

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

HELD ON 20 JULY 2017 FROM 7.30 PM TO 9.50 PM

Members Present

Councillors: Rob Stanton (Mayor), John Kaiser (Deputy Mayor), Mark Ashwell, Alistair Auty, Keith Baker, Parry Batth, Laura Blumenthal, Chris Bowering, David Chopping, UllaKarin Clark, Gary Cowan, Andy Croy, Richard Dolinski, Lindsay Ferris, Michael Firmager, Kate Haines, Mike Haines, Charlotte Haitham Taylor, John Halsall, Emma Hobbs, Tim Holton, John Jarvis, Philip Houldsworth, Clive Jones, Norman Jorgensen, Pauline Jorgensen, Dianne King, Abdul Loyes, Charles Margetts, Julian McGhee-Sumner, Ken Miall, Philip Mirfin, Ian Pittock, Bob Pitts, Barrie Patman, Anthony Pollock, Malcolm Richards, Angus Ross, Beth Rowland, Imogen Shepherd-DuBey, Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey, David Sleight, Chris Smith, Wayne Smith, Bill Soane, Alison Swaddle, Paul Swaddle, Simon Weeks, Oliver Whittle and Shahid Younis

19. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Prue Bray, Pauline Helliard-Symons, David Lee and Stuart Munro.

20. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 18 May 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

Councillor Beth Rowland referred to Minute 9: Election of the Leader of the Council, in relation to the wording about the previous Leader's decision to step down from the role.

21. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

22. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

22.1 David Hare asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

A number of residents have complained to me that very few roads in Hawkedon ward, Earley, seem to have been resurfaced recently, despite many roads needing to be done. Can you tell me how much money has been spent, and where resurfacing has occurred, in Hawkedon ward over each of the last two financial years (2015/16 and 2016/17)?

Answer

The annual road resurfacing budget for the whole of the Borough is £2.4m per annum. Regarding road schemes in Hawkedon ward in Earley; in 2015/16 £32,000 was spent resurfacing the Rushey Way/Gipsy Lane junction, and in 2016/17 £16,600 was spent resurfacing Meldreth Way.

Supplementary Question

Could you tell me how it is decided which roads are to be resurfaced and also more than just Meldreth Way has been done this year?

Supplementary Answer

We do not divide up the roads programme on a ward by ward basis as that would be

contrary to effective repairs. We follow the Highways Asset Management system promoted by Government, and adopted by Wokingham's Executive in 2016. The roads treated are the ones in most need, so it does not relate to a particular ward. We aim to provide a consistent level of resurfacing for our roads across the entire Borough.

22.2 Chris Singleton asked the Executive Member for Strategic Planning and Highways the following question:

With the continuing house building programme, congestion seems to be worsening, affecting residents of the Town Wards and visitors to Wokingham Town. In the period prior to completion of both Northern and Southern Distributor roads, what peak flows and delays are anticipated, in particular on London Road, Peach Street, Denmark Street, Langborough Road, Finchampstead Road and Reading Road and what steps can the Council take to mitigate the impact of development on traffic and the potential damage to the prospects of the Regeneration programme in the period up to these 2 major road improvement projects becoming effective?

Answer

Whilst housing delivery is progressing in both North and South Wokingham Strategic Development Locations, housing occupations currently stand at 28% for the North Wokingham SDL and 15% for the South Wokingham SDL. The Town Centre Regeneration is in its very early stages, with some applications still awaiting submission. Therefore, at the moment there has not been significant additional pressure applied to the network as a result of those developments.

The Council owns and operates a Wokingham Strategic Transport Model (WSTM) which has been validated in accordance with the Department for Transport's guidance. This allows us to assess aspects of the highway for chosen forecast years, which include 2019 and 2026. For each forecast year they can be reviewed against, 'no development' (which is base year plus growth) and 'development with infrastructure' (which is base year plus growth, plus planned infrastructure). This assists us in understanding what the network background growth is and what the development related growth is. It separates the two. It should be noted that the Core Strategy includes Transport Interventions (triggers linking house completions to new highways investment) assessed through the use of the WSTM, which were secured and found to be sound through an Examination in Public.

During the delivery of the Core Strategy it is inevitable that there will be some pain prior to the infrastructure gain. The Council, as you will remember, is focused on Infrastructure Delivery and is progressing on time with the current programme which, when completed, will provide network improvements and resilience. There is not always an option for an interim scheme to be considered prior to the delivery of strategic infrastructure (which ends in 2026) and where an interim scheme may be considered (i.e. the Holt Lane junction with Reading Road, Rances Lane, Binfield Road and Priest Avenue junctions with London Road) an option is not always possible or advisable due to negative associated effects. Interim junction improvements in these locations would encourage increased traffic movements in areas where this should not be encouraged (residential and school areas). It would also divert significant s106 funds from the infrastructure projects and result in abortive works (often requiring the removal of trees and landscaping), which would not be required once the strategic infrastructure is delivered.

Rather than try to provide a lengthy range of data within this fairly short response, I would be happy to discuss this and the specific areas you mention in a separate meeting and make the main points of the meeting available on the Council's website. I would also point

out that there will be a series of information sessions for ward Members and Town/Parish Councils which will take place in the autumn. These will cover traffic modelling, Civil Parking Enforcement and our emerging Highways Strategy.

Supplementary Question

My concern is, leading up to the new roads being opened, how bad the situation is going to get. I am concerned that we are seeing the difficulty of driving through the town, in encouraging visitors to the town and that we may stop people coming here. Are there any figures available for footfall, relative to Bracknell and Reading?

Supplementary Answer

I am not aware of footfall figures for Bracknell or Reading, but I am sure that Councillors Lee and Mirfin will be able to supply you with the data you are asking for.

22.3 Annabel Yoxall asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

It is welcoming to hear that the Leader of the Council is committed to standing up for victims of domestic abuse in our community. My question is on behalf of those who have suffered historic abuse, those who are currently in abusive and controlling relationships and for the perpetrators of the abuse. For the many who have experienced abuse there will be a range of strong emotions attached to it. They may also feel isolated and that they have no voice. What will the Leader be implementing to encourage those who are afraid, who feel shame and who carry guilt, to step forward and seek the help they so desperately need?

Answer

By publicly championing this agenda, I am tackling the very notion that any victim should feel isolated, shame or guilt. By talking publicly about this priority I am encouraging anyone who needs support to be brave and ask for it.

Earlier this year the Community Safety Partnership approved the refreshed Domestic Violence and Abuse Strategy that sets the strategic aims and objectives for the next three years.

This strategy has three main areas of focus; prevention, provision, and risk reduction.

The focus on prevention has the following aims:

1. Increased understanding of coercive control and 'hidden abuse' across the workforce in order to help early identification, so that support can be offered;
2. Empower the community to seek support - to know where to ask for help and to demystify what the process for asking for help is; and
3. Work with schools and early education settings to support young people in developing an understanding of healthy and safe relationships to prevent future domestic abuse.

There are a range of services that the Council commissions and intends to commission to support residents who are or have experienced domestic abuse and to support and enable perpetrators of abuse to change their abusive behaviours.

In addition, I aim to make sure that every elected Member and Officer of this Council recognises the serious implications of domestic abuse and recognises their responsibility to tackle this blight on our community.

23. PETITIONS

Kenneth Lowe and Councillor Keith Baker presented petitions in relation to the matters indicated below.

The Mayor's decision on the action to be taken is set out against each petition.

Kenneth Lowe	Mr Lowe presented a petition with 75 signatures requesting a review of the use of Rose Street by buses. To be forwarded to the Executive Member for Highways and Transport.
Councillor Keith Baker	Councillor Baker presented a petition with 40 signatures (supported by an e petition with 128 signatures) requesting the introduction of height barriers to all Council owned car parks in order to minimise the risk of incursions by Travellers and others. To be forwarded to the Executive Member for Highways and Transport

24. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor informed Members of the following:

- This was the final Council meeting for Andy Couldrick, Chief Executive, before he departed to take up a new role as Chief Executive of the Birmingham Children's Trust. Mr Couldrick had been appointed in 2009 as Director of Children's Services before taking up the role of Chief Executive in 2012. On behalf of the Council, the Mayor wished Mr Couldrick success in his new role.
- The book of condolence opened following the terrorist attack at the Manchester Arena on 22 May 2017 had now been closed and would be delivered to the Mayor of Manchester, Andy Burnham. Mr Burnham had confirmed that the book would be displayed publicly with gratitude from the residents of the city.
- The Mayor's main charities for the year were Cancer Care and a new charity, Cancer Champions. Any funds raised would be used to support the work carried out by the Royal Berkshire Hospital to treat and care for local residents.
- The Mayor and Deputy Mayor had carried out a number of recent engagements including a number of summer fetes. They were impressed by the efforts of local residents and the vibrant community spirit on display across the Borough.

25. LOCALISM ACT PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2017/18

The Council considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 27 to 35, which gave details of the Pay Policy Statement for 2017/18. Under the Localism Act 2011 the Council was

required to publish details of its pay policy. However, the statement did not include data about staff based in schools, as this was outside the scope of the legislation.

The statement gave details of pay levels at the Council ranging from the highest to lowest paid. It also gave details of mean and median pay rates. The report indicated that, whilst there had been no change to senior management pay, the gap between the highest and lowest paid was narrowing.

Councillor Oliver Whittle reported that the Pay Policy Statement was submitted to Council on an annual basis and that the 2017/18 statement had been supported by the Council's Personnel Board.

Members commented on recent national discussions about public sector pay and the impact of ongoing Government austerity measures. Councillor Charlotte Haitham Taylor confirmed that any changes in the Government's position on public sector pay would be the subject of local negotiations and would also be the subject of a further update to Council.

It was proposed by Oliver Whittle and seconded by Charlotte Haitham Taylor that the recommendation in the report be agreed.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Pay Policy Statement for 2017/18 be approved for publication on the Council's website in accordance with the Localism Act 2011.

26. COMPLAINT - LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN'S REPORT

The Council considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 37 to 55, which gave details of the findings of an Ombudsman investigation into a complaint made on behalf of a resident of Murdoch House care home between 2010 and 2013. The complaint had been brought by the resident's daughter.

The report stated that the placement was arranged and funded by the Council and, at the time, the care home was managed by Four Seasons Healthcare (FSHC) Ltd. It was alleged that, as a result of poor care planning, delivery and monitoring by both FSHC and the Council, the resident suffered severe malnourishment.

The Ombudsman had found that:

- The resident's nutritional care was inadequate and not in line with the relevant regulations and guidance;
- There were not enough activities arranged to stimulate the resident;
- Care planning and risk assessments around falls and mobility were inadequate.

In light of the findings the Ombudsman had recommended that the Council make payments of £3,500 and £500 to the resident and her daughter respectively. The Ombudsman had also recommended that the Council review its contract monitoring process.

The report gave details of subsequent changes made to the Council's information gathering systems, risk assessments, quality assurance procedures and training and development for front line staff. The Council had also established a register to facilitate

monitoring of safety standards in agencies causing concern. The Ombudsman had been informed of these changes and had indicated that they were reasonable.

The report was submitted to the Council for consideration as required by S 31 of the Local Government Act 1974.

Councillor Julian McGhee-Sumner gave details of the Ombudsman's findings and, on behalf of the Council, apologised to the resident and her family for the Council's failings.

Members noted the details of the case with concern and sought assurance that the changes made to the Council's systems and monitoring procedures would ensure that there was no possibility of further cases of this nature. Councillor McGhee Sumner confirmed that the new systems had been thoroughly checked and that other checks and balances were now in place. The Ombudsman was satisfied that the Council had taken appropriate action.

It was proposed by Julian McGhee-Sumner and seconded by Richard Dolinski that the report of the Local Government Ombudsman and the subsequent actions taken by the Council be noted.

Upon being put to the vote it was:

RESOLVED: That the report of the Local Government Ombudsman and subsequent actions taken by the Council be noted.

27. CHANGES TO THE CONSTITUTION

The Council considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 57 to 62, which gave details of proposed changes to the Constitution, as recommended by the Constitution Review Working Group. The proposed changes related to:

- the annual review undertaken by the Council's Independent Remuneration Panel;
- the quorum for the Health and Wellbeing Board;
- the Planning Committee's Terms of Reference;
- the process for considering Code of Conduct complaints.

Councillor Lindsay Ferris stated that the Liberal Democrat Group had concerns about the current operation of the Member Code of Conduct procedure and the role of the Standards Committee. Councillor Charlotte Haitham Taylor commented that the Standards Committee was properly constituted and would continue its important role in promoting high standards of behaviour with or without support from the Liberal Democrats.

Councillor Keith Baker referred to the recent handling of Code of Conduct complaints and suggested that further guidance be provided on the process for making complaint details public, specifically who "owned" the complaint.

It was proposed by Paul Swaddle and seconded Pauline Jorgensen that the proposed changes to the Constitution, set out in the report, be agreed.

On being put to the vote it was:

RESOLVED: That the following changes to the Constitution be agreed:

1) Chapter 2.2.3 Independent Remuneration Panel

that Rule 2.2.3 be amended as follows:

2.2.3 Independent Remuneration Panel

The Council commissions an Independent Remuneration Panel to review the Scheme of Members Allowances annually. ***Should there have been little or no change during the year, the Independent Remuneration Panel may decide not to undertake a full review or any review of the Scheme of Members Allowances. In such instances, the Panel will report their decision and the reason for it to Full Council.***

2) that Rule 4.4.35 Quorum be amended as follows:

“4.4.35. The quorum of the Health and Wellbeing Board shall be four. Representatives from Wokingham Borough Council and the Clinical Commissioning Group must be in attendance at each meeting.

If neither the Chairman nor Vice Chairman is present a Chairman will be elected for that meeting. Substitute voting members for the Chairman and Vice Chairman, for that meeting will be identified prior to the meeting.”

3) that the following be added to Rule 8.1.1 Planning Committee’s Terms of Reference and the Procedure for Appeals added as an appendix to the Constitution (Appendix A to the report):

“m) Applications by any person in respect of a decision to designate/de-designate a building as a Building of Traditional Local Character. This is conditional in that the application must be made within eight weeks beginning with the day on which written confirmation of the decision was issued to the relevant parties (unless a longer period is agreed by either the Chairman of the Planning Committee or the Director Customer and Localities Services).

4) Chapter 9.1 Process for Considering Code of Conduct Complaints

Guidelines to support the Monitoring Officer’s initial decision regarding a complaint to be added to Rule 9.1.13.4 Initial Decision of the Monitoring Officer (Appendix B to report).

28. STATEMENTS BY THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL, EXECUTIVE MEMBERS, AND DEPUTY EXECUTIVE MEMBERS

Charlotte Haitham Taylor, Leader of the Council

Before going on to the main topic of my speech this evening, I need to inform Council that Councillor Alison Swaddle decided to step down as Deputy Executive Member for Children’s Services in June. I want to thank her for her work since she accepted the appointment when I became Leader. I can announce that Councillor Clark has accepted the position as the new Deputy Executive Member for Children’s Services.

I spoke at some length at the last full Council meeting about Andy Couldrick, but I would also like to give my thanks to him for all the work he has done for this authority and wish him the very best of luck in his new role at Birmingham.

In May, I talked about engaging better with local businesses and finding more ways to generate income. We have made clear also that the Council needs to change, using technology and early intervention to provide services that respond to the needs of our residents. Phase 1 of the 21st Century Council programme, dealing with internal services staff, is now complete. We have taken on board important lessons for the implementation of Phase 2.

However, we completely disagree with Unison's conclusions in last week's press. Affected staff have been consulted throughout, and the programme was raised with residents at last year's Budget Engagement sessions. Unison's comments about the impact on vulnerable people simply do not match the changes being implemented: improved availability and access to our services, whilst ensuring those who need or want to speak to someone still can. Councillor Whittle will speak a bit more about the implementation of this programme later.

It is disappointing that Councillor Croy used the Unison article to say "The Council is struggling to provide services residents expect". Our proud record of making this Council more efficient whilst protecting frontline services has seen other Councils visit Wokingham to learn about our innovation.

We have maintained weekly waste collection, unlike Labour in neighbouring Reading. We continue to invest in infrastructure, providing houses, roads, new schools, new car parks, community centres and leisure centres.

Only two weeks ago, Members visited the finished Bohunt School and were there to witness the handing over of the keys to the school. I think that this is a real accomplishment.

Optalis leads in providing adult social care, and our housing companies go from strength to strength in providing more affordable homes. Indeed, last year we built more affordable homes than any year since the financial crash, and this year we are set to double that number.

We are implementing Civil Parking Enforcement this autumn, making parking in the Borough fairer whilst stopping illegal and anti-social parking. We have built a new car park in Wokingham, we are regenerating the town centre at pace and we are renovating and building new leisure centres.

Our library service is seeing an increase in usage, against the national trend. And our Borough continues to be one of the best places to live in the country.

"Struggling to provide services"... I am not sure which planet you live on Councillor Croy? Just compare this to Reading, run by your party. Children's Services in crisis, swingeing cuts to services, Council Tax and fee rises through the roof, multiple swimming pools closing, and an administration incapable of getting its spending under control, despite receiving three times as much money per head from the Government as Wokingham.

We have serious challenges ahead, some of which I have set out tonight. When I was elected Leader of my Group and this Council, I set out a plan for what we need to meet these challenges head on.

But when I look at how Labour runs Councils, and compare them to our successes, the strength and high-quality of our services, our dedicated and skilled officers, our sound financial management and our high quality of life, I reach a stark conclusion: you only get these things with the Conservatives.

Mark Ashwell, Executive Member for Children's Services

This week, the secretary of State for Education, Justine Greening, announced an extra £1.3bn in Central Government funding for schools over the next two years. At the same time a new minimum per pupil funding limit will be set in secondary schools, meaning that all secondary schools will receive at least £4,800 for each student. This is a real breakthrough for the schools in Wokingham Borough.

As we know, up to now, our schools have received less money per pupil than anywhere else in England. My predecessor and now Leader, Charlotte Haitham Taylor, worked with Councillor Richard Dolinski, her deputy, and Councillor Keith Baker, when he was Leader, to press the Government on the issue of fairer funding for schools. We raised the issue with Ministers in Whitehall. We met the Schools Minister along with former Reading East MP Rob Wilson. This was to set out the case for our schools and, since gaining this role, I have continued to keep fairer funding on the agenda.

The announcement of extra funding is a triumph for Wokingham Borough. I want to thank all those who have helped us to argue for fairer funding for schools, including Councillors, our local MPs, schools, voluntary organisations, local residents and those who prompted our debates in this very chamber. You all made that difference.

I am glad that it is a Conservative Government that has not only recognised the problem, but started to address it. But there is still so much more to do. It is important that we continue to press the Government to increase the level of funding and, in particular, to recognise the base levels of funding for our primary schools and early years providers in our Borough. These are simply inadequate. I pledge to lead the charge to get more money for our pupils and I know that I have the Council's support which will be vital to ensure that the schools in Wokingham Borough remain some of the best in the country and every child has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

With this in mind, as Councillor Haitham Taylor has just stated, last week I had the honour of organising a cross-party tour of our new secondary school, Bohunt, in Arborfield Green. While we were there we officially handed over the keys to Ben Godber, the headteacher. This project, which I know is dear to your heart Mr Mayor, was delivered on time and on budget. Huge congratulations to all involved.

I have made it my personal mission to visit every one of the 70 plus education establishments in our Borough over the next 12 months. Today I visited Foundry College in Norreys which is a pupil referral unit to provide or support the education needs of vulnerable and permanently excluded pupils. Their strap line is "It takes commitment to change lives".

In chairing the recent Corporate Parenting Board meeting we had a great interaction with the Chair and representatives of the Children in Care Council. This Council is made up of and represents our children in care. After their presentation I said to Julia, Lily and Jackson that they could leave the meeting because they might be bored. They insisted that they wanted to stay as they found great comfort in hearing the meeting talking about them and their care. So please don't forget that we are all corporate parents for our children in care. I will continue to report back to full Council on Children's Services as it will take all our commitment to change lives.

Oliver Whittle – Executive Member for Finance, 21st Century Council, Internal Services and Human Resources

The first phase of the major project to improve efficiency and reduce costs within the Council has completed in line with the programme and targets set. Phase one focused on internal areas, and our residents and Councillors will not have noticed any changes.

A much enhanced IT system has been introduced and all internal functions have been redesigned to ensure the operations are streamlined, that is to say lean processes.

The next stage will see a similar approach applied to outward facing services. The intention is to offer our residents greater and easier access to information through the Council website which is being redesigned. The website is also available now as an app for mobile phones, and again this will be improved. Residents unable to access the web will still be able to telephone the Council or visit Shute End.

Julian McGhee-Sumner – Executive Member for Adults' Services, Health, Wellbeing and Housing

I would like to share two good news items with Members.

The first relates to Fosters Care Home in Woodley. As Members will remember, we agreed to have Fosters rebuilt to 21st century standards. The building is due to be handed over in October and is fully on schedule and on budget. I know my colleagues in Optalis are excited to be taking over this brand new, state of the art, building and I am advised that residents will begin moving in towards the end of the year.

The other area I wanted to mention is Phoenix Avenue in Norreys Ward. A number of houses have been handed over and I was delighted to be able to meet two new residents who were delighted with their new homes which offer greater family indoor and outdoor space. I look forward to seeing the remaining units completed in the coming months.

I would also like to update Members on the recruitment of a new Chief Executive Officer for Optalis. Recent applications have been whittled down to 27, of which four have been shortlisted for interview, due to take place in the first week in August. I will report back once a decision has been made.

Norman Jorgensen – Executive Member for Environment, Sports, Environmental Health, Leisure and Libraries

Following the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower and our subsequent reviews, I provide this statement about the fire safety status of the Council's buildings.

- For the buildings where we have a duty to provide a Fire Risk Assessment these are fully compliant.
- All maintained Schools have been re-surveyed 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 take them to low risk.
- As part of the Council's policy, all new educational properties completed since 2012 have sprinklers installed. These include Waingels, Bulmershe, St Crispins, Charvil Primary, Wheatfield Primary, Windmill Primary and the New Arborfield School
- Our buildings are not high rise and none are over 5 storeys.

Cladding

- Two new buildings have been constructed recently with cladding, Shinfield Infants Hall and the new Bulmershe Administration block. Both buildings are only single storey in height and have used cement fibreboard cladding.
- Windmill and Wheatfield Primary schools (both Academies) are clad with plastic composite decorative planks. Both are single storey and have multiple escape routes and sprinkler protection.
- The cladding in all these cases meets building regulations.

Properties under Construction by our Housing Companies

- Fosters and 52 Reading Road both include a sprinkler system within the design and as part of the build specification due to the more vulnerable nature of the expected future tenants.
- The apartment blocks under construction at Phoenix Avenue are of traditional brick construction with no sprinkler system.

The Grenfell Tower fire provides a reminder that we cannot become complacent with the security and safety of our buildings and accommodation. Although our records show we are diligent in fire risk assessments and that we are relatively low-risk in terms of the nature of our buildings, we will continue our reviews and apply any learning from this fire as the Inquiry develops.

Simon Weeks, Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement

I have several items to report. Members will be aware of the Hare Hatch Sheeplands issue, which has occupied the time of this Council in the past and also one of our Council meetings. I have an update following Court appearances. The High Court granted the Council an injunction in February 2017 which required Mr Scott and other retailers to comply with the Planning regulations at Hare Hatch Sheeplands by the 1st May. Officers visited on the 2nd May and found that neither Mr Scott nor Mr Parry, of Garden Trends, had complied.

A breach of a Court order is contempt of court and the Council made an application for committal. The first hearing took place on 30 June and Mr Scott and Mr Parry admitted that they had not complied and were, therefore, in contempt of court. The Judge adjourned the case until 19 July to give Mr Scott and Mr Parry the opportunity to purge their contempt by complying with the order. Officers visited again on Monday and Tuesday this week and found that, other than the complete removal of demolition debris, Mr Scott and Mr Parry

had complied. Mr Scott and Mr Parry apologised unreservedly to the Court for their contempt. The Judge gave Mr Scott a two month custodial sentence, suspended for two years, subject to his continued compliance with the Planning regulations on site. Mr Scott and Mr Parry were also ordered to pay the Council's full legal costs, totalling £19,477. Other legal issues are pending.

The second matter relates to the 5 Year Land Supply which many of you are aware is contentious and puts some of our longer term plans at risk. A decision was taken over a year ago, in relation to Stanbury House, where we refused an application which we then lost on appeal. We felt that the Inspector was erroneous in reaching his decision and we applied for a Judicial Review. We received the outcome of the Judicial Review at 4pm today. It is 68 pages long so I will just read out a couple of relevant paragraphs. "The Council has suffered a material prejudice as a result of the manner in which the Inspector dealt, unfairly in my judgement, with the application of a 10% lapse rate. It made the difference between whether or not the Council had demonstrated a 5 Year Supply of deliverable housing. For these reasons the Inspector's decision is quashed".

Finally, as some of you will be aware, we have had a matter ongoing for nine or ten years in Nine Mile Ride known as Pine Ridge Caravan Park and New Acres. These have been through a series of appeals, High Court reviews, Appeal Court reviews and eventually they have reached the end of the line. The final appeal decision has just been released. The latest appeal was a ten day public inquiry, held in November 2016 and March 2017. The relevant paragraph states that "For both sites, for the reasons given above, and having given account of all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeals should not succeed. I shall uphold the enforcement notice with variations and refuse to grant planning permission on the deemed application". This is the culmination of 12 years' work.

Chris Bowring – Executive Member for Highways and Transport

Civil Parking Enforcement begins in Wokingham Borough in early October. But this is much more than a transfer of responsibility for parking enforcement from the Police to the Council.

In recent years, the Police have not regarded enforcement as a top priority. The result is that parking has, in places, become a problem. Residents have been inconvenienced by people parking where they shouldn't. Even worse, this can be a danger to road safety and a cause of road congestion.

Under the new regime we will be more active in dealing with bad parking. But our watchword will be "reasonableness". We will not be clamping or towing vehicles away, at least not to begin with, and the traffic wardens (or "civil enforcement officers" as we are supposed to call them) will be polite and not over-zealous.

Our aim is to reduce the amount of bad parking in the Borough. The vast majority of drivers park sensibly. But those who don't, the serial offenders, should know that we intend stop their anti-social behaviour.

Philip Mirfin – Deputy Executive Member for Business and Economic Development and Regeneration

2017 has seen Wokingham's town centre regeneration moving firmly from the drawing board to delivery. Work started last June to build a brand new car park at the Carnival site

and, a year later, this facility is now complete on budget and helping to meet local parking needs. It is a great facility and is something that Wokingham should be proud of.

It is also the perfect backdrop for the new Carnival Phase 2 proposals which will see the rest of the Carnival site redeveloped with a brand-new sports, leisure and community concert hall facility for Wokingham that will give residents lots to do right here in Wokingham. The planning application is in the process of being submitted and people will be able to see these exciting plans very shortly.

As can be seen in the town centre, work at Peach Place is progressing quickly with the old 1960's parade long gone and the new units already beginning to take form along Peach Street as the steel frames are installed. Works will continue apace over the coming months with the remainder of the Rose Street façade stripped back and replaced, and buildings continuing to go up across the site.

The coming months will also see more work at Elms Field as the Council works with the preferred contractor, McLaughlin and Harvey, on essential works such as archaeological surveys and clearing the old Wellington House site in the run up to main construction works later this year. I'm also pleased to confirm we have agreed with McLaughlin and Harvey to minimise works around the main park this summer so the play area can remain open for families to use over the summer holidays.

I urge people to continue to support Wokingham Regeneration as we move forward with creating a better town for our existing residents and the many new residents that are moving into this area, along with the many new jobs.

29. STATEMENT FROM COUNCIL OWNED COMPANIES

Anthony Pollock – Chairman of Optalis Ltd

I would remind Members that on 3rd April 2017 the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead became a shareholder in our local authority trading company, Optalis, when it transferred its adult social care services into the company. This is the result of much work by our Council Officers, Directors and managers of Optalis and Members of this Council over the last 12-15 months.

It is a vote of confidence in the vision we had for Optalis when we set it up 6 or 7 years ago. We have successfully transformed the company from being a local authority department to a partner of choice for a neighbouring Local Authority. Consequently the company is now jointly owned by Wokingham Borough and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead with an operating budget of about £40m, which I expect to increase further by the end of the municipal year.

As colleagues will remember, since its inception Optalis has been delivering provider services to residents in Wokingham Borough and more recently sought and won contracts with other local authorities: Bracknell, Oxfordshire and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead for specific provider services and the company has sought to establish a foothold in the private sector.

The new partnership has resulted in Optalis, providing the full array of adult social care services for the Royal Borough, as well as provider services for Wokingham, contracted work in Slough, Bracknell and Oxfordshire and a limited level of private work. This array of

service provision places Optalis in a unique position as the only local authority trading company providing statutory adult social care services.

The company has revised its vision to accommodate this new development and set three strategic objectives. All of which align with both Councils' ambitions for delivering services which meet residents' needs. The strategic vision is that Optalis will be a bigger and more resilient Social Care Company, which has the flexibility to deliver a wider range of high quality services to residents, with the capacity to cope with increasing local demand, the efficiency to cope with diminishing resources and to be capable of further significant growth.

Over the next three years the focus will be on:

- Providing high quality adult social care services to residents of the two Boroughs;
- Delivering adult social care services that provide greater value for money but without compromising the quality of care;
- Growing the business by looking for other local authority partners.

As Councillor McGhee-Sumner stated, the company is currently recruiting a permanent Chief Executive, who will work with the two Councils to deliver our shared Vision, whilst seeking to draw more local authorities into the partnership.

Current financial results are on target for the first quarter with planned extra care projects which are coming on line in October within the agreed timelines. These projects are Birches and Fosters which are brand new Extra Care facilities in Wokingham and Woodley.

Alistair Auty – Wokingham Housing Ltd (WHL)

Mr Mayor, I am pleased to advise that the new Board of WHL is taking shape, with a new independent non-executive director having joined at the start of this month, to complement the MD, Bill Flood, and I as the other Board members.

Reiterating what Councillor McGhee-Sumner said earlier, I am also pleased to advise that Fosters, which will deliver 34 extra care homes and be managed by Loddon Homes, is on target for completion at the end of October as planned and to budget.

The Phoenix Avenue development is part way through completion, with 22 of the 68 homes already handed over and the others scheduled to be completed and handed over in phases between now and the end of October.

In total there is construction on-going at 7 WHL development sites across the Borough. Planning approval has also been secured for at an additional 4 development sites which will see a further 26 affordable homes delivered.

The first phase of Gorse Ride, which will see up to a further 44 affordable homes, is due to go to the Planning Committee in the near future.

Mr Mayor, it is a testament to the staff and Council officers that in total, WHL are anticipating the delivery of 118 affordable homes within the Borough during this financial year.

Finally, I would like to extend my thanks to Councillor John Jarvis and, particularly, to Councillor David Chopping for their contribution to WHL. I look forward to working with Councillor Chopping as Chairman of Berry Brook Homes, the new Council-owned company which, I am sure, will go from strength to strength.

Cllr David Chopping – Chairman of Berry Brook Homes Ltd

Before I start my update, I would like to make a comment on Andy Couldrick's departure. I sat on the Personnel Board which appointed him as Director of Children's Services and again when he became Chief Executive. He was the ideal candidate for both jobs. As Members we have to say a big thank you and wish him well in his future career.

My update is a report on behalf of Berry Brook Homes Ltd which is the Council's new housing company. I will also make a few comments on behalf of Councillor Cowan relating to Loddon Homes.

It is some 8 years since we started down the road to put together a Housing Investment Company. My original idea has grown from an idea on a single sheet of paper into a £30 million group of companies, building homes for Wokingham residents. Not just houses and flats for letting to those on the housing list but also building the Special Needs properties we could not, otherwise, have provided. Members will be aware that we now have residents moving in to their new homes, into quality properties that will provide for them well into future decades. Much more is to come.

Schemes are going through the various planning, contract and building stages and our current register of some 118 units should double in the next few years. We have the first Local Authority owned "for profit" Registered Provider and I am particularly proud of that achievement, as well. This company, Loddon Homes, is independent of Council control and operates within the required Homes and Communities Agency framework. In line with these guidelines I have stepped down from the company. There are two new independent directors and Councillor Kaiser has joined the Board. We wish them all well.

Whilst WHL, the original company, will carry out the initial development and construction work, they will pass on to Loddon any properties where grant aid is involved. The new company Berry Brook Homes, will be responsible for the management and future benefit of other developments.

This company will also have a majority of independent Non-Executive Directors, in Robin Roberts and Derek Cash who have already joined the Board in order to help us get up to speed quickly and deliver our objectives. We feel we now have a strong and experienced Board.

The first Berry Brook Homes Board meeting has also taken place with a number of key issues discussed and progressed in ensuring arrangements for governing and managing the company. We have a lot of work to do.

WBC Housing Services is to have a dedicated Housing Officer for Local Housing Company (LHC) work and, when employed, will enable us to manage everything effectively. Similarly, as the housing stock grows we will need to employ suitable staff to meet the opportunities coming our way as the Council becomes more commercial in its approach to the businesses.

30. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

30.1 Lindsay Ferris asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

The Meeting TV Screen at Shute End is not working. This is causing considerable confusion and some annoyance. When will this facility become available again?

Answer

This has been rectified and a solution has been implemented that displays key meeting rooms on one screen display negating the need to wait for the screens to scroll through. The booking of meeting rooms is now integrated with the Council's email system so Councillors can also view meeting room locations directly in their meeting invites.

Supplementary Question

Most of us will have seen the new screens and I don't think that they are fit for purpose. I am concerned, if this is part of an integration of computer systems, that we don't have any more hiccups relating to something that looks fairly simple to transfer across. So, can I ask will there be any other issues associated with dealing with this type of change?

Supplementary Answer

The short answer is, I hope, no.

30.2 Imogen Shepherd-DuBey asked the Executive Member for Environment, Sports, Environmental Health, Leisure and Libraries the following question:

Given recent tragic events around the country, our thoughts have moved to what would we do in these situations. I understand that Wokingham Borough Council has an Emergency Plan, but I have not seen any information on it. Isn't it time to have a Members' briefing on it?

Answer:

Wokingham Borough Council has in place a suite of Emergency Response Plans to meet the requirements of Emergency Risk Assessments carried out as part of the Council's Duties under the Civil Contingencies Act.

Emergency Risk Assessments are undertaken at the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum by the multi-agency partners. The Thames Valley Community Risk Register is available as a public document at:

www.thamesvalleylrf.org.uk

The Council's Emergency Plans are underpinned by an Emergency Response Team comprised of the Council's Emergency Planning Officers and supported by Officers at Gold (Strategic), Silver (Tactical) and Bronze (Operational) levels. The 21st Century Council project has allowed us to strengthen this arrangement by inserting Silver emergency team roles into Job Descriptions.

A robust training package ensures that Officers required to respond to emergencies are fully trained and competent in their role, and now the high level management structure is in place for 21st Century Council, a series of Silver level courses have been scheduled to ensure that our managers are fully trained.

We have an Emergency Operations Centre from which to manage such emergencies and a backup Emergency Operations Centre in case our primary venue is unavailable.

Our Out of Hours emergency call handler processes all of the Council's out of hours calls and has access to our Out of Hours manual and emergency rotas, so that they are able to activate them at any time.

In advance of recent terror attacks around the UK, the Council had developed a plan for a move to the Critical threat level and this included development of a Lockdown/Shelter Plan for the Shute End building. This plan is in the early stages of development though it is planned to complete the rollout by the end of autumn 2017.

An E-learning training package for elected Members is being developed by the Emergency Planning Officers of the six Berkshire councils with a view to providing a consistent training package for all elected Members across Berkshire. It is planned that this will be available towards the end of 2017.

Supplementary Question:

This is good information, but when are we likely to receive a briefing on it?

Supplementary Answer:

Two points. One, the information is available on the website. Two, specific training for Members is planned for later this year.

30.3 Gary Cowan asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

There are many examples where Members do not comment one way or another on planning applications and/or consultations in their own wards so what message does that send to residents and should they be encouraged to do so?

Answer

The Council receives over 3,000 planning applications each year and the relevant local ward Members are informed about each of these individually via an email that asks them to contact the allocated planning case officer if they have any concerns. As the majority of applications are for residential extensions and other minor proposals that have a limited impact, most do not generate resident and hence local Member concern, so in line with the consultation email, Members do not need to respond.

If, however, Members are concerned or are contacted by concerned residents, they are encouraged to contact the planning case officer to discuss the proposal, or if appropriate, to submit a listing request to trigger consideration and determination of more contentious applications by the full Planning Committee, rather than by delegated authority.

A Member response to every application would not necessarily be proportionate and I am content that Members use their own judgement when commenting on applications. They know their wards best and understand the planning proposals that will have the greatest potential impact on their communities.

Supplementