeed for your correspondence to the Executive Member for Children Services regarding this matter.

Questions and concerns raised by parents have been addressed by Officers, local Members, myself, the Executive Member for Children Services, and I am not aware of any outstanding matters. I do appreciate that there are parents who wish for the proposal to be withdrawn but it is important for the Executive, at all times, to consider this matter thoroughly and with due regard to all Wokingham residents.

It is a matter of record that the projections show a surplus from 2018 onwards. However, the projections are led by births in the area. While we have good reason to believe that the demand is fed by housing churn and so reflects the number of children who were born in other areas who are moving to Earley. It is because of these movements, that can take place shortly before an application is made for a school place, that we have looked at the number of applications for 2017 Reception places in March before making the decision for this year.

The Council's traffic study recommends that the proposal is manageable and without substantial impact on local traffic. Congestion caused by parents dropping their children at the school gates is a concern, as it is at many other schools, but I note that the vast majority of children choose other methods to travel to school.

Should this proposal go ahead we will continue to work with the school to ensure the local Travel Plan helps to mitigate impacts and will consider whether other measures such as Traffic Regulation Orders are appropriate.

In the proposal, additional staff car parking will be provided on site, with at least 12 spaces to meet the needs of the new staff required to support expansion and partly address an existing shortfall in parking spaces.

Lastly, I very much hope that you will find reassurance in our genuine wish for democratic transparency in actions taken by the Executive to agree that the school expansion proposals will not be delegated but will form the basis of a Special Executive to be held on 15th March.

4. Lloyd Watkins asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question

The Capital Programme makes specific mention of tackling traffic congestion in specific areas. There is also specific funding in Year 1 of £214K of Service Development Capital which appears to be an allocation from the CIL levy for the Arborfield Development (Which is further specified in the 10 year Capital Vision) as well as mention of Specified Section 106 allocations of a recurring £45k. In addition there is a specified £1.787k apportionment in the 10 Year Capital Vision for the Wokingham Borough Cycle Network.

The Capital Programme also contains a specific project relating to a Safe Route to Arborfield School. £214k is allocated to this project to progress the design and construction and to include all feasibility work. Could you therefore please tell me what options for the delivery of a cycle route were presented and considered by elected Members?

Answer

It remains the aim of the Council to provide a safe cycleway along Nine Mile Ride between California Crossroads and Bohunt School.

There was a planning commitment to provide a walking route to the new school, and it was also agreed that it was desirable to provide, in addition, a cycleway. Although not part of the planning requirement the Council felt it would be beneficial and they would fund it. The Council recognises that it has informed local parents that it intends to proceed with a cycleway and it regrets the delay.

A footpath takes up less space than a combined footpath and cycleway in terms of width. When Officers investigated the route they found major problems which were constraining what would happen quickly. The Council is committed to working with the local Members and parents to achieve a satisfactory and safe resolution for all parties at the earliest opportunity.

In order to have a safe route by the new term the decision to go ahead with just the footpath was made; which will be achieved by September 2017, ie this year. The Council is also committed to pushing ahead with a sufficiently lit greenway between the FBC and Bohunt School to ensure that this is also ready by September 2017.

However as I said right at the beginning, the opportunity to put in a cycleway in the future is still our aim. However, there are complex legal issues surrounding this matter that have prevented us from putting in the cycle route by this September.

However, we will be working closely with local Members, residents and parents in order to achieve the best result for the area and to resolve those issues. It has been agreed with local Members that free bus passes on the number 3 bus route serving the school will temporarily continue until an alternative safe cycleway route is implemented. In addition, we have agreed to a request by local Members to undertake a feasibility study and find an alternative route for the cycleway and to consult with those Members prior to a decision being made.

