

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF  
THE EXECUTIVE  
HELD ON 29 JUNE 2017 FROM 7.30 PM TO 8.25 PM**

**Committee Members Present**

Councillors: Charlotte Haitham Taylor (Chairman), David Lee, Mark Ashwell, Chris Bowring, Norman Jorgensen, Julian McGhee-Sumner, Stuart Munro, Simon Weeks and Oliver Whittle

**Other Councillors Present**

Prue Bray  
Gary Cowan  
Lindsay Ferris  
Michael Firmager  
Pauline Jorgensen  
Malcolm Richards  
Beth Rowland  
Imogen Shepherd-DuBey  
Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey

**14. APOLOGIES**

There were no apologies for absence received.

**15. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 25 May 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**16. DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

Councillor Norman Jorgensen declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 18 Shareholders' Report by virtue of the fact that he was a paid Non-Executive Director of WBC Holdings Ltd for part of the period reported and his wife was now a paid Non-Executive Director of WBC Holdings Ltd. Councillor Jorgensen remained in the meeting during discussions and voted on the matter.

Councillor Simon Weeks declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 18 Shareholders' Report by virtue of the fact that he was a paid Non-Executive Director of the Optalis Group for part of the period reported. Councillor Weeks remained in the meeting during discussions and voted on the matter.

Councillors David Lee and Stuart Munro declared personal interests in Agenda Item 18 Shareholders' Report by virtue of the fact that they were paid Non-Executive Directors of WBC Holdings Ltd. Councillor Lee and Munro remained in the meeting during discussions and voted on the matter.

**17. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

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

There were no public questions submitted.

## **18. MEMBER QUESTION TIME**

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

### **18.1 Charles Margetts had asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question but as he was unable to attend the meeting the following written answer was provided:**

#### **Question**

The Executive Member will be aware of various planning applications across the Borough from speculative developers. In some cases the applications relate to sites outside the settlement boundary, with limited public transport links, a limited level of local services and which are accessed via roads which are heavily congested at rush hour. Can the Executive Member clarify the general criteria which WBC looks at when considering new housing development?

#### **Answer**

The planning system is plan-led and we must determine applications in accordance with the development plan (Core Strategy and Managing Development Delivery Development Plan Document), unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Our Development Plan defends the Borough from inappropriate development; however, where we are thought to have less than a 5 year housing land supply a presumption in favour of development is given weight by Planning Inspectors. Up until this year our housing land supply has been underpinned by the Core Strategy 2006. Developers have however not built houses quickly and the Government has re-written how housing land supply is formulated. We have come under attack by speculative developers arguing that our housing need (856pa) should be increased, based on affordability and that our supply estimates should be reduced based on delivery constraints. Further pressure is also coming from:

- Appeal decisions (Stanbury House 862/890pa), (Park Lane 894pa);
- Current appeals at Barkham Road 950pa argued;
- the University of Reading's LPU submissions, estimated 1120pa; and
- the Housing White Paper standard formula for assessing housing need.

Going forward, our housing need figure is likely to continue to be viewed as a starting point unless the Local Plan Update adopts a fresh and robustly tested housing need number. It is clear that Inspectors are siding with the appellant in any '*on balance*' cases as this approach has already been successful. Our best defence in the longer term is to adopt the Local Plan Update and in the interim to aim at more planning consents to give us a 6 year housing land supply making it more risky for developers to appeal. It is planned to consider actions to address these concerns at the Executive meeting this evening.

### **18.2 Gary Cowan asked the Executive Member for Strategic Highways and Planning the following question:**

#### **Question**

With the Leadership change within the Conservative Administration which sees you now as the Executive Member responsible for Strategic Highways and Planning can you advise me if the existing various housing policies adopted by this Administration will have the continued support of the Administration.

I refer in particular to the following;

- The increase of the Core Strategy approved housing numbers from 661 to 856 without any public consultation to which Officers now say this is a minimum;
- The secret plan to build up to 15,000 houses at Grazeley; and
- finally continue to support the plan announced recently in Wokingham Town Hall to support Bracknell, Reading and West Berks should they have any housing shortfalls up to 2036.

### **Answer**

As I am sure you are aware we are required to use the most up to date housing assessment figures, and this has been confirmed by Government in various guidance, and that is the most recent and also the most recent planning appeals. GL Hearne carried out a revised housing needs assessment in October 2015 and we are now compelled to use that as the most up to date information that we have. As this is an objectively assessed piece of evidence the public consultation was not required and it is not something that we could have achieved anything by carrying out any public consultation on it.

We are forced, as I am sure you know, to accept these figures. We will challenge them but we are being constantly challenged at appeal and they keep pushing those figures up and those appeal inspectors are backing those people and still doing it. But we are not sitting back doing nothing we are challenging this.

### **Supplementary Question**

One of the concerns I do have is although I see leadership changes within the Administration two of the key architects of the above disastrous housing policies which I have listed in my original question, supported by the Conservative Group, one has to worry about the future for Wokingham's green fields.

If you look at Windsor and Maidenhead it has 53 Conservatives out of 57 Councillors yet they are in the same drive like us in support of the Hearne report housing numbers which has actually fractured that Council and its residents.

My supplementary question is how can our residents have any confidence at all in a Conservative Administration which is positively supportive of massive housing building on an epic and unimaginable scale that will lead to concreting over vast tracts of our green fields.

### **Supplementary Answer**

If I actually go back you had two other points in your original question so let me come back to that. The first one was the secret plan to build up to 15,000 houses at Grazeley. Grazeley was thought to have potential to be considered as a joint venture with neighbouring authorities to accommodate some of the housing requirement the Government is forcing us to accept; and that is Governments of all colours – Labour Government, coalition government of Conservative and Liberal and the Conservative Government. They are all forcing us to accept housing. This site is not totally in the Borough and it is not designed that we are taking anybody else's housing; which I think the third part of your question comes on to. It was as many other projects considered in a confidential environment to understand if it could be of benefit in alleviating some of our housing pressures; exactly what you were saying about building on greenfield sites. I

totally agree with you on that and it is certainly not my objective. It is now a formally submitted site and is being assessed alongside the other some 200 sites.

Finally you talked about something announced and I am totally ignorant of this in Wokingham Town Hall to support Bracknell, Reading and West Berkshire should they have any shortfalls. This Authority has over many years complied with Government requirements to assess our housing need and accommodate such need within our boundaries. While we have a responsibility under law to work together with our neighbours as part of the duty to co-operate, it is not our intention to take on any further un-necessary housing in our Borough; especially as we are the highest within our housing area, which is the west of Berkshire. We have the highest number of houses that has been pushed on us at 856 which is 221 more than Bracknell which is just down the road.

I will not sit by and see this area concreted over and I know Gary that you will make sure that none of us do that but you have my assurance because we will be writing to Government and we are arranging meetings with them. This Authority has granted some 10,000 planning applications and the appeals that we fail on are because the Inspectors challenge the affordability. Affordability, as everybody knows, is all to do with delivery. If you have more houses being delivered the houses are cheaper. Well, 10,000 planning applications out there you have to ask yourself, and I hope the press pick this up, who is it who is holding back on the delivery. It is not Wokingham Borough Council it is the developers and if they actually built what they say they would build you would have cheaper houses in this area. However we are constantly losing at appeal and the Government have got to change their attitude and we are going to make sure that they are aware of our frustrations.

### **18.3 Pauline Jorgensen asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question:**

#### **Question**

What is the Executive Member doing to hold the developers to account for the appalling landscaping and completion of the Sibly Hall development in Earley?

#### **Answer**

It is true that the Council has struggled to get the developer Persimmon to honour its s106 legal obligations in a timely fashion at the Sibly Hall development and anecdotally we understand that we are not alone in having this problem.

WBC Officers and Earley Town Council have met on site with representatives of Persimmon on at least three occasions in the last couple of years and I have been in regular contact with senior management at Persimmon with a view to persuading them towards a satisfactory conclusion. On each occasion Persimmon have agreed but then failed to fully implement a programme of outstanding agreed works. The current estimated date for completion of all works is at the end of June 2017 and should Persimmon again miss this deadline then the Council will have no option but to pursue a legal remedy.

#### **Supplementary Question**

That is good news on behalf of the residents particularly. This has now been going on for two years I think. It is completely unsatisfactory both for the residents who have moved into really nice new houses and found that the landscaping work has not been completed and also for the residents in the area that lived there before who have found that the roads are still not repaired and the whole thing is looking an eyesore.

I went round this morning and took some more pictures which I would be happy to show you which show that the promised reseeding and weed killing does not seem to be very effective. I got John Redwood involved in November last year to help and he wrote to Persimmon and at that point they were promising that everything would be resolved shortly. I have got the letter and I would be happy to give you a copy.

I would be very keen to see this fixed and I am very pleased to hear your reassurances. I actually talked to the Town Council this morning and they have still got a list that requires doing and they don't sound to me like the sort of things that will be done by tomorrow but we can remain hopeful.

### **Supplementary Answer**

It is disappointing that one or two national developers appear to have such disregard for agreed planning conditions often to the detriment as you say not just of the existing residents in the area but also to the purchasers of the new housing. So as indicated in my initial answer we will be pursuing an appropriate legal remedy.

### **18.4 Lindsay Ferris asked the Executive Member for Environment the following question:**

#### **Question**

In response to the terrible fire in North Kensington, has anyone in WBC clarified the status of all fire related issues in WBC owned buildings including working Fire/Smoke Alarms and Sprinkler Systems installed or retro fitted wherever recommended and whether the same cladding has been used on any building in the Borough as in Grenfell Tower.

#### **Answer**

First, I would like to give my condolences to the families of those killed and best wishes to those affected by the fire. Clearly it was quite a tragedy.

To answer your specific question, yes we have been reviewing the fire safety status of our buildings.

For the corporate portfolio which includes education, I can confirm the following.

- Buildings where we have a duty to provide a Fire Risk Assessment in accordance with the Regulatory Order are fully compliant;
- All the maintained Schools have been resurveyed this year and are being assessed for any works that are required;
- All corporate buildings were Fire Risk Assessed last year and of the three sites identified as moderate risk we have completed the necessary works to lower them to tolerable levels i.e. low risk;
- As part of the Council's policy all new educational properties that have been completed since 2012 have installed sprinklers. These include Waingels, Bulmershe, St Crispins, Charvil Primary, Wheatfield Primary, Windmill Primary and the new Arborfield School;
- Our buildings are not high rise and there are none over five storeys.

Moving on to cladding:

- Two new buildings have been constructed recently with cladding, Shinfield Infants hall and the new Bulmershe admin block. Both sites have used Marley Equitone

- Natura cement fibreboard rain screen cladding and they are only single storey in height. This product has a class 0 flame spread certification and is not insulating;
- Windmill and Wheatfield Primary Schools which are both academies are clad with Dura cladding plastic composite decorative planks with a fire rating to Euro Class Dfl-S1. Both are single storey and have multiple escape routes and sprinkler protection. This cladding meets building regulation, has been assessed, and Officers are not recommending any further action or testing of the cladding.

Looking at properties under construction by our Housing Companies next:

- There are two schemes under construction for Loddon Homes – Fosters Extra Care scheme and 52 Reading Road. These both include a sprinkler system within the designs and as part of the build specification due to the more vulnerable nature of the future tenants of both schemes;
- The apartment blocks at Phoenix Avenue under construction for Berry Brook Homes are of traditional brick construction with no sprinkler system. They will meet all fire safety requirements and will have to satisfy Fire Safety Officer checks and assessments prior to them being let.

In relation to the Town Centre Regeneration:

- No properties will be higher than five storeys;
- All our properties have been designed and will be built in compliance with Building Regulations and the relevant Fire Regulations;
- Up to date Fire Risk Assessments are in place where they are required.

The shocking tragedy of the Grenfell Tower fire provides an important reminder to us all that we cannot be complacent with regard to the security and safety of our buildings and accommodation. Although our records show we are diligent in fire risk assessments and that we are a relatively low risk in terms of the nature of our buildings, we must continue our efforts to keep our residents safe.

This is a summary of a response there is a more detailed response available if you wish.

### **Supplementary Question**

It might be in the full detailed response but could you just clarify that when you said the Fire Risk Assessment in the early part of your answer was that recent or was that last year? I just wanted to check that because my concern there is that the fire assessments were done in lots of places around the country and it has been found not to be quite right. So if you are saying that it was something that was done in 2014, 15 or 16 then I am looking for anything that we have done in the last few weeks.

In addition to the cladding serious concerns have been raised about the thermal insulation used. The most common thermal insulation used is Polyisocyanurate; known as PIR. This unfortunately has now been found to have problems both as a fire hazard and as a source of toxic products; in particular hydrogen cyanide. Has Wokingham Borough Council ascertained whether there are any buildings in Wokingham Borough which have used PIR?

### **Supplementary Answer**

I will check more thoroughly on that just to give you a 100% assurance on that. My understanding is that from the checks that we have undertaken so far we haven't identified any buildings but I will get back to you with a full response on that.

### **18.5 Prue Bray asked the Executive Member for Environment the following question:**

#### **Question**

Last year, the introduction of the new grass-cutting contract led to a large number of complaints and a lot of time and effort was expended by Councillors, residents and Officers sorting them out. Could the Executive Member please explain why the same problems are recurring with respect to some of the same areas of grass this year?

#### **Answer**

It is certainly true that we had problems during the early months of the Grounds Maintenance Contract in 2016 and these were explained at the time last year. However, last year those problems were generally dealt with by mid-July.

It is difficult to predict weather patterns and hence how things will grow. That is why we introduced an 'outcomes' based contract so that our contractor can be more flexible in responding to different weather patterns.

The 2017 cutting season started well in early March with the first cut being completed within four weeks. The second and third cuts started well but were disrupted by rain which saw the time for the second and third cuts fall behind by approximately two weeks.

ISS, our contractor, has mobilised an additional crew and they have almost caught up and expect the third cut to be completed by the end of June. They will then immediately start the fourth cut at the start of July and continue grass cutting during the growing period up to October. On top of the resources dedicated to grass cutting we have also worked in partnership with ISS to deal with overgrown vegetation and sight lines thereby avoiding many of the complaints we had last year.

On the positive front we have had a number of compliments from those who complained last year commenting on the improvements. We have also had a significant amount of compliments on the wild flower areas and especially those undertaken by ISS on the Showcase roundabout on the A329.

We will be extending the wild flower areas once again in 2018 so please let us know if you would like to put forward any specific areas in your respective wards. ISS has also agreed to assist in community bulb planting and are going to be working with the Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association on self-set hedgerow trees and how to develop and protect hedgerows around Cantley.

### **Supplementary Question**

Obviously I am the Member for Winnersh so most of my experience is with Winnersh and I do know, however, that there are problems in other areas such as Arborfield, Earley and Twyford. The issue is not so much whether the cuts are delayed it is the larger areas of grass which are not being cut in exactly the same way as they were not cut last year and we resolved to sort out which bits would be cut and which bits wouldn't but they have not cut the same bits they didn't cut last year. I could give you a whole list of roads starting with Allnatt Avenue and ending with Woodward Close in Winnersh where we need to

define more clearly how the larger areas should be kept because they are just not cutting them. They are leaving areas for informal play but you can lose your football in them because small children cannot see over the top of the grass and I am not really exaggerating very much.

So could you please try and sort out those larger areas of grass and get a plan for next year so that we know what they should look like. We don't mind if the cuts are delayed by rain but we do want them to be cut and not just left.

### **Supplementary Answer**

I will take that away. Clearly the idea of this was to let places like verges grow so that the plants and wildlife can thrive but the flipside of that was that the play areas would be cut as often as is required. So yes we need to be clear what has to be cut and at what frequency.

### **18.6 Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey asked the Leader of Council the following question:**

#### **Question**

Shouldn't Councillors who go to functions for the WBC pay the difference between what we are allowed for reimbursement and the actual cost of the hotel?

#### **Answer**

The Members' Allowances Scheme, which is contained within the Council's Constitution, states that Members attending a conference may claim a "reasonable cost of overnight accommodation (e.g. 3\* star hotel)". This is in line with the Officers' accommodation expenses scheme. However, when anyone makes a choice about overnight accommodation for conferences they need to think about more than just cost. We need to think about convenience, closeness to the conference centre, where attendees attend the event organisers might gather for example, and the safety of being in an unfamiliar place particularly at night-time

I happen to prefer the previous arrangement used by the Council, where there was an upper limit on the amount Members and Officers can claim for conferences. We could ask the Constitution Review Working Group to look at this and put the system back into the Members' Allowances Scheme and the Officers' Scheme if Members felt that was correct and make new changes. A scheme perhaps would need to reflect the fact that prices in city centres would be higher than in less urbanised areas or for example in university campuses where I have been to a number of different conferences. For example a 3\* hotel in Manchester may be significantly more expensive than a 4\* hotel, for example, in Bournemouth. On top of this hotels are known to increase their prices for large conferences so this would also need to be taken into account.

What we do not want is a scheme that stops Members or Officers being able to attend conferences because they are unable to claim for suitable, sensible and safe accommodation when they travel on Council business.

### **Supplementary Question**

Since governors are expected to pay £1 every time they come for training for parking in the car park out here this is something they volunteer for. We are saying that we can spend more money on hotels, £149 possibly more than the allowance would be per night, and this could represent almost 900 governor visits. I would ask you at least if you were preparing not to do this could you give governors a special thing that says "we are

governors here for this meeting xxx date and we won't be paying for the parking this time", please?

### **Supplementary Answer**

I think this has been raised before and a number of people come here for a number of different reasons to visit the Council offices and it was voted through to charge for car parking in the evening. We could look at it again but the question is who you charge for and who you do not and there will always be a group of people that will be particularly unhappy about being charged for or not being charged for. I can take that away to look at in terms of those who are volunteering their time but equally you could say that our Members who are coming here in the evening are also volunteering their time and the question would then be would they be charged as well. So that I would also put back to you as well.

### **18.7 Beth Rowland asked the Executive Member for Business and Economic Development and Regeneration the following question:**

#### **Question**

In the Executive papers before you tonight you are being asked to agree to spend a further considerable amount of money purchasing property for the regeneration of Wokingham Town Centre.

The residents of Woodley along with others in the whole Borough are picking up the bill for a huge amount of borrowing to spend on one of the three towns in the Borough.

When can Woodley residents expect the same treatment – that is around £138 million being spent on Woodley Town Centre?

#### **Answer**

Later on this evening there is a proposal for a further acquisition in the town centre. As is set out in that paper it is an opportunity that has arisen and has been assessed in terms of the benefit to WBC as a whole; not only is it a good financial deal for WBC but it also adds benefits to the regeneration of the town by its adjacency to one of our current sites.

The regeneration of Wokingham is identified within the adopted Core Strategy and it also forms part of our Vision. Inside all our agendas if you look at the fourth point down in our Vision it says "Invest in regenerating towns and villages, support social and economic prosperity, whilst encouraging business growth" and this is one of our core visions.

In terms of the total cost of the regeneration scheme, and I will come back to answer your question in a second, based on the cash flow developed in April this year, it is expected to generate £3.5 million per annum financial contribution in 2022 to 2023 when the whole scheme is complete and fully income producing. This figure is after meeting the cost of interest on the borrowing; at 2.8% interest per annum, the current PWLB rate that has been secured. This potentially rises to £4.4m income after the debt is fully repaid; currently estimated to be financial year 2029/30.

This surplus is for the benefit of all our residents, including those who live in Woodley. Not only are we regenerating the town of Wokingham, providing additional homes, local employment and creating a great place to shop, it also makes a significant financial contribution for the benefit of all the residents across the whole of the Borough.

We will continue to evaluate other opportunities that make sense when they present themselves and make financial sense across the Borough. So it is for the whole of the Borough not just for the Wokingham residents.

### **Supplementary Question**

I have lived in Woodley for about 40 years and been a Member of this Council for well over 20 years and a few years ago the Conservative Administration sold off the premises that they owned in Woodley. They sold the Woodley silver and took the cash then.

The imbalance of spending in this Borough, between Wokingham and Woodley and the other towns and villages, is clearly not fair. The Authority needs to be less Wokingham centric. I would like you to assure us that all future spending will be fair and equitable in the Borough and I am very sad that not I, or many of my residents, will live long enough to see any work done in Woodley town centre that repays them for what they have paid for Wokingham town centre.

### **Supplementary Answer**

I would just like to point out that my colleagues have reminded me that there are two extra care home facilities in Woodley and also there have been quite a lot of leisure developments in Woodley. I hear what you are saying. This was a process that we are starting across the Borough and I think my brief is to do town centres and villages throughout the Borough not just to concentrate on one place but we started with one place quite rightly.

The Leader of Council stated that every time we bring something here in terms of investment it is to generate income as well which can then be spent in other areas in the Borough. It can either be spent as investment or as revenue to then help our more vulnerable throughout the community. So it is not just limited to spend again in Wokingham; it can be spent throughout the whole of the Borough.

## **19. SHAREHOLDERS' REPORT**

*(Councillors Norman Jorgensen, David Lee, Stuart Munro and Simon Weeks declared personal interests in this item)*

The Executive considered a report setting out the budget monitoring position for the month ending 30 April 2017; the operational update for the period to 31 May 2017 of the Council Owned Companies and the changes to the senior leadership structure of Optalis Limited.

The Executive Member for Finance went through the report and provided background to the structure of the companies and the membership of the various Boards. Members were reminded that the Optalis Group was split out from WBC Holdings on 1 April 2017 following the formation of a partnership with the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. It was noted that the Managing Director of Optalis had since resigned and a recruitment campaign for a successor would start in July. It was expected that this would provide a great opportunity to move the company forward and explore opportunities for new contracts and potentially find more clients.

Councillor Whittle advised the meeting that the financial information contained in the report only covered the first month of the financial year and no variations from budget were showing.

Councillor Lee highlighted that one of the ventures that both the Housing Company and Optalis were involved in was Fosters, the new extra care housing development at

Woodley. Members were pleased to note that a number of houses at Phoenix Avenue had recently been handed over and the people who had moved into these were very pleased with their new homes. The scheme would also be generating substantial income to the Council.

**RESOLVED** that:

- 1) the budget monitoring position for the month ending 30 April 2017 be noted;
- 2) the operational update for the period to 31 May 2017 be noted;
- 3) the changes to the senior leadership structure of Optalis Limited be noted.

## **20. MAP-BASED TRAFFIC REGULATION ORDERS (TROS) FORMAL CONSULTATION**

The Executive considered a report setting out the results of a consultation on proposals for a map-based Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) to replace the current system of text-based TROs.

The Executive Member for Highways and Transport advised that the report was concerned with the consultation which was conducted in April to prepare for the digitisation of existing traffic regulation orders in the Borough which pertained to parking. Councillor Bowring explained that currently TROs were held in paper form but it was proposed to update the way that TROs were dealt with to enable all the parking regulations to be placed on the Council's website in colour. Residents would be able to see precisely where the regulations applied and other information including times at which the regulations apply.

Councillor Bowring further stated that the opportunity would also be taken to look at the operation of parking permits with a view to providing a more flexible and easy to use service. It was noted that the digitisation process of TROs was also a prerequisite for the introduction of Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) whereby the Council would take over the regulation of traffic from the police; which would provide the ability to improve road safety, manage traffic congestion in a better way and enforce parking regulations. It was also confirmed that CPE was likely to be introduced in the early part of October this year.

**RESOLVED** that:

- 1) the making of the Wokingham Borough Council (Various Roads, Wokingham Borough)(Stopping, Waiting, Loading and Unloading Prohibitions and Restrictions, Parking Places and Resident Permit Parking Places)(Map-Based) Order 2017 be approved;
- 2) Officers be authorised to inform respondents of the results of the consultation.

## **21. BUS SERVICES IN WOODLEY AND EARLEY**

The Executive considered a report setting out options for the provision of the 19a and 19c bus routes; the contract for which was due to come to an end in September 2017.

The Executive Member for Highways and Transport advised the meeting that the 19a and 19c bus routes were services, including providing access to the Royal Berkshire Hospital and Reading town centre, which offered lifelines to some of the most deprived and vulnerable residents in the Woodley and Earley area. Due to rising costs Reading Buses

was now requiring a higher subsidy from the Council who were now having to look at not only the benefits to residents but the overall cost of providing such services.

Councillor Bowring advised that the previous contract had expired in May but following protracted negotiations the contract was extended until September 2017. An interim arrangement was now being considered to safeguard the valued service over the next 12 months. Members were advised that Option 4 was the preferred option as it best maintained the current service in terms of route and frequency of service for a reasonable cost to the Council.

Councillor Ashwell asked if consideration had been given to carrying out a review of all bus services supported by the Council and it was agreed that it was probably an opportune time to consider the Council's strategy, including ways of trying to get people to use their cars less and use public transport more.

Although supportive of the proposal Councillor Jorgensen felt that there was a need to look at the way services would be provided in the future and the routes that the buses followed. In particular there was a need to consider a more direct route for the 19a and 19c buses.

The Leader of Council gave thanks to the bus company for agreeing to let the Council place advertising on these buses and also for the partnership working.

**RESOLVED** that:

- 1) Option 4 be implemented as presented in the report that maintains for one year an hourly service on the existing 19a and 19c bus routes, whilst a new contract is put in place through a tender process;
- 2) options be explored to make the provision of these bus routes more financially sustainable through identifying alternative sources of funding;
- 3) a supplementary estimate for £35,225 for 17/18 be approved and the pressure of £8,958 growth for 18/19 be noted.

## **22. ACQUISITION OF PROPERTY (THE LODGE) DUE TO THE ARBORFIELD CROSS RELIEF ROAD**

The Executive considered a report proposing the purchase of the Lodge in Arborfield following a wish by the current owners to sell their property due in part to its immediate proximity to the approved alignment of the Arborfield Cross relief road and the impact it would have on them and their future plans.

The Executive Member for Strategic Highways and Planning informed the meeting that if people lived near a roadway such as this and it impacted on them they had a minimum of 12 months after the opening of the new road to claim compensation. Councillor Lee reminded the meeting that the Executive had adopted the Discretionary Land Acquisition Policy for Highway Works in March 2017 which enabled people who were directly affected in certain circumstances to apply for compensation before the road was built.

Members were keen that the property would be rented out at the earliest opportunity in order to achieve rental income that would over time mitigate the acquisition costs.

Following a query about when work on the relief road was due to start it was noted that it would take around a year to carry out all the surveys along the route and make sure that there was no ground water.

**RESOLVED** that the purchase of The Lodge be agreed in principal and Officers be authorised to undertake:

- 1) detailed negotiations with the property owners to establish a draft heads of terms for sale and proceed on acquiring the property;
- 2) the purchase of The Lodge is delegated to the Director of Corporate Services and Director of Customer and Locality Services in consultation with the Executive Members for Highways and Transport and Planning and Regeneration to proceed and make the discretionary purchase of The Lodge;
- 3) detailed discussions with Property Services to optimise the use of the asset whilst owned by the Council and minimise the impact on existing project budget as outlined in the Financial Implications Section.

### **23. A COMMERCIAL OPPORTUNITY TO ACQUIRE A WOKINGHAM TOWN CENTRE PROPERTY**

The Executive considered a report relating to a commercial opportunity to acquire a Wokingham Town Centre property.

The Executive Member for Business and Economic Development and Regeneration advised the meeting that the proposal was a great opportunity to acquire a property which was situated right in the middle of the town centre next to the Council's existing sites. This would enable economies of scale in terms of the ongoing management of the site; whilst generating a healthy revenue stream to fund vital services.

Councillor McGhee-Sumner wanted to ensure that an independent valuation would be sought from valuers not used previously to ensure that the Council was not overpaying for the asset.

**RESOLVED:** That the opportunity presented be taken and the acquisition of this key property within the town (as set out in the Part 2 report) be agreed, subject to the outcome of the due diligence process.

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