5. Keith Malvern asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question

I am disappointed that despite the Woodley trial starting in August you are not yet in a position to give details of the income generated compared to the proposals that have been implemented elsewhere in the Borough. We know from last month's Executive that the car park budget has been over achieved by £40K. That was then. Regardless of whether the Executive takes a sensible decision or not this evening, can I ask you to consider what you can do to help retailers in Wokingham Town, two of whom have already left this year.

Answer

Regarding the Woodley trial that commenced in September 2016 we need to analyse a full year's car parking data across the Borough, including seasonal fluctuations, before making a permanent decision. However I am proposing that this data and a clear recommendation will be brought back to this Committee when it is available.

I have recently set up a cross party Member and Officer working group to review the Borough's approach to parking. The initial meeting was only this week however I am pleased to report that part of the group's wide remit will be to review town centre car parking, as well as Borough wide parking. When a new Wokingham Parking Policy is drafted later this year the Council will be engaging with stakeholders by consulting widely, before a new Wokingham Parking Plan is ultimately approved by the Committee. It would be unwise to make hasty decisions about anything based on incomplete data.

With regard to the retailers in the Wokingham Town, which you asked about, apart from the Rose Street car parking being recently removed to enable the new Peach Place development there is considerable parking around the town, both at daytime and evening (both chargeable and free parking) and the brand new Carnival Pool with parking will be opening shortly, and don't forget that the on-street parking is still operational and is free around various parts of the town centre. Finally, the feedback we are getting from retailers (both existing and potential new ones) is that they are very pleased with the regeneration and are keen for us to continue and we are receiving many enquiries about the new town centre premises including major sign ups.

Member Questions

1. Charles Margetts asked the Executive Member for Economic Development and Finance the following question:

Question

Some parts of Finchampstead have internet speeds only marginally faster than dial up. This lack of internet speed is a major constraint on the ability to work / shop from home and should not be accepted or tolerated. Can the Executive Member tell me what is being done to address the remaining internet blackspots in Finchampstead and across the Borough?

Answer

Superfast Berkshire has now instigated phase 3 of the programme which will address remaining gaps in coverage across Wokingham Borough. There are a number of steps in this process (e.g. State Aid approval and a full open procurement) before contracts

can be awarded. The ITT process is currently underway with the evaluation scheduled to commence in March 2017. Contracts are expected to be awarded in July 2017.

The aim is to ensure that everyone in Wokingham Borough has access to superfast broadband by 2018 at the very latest. Finchampstead has been identified as one of the priority areas to be addressed as part of phase 3.

Superfast Berkshire is also in continuous dialogue with suppliers encouraging them to extend their networks across Berkshire as part of their commercial roll-out at no cost to the project. Virgin Media are currently exploring expanding their network to homes and businesses in the Finchampstead area and the Project Team will provide an update when they have more information.

2. Gary Cowan asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question

Deteriorating bus shelters in Arborfield and Barkham has been a big problem for residents for some years now but just going back to the 1st June 2015 as a start date for a series of emails referred to in this question the Head of Highways stated that “we are very keen to make sure that the bus shelters in Arborfield are attractive and well used. To this end replacing the existing “life expired” shelters would be a great idea and really worthwhile”.

He continued “however there are a number of issues in the offing at the moment that mean I would recommend we put this idea on hold – for no more than 6 months and if in 6 months we are no closer to knowing the outcome of any of these issues then at which point we will go ahead and replace the shelters anyway”.

A more recent email from the head of highways stated that the Borough has no money available to carry out these works in the next financial year yet I read in the Wokingham Paper that WBC were going to replace an old bus shelter in Woodley and also erect a second new one. Why does Woodley appear to get star treatment and Arborfield and Barkham do not?

Might residents of Wokingham Borough be forgiven if they thought it might have anything to do with the fact that the Leader of Wokingham Borough Council is also at the time of writing the Leader of Woodley Town Council.

Answer

Analysis of bus routes operating within the Borough is undertaken regularly to identify where the funding would be best targeted in terms of cost/benefit. The analysis takes account of the type of route operated, the days and times of operation, the annual passenger numbers and the type of vehicles operated on those routes.

An outcome of this process has identified Woodley Orange routes to be improved during 2017/18. Following that, the Leopard route, which serves Arborfield and Barkham would be the next route for consideration. The Woodley Orange routes score better than the Leopard as passenger numbers are higher, at over 1 million per year and the combined frequency of the Woodley Orange routes is higher than that of the combined Leopard service.

With regard to the shelters in Woodley one was formally supplied free of charge to the Borough by the bus shelter company Clear Channel. This shelter has recently been damaged by a vehicle; therefore this replacement is being undertaken now. The bus shelter on Beechwood Avenue has come to the end of its natural life and is due to be replaced by the Town Council using the Town Council's own funding (ie Woodley Town Council, not WBC's money) – once more a matter involving an Officer-only procedure. The Leader was not involved in any of these decisions.

3. Clive Jones asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Question

Many residents living in Earley and parents of children who attend Aldryngton Primary School have expressed concerns about the Council's expansion plans for Aldryngton School. Will you confirm that the Council's Executive and officers are taking all their concerns seriously?

Answer

Concerns are, and without any doubt, being treated seriously on this matter which has received a great deal of attention from Members and Officers alike. There is an active and open consultation with parents with children attending Aldryngton Primary School. Indeed, you still have time to submit your views should you wish to. As you might expect, considering the concerns raised by existing parents at the school and the school itself, this has been a priority for Officers, who have ensured that issues raised have been dealt with thoroughly and promptly. In addition to this there has been: an open meeting with parents in January with the presentation on proposals and an extensive question and answer session, which I believe you attended as well; a detailed proposal was sent to the parents of the school including responses to issues raised by parents; a briefing for all local members (I know that you attended that as well); and a statutory school expansion consultation concluding on the 2nd of March.

I note that, whilst you are not a local Ward Member, you should be conversant on this topic as you have been invited, as I said, to the briefing of local Members as well and you also put an appearance in at the open meeting for parents and residents. I hope that you will agree with me that it is important to also consider the parents in Earley who are not actively engaged in the consultation but hope to send their children to a local school. When considering the Council's expansion plans for the school the Council is going to need to balance the concerns raised against the proposals with those factors favouring a school place strategy that enables greater capacity in Earley.

The Conservative-led Council is a leader in this region in delivering and investing in local schools for local families. We want to continue to avoid children unnecessarily travelling across the Borough to find a school placement. This is something that the parents have appealed for and this is imbued in the work that the Executive Member for Children Services has led for the last five years through the current and previous primary schools strategies. The Council's Executive will be holding a Special Executive on the 15th of March in order to ensure that the proposals are scrutinised by Members, as well as ensuring that the matter continues to be treated in an open and transparent matter.

Questions to Council on 23 February 2017

Public Questions

1. **John Russell asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:**

Question

The Council is currently updating its Transport Plan. What is the 2016-17 budget spend on transport across the borough and how much is being spent on the following elements: (a) Highway maintenance; (b) Traffic management of the existing road network, e.g. traffic lights, islands and speed controls; (d) Bus services; (e) Community transport and (f) Responsive transport.

Answer

The answer is as follows:

Revenue

- £1.4million on Highway maintenance, that is reactive road and footway repairs including patching and potholes;
- £480,000 on Traffic management of the existing road network that includes minor traffic schemes, signing and lining, Traffic Regulation Orders, road safety activities, traffic signal maintenance, traffic surveys and data collection;
- £734,000 on Bus services; and
- £98,000 on Community transport and Responsive transport.

On the capital side there are numerous highway and transport capital projects and initiatives and these are all listed in the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan.

Of the capital sums allocated to Highways & Transport there is £2.28million per annum allocated to "Carriageway Structural Maintenance" which includes the annual road resurfacing programme, where the Borough's roads are assessed to identify those most in need of treatment, including their structural condition and usage.

2. **Guy Grandison asked the Executive Member for Economic Development and Finance the following question:**

Question

Could the Executive Member for Finance tell me what Capital investments the Council will be making in Earley as part of the 2017/18 budget?

Answer

The schemes included in the Budget, specific to only the area of Earley are: the expansion of Loddon Primary school £2.4m over the next 2 years and the proposed expansion of Aldryngton Primary at £4.8m over the next 2 years.

However, there are a number of other programmes in the capital vision which though Borough wide involves additional investment in Earley. Amongst these are:

- Schools urgent maintenance
- School Kitchens maintenance

- Schools LED Enhancement (that is lighting)
- Special Education Needs
- Enhancing Provision for Children and Young People with Disabilities
- Highway Drainage Schemes
- Street Lighting Column Structural Testing
- Highway Infrastructure Flood Alleviation Schemes
- Highways Carriageways Structural Maintenance
- Highways Footway Structural Maintenance
- LED Streetlight Replacement Programme
- Traffic Signal Upgrade Programme
- Wokingham Borough wide Cycle Network
- Sports Provision across the Borough
- Waste Schemes and
- Library service

I would also like to stress that even where capital investment is made outside the area of Earley, it is also of benefit to the residents of Earley, as they can utilise the roads and community facilities and other facilities beyond their immediate boundaries.

Questions to Extraordinary Executive on 15 March 2017

Public Questions

- 1. Sabine Heine-Bickle asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:**

Question

Do you agree that any investment decision by the Council should only go ahead if it offers value for money against all other available options?

- 2. Toshiko Tani asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:**

Question

Do you think it is important that your decision tonight is based on facts?

- 3. David Nader asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:**

Question

Do you agree that a £5m investment in the expansion of a school should be based on a high level of confidence of long term local demand for school places rather than a single year's data?

- 4. Jason Sutton asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:**

Question

Do you agree that the council's statutory duty is to provide school places to every child in the Borough, but that this duty does not extend to: ensuring every child is allocated a place in the catchment it lives in every year, ensuring there is a place for every child at

- 5. Hannah Selman asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:**

Question

The issue of funding in education is currently high on everyone's/ the political agenda at the moment, both nationally and within Wokingham Borough, with many schools facing the challenge of ever-tightening budgets. Do you agree that given the current financial situation in schools maintaining surplus places could be considered a considerable, and uneconomical, financial burden?

- 6. Martha Ahijado asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:**

Question

Do you agree that the Council's decisions should be made following a transparent set of decision making criteria?

- 7. Ian Head asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:**

Question

Do you have faith in the Aldryngton Primary School governors to make the best possible choices and exercise sound judgement for the pupils of the school?

- 8. Philip Martin Daniels asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:**

Question

Can you share the number of parents who attended the Council's pre-consultation meeting on the 16th of January?

- 9. Carolyn Simpson asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:**

Question

Aldryngton School and its PTA have for the last 9 months put their capital investment on hold, from repairing the climbing frame, adding the planned new playground markings, to needed repairs etc. in order to avoid investing funds into infrastructure about to be demolished again. Do you agree that it is unreasonable towards the school and unfair to its current pupils to expect this to continue for the next three years that the planning permission would be valid for?

- 10. Tahir Maher asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:**

Question

Now that a decision has been made not to expand Aldryngton school this year will the Council use some of the money that was set aside to finance the expansion to repair and refurbish parts of the school.

11. John Russell asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Question

Do you agree that Aldryngton School has successfully accommodated all foundation applicants from within the catchment area from at least 1998 until 2014-15 and that the school has been unsuccessful in accommodating all foundation applicants only in the last two years 2015-16 and 2016/17?

Member Question

1. Clive Jones asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Question

You have advised me that you don't think that a new school in the Hatch Farm Diaries development, as an alternative to the expansion of Aldryngton School, is not a good idea.

Could you explain in detail why you have come to this conclusion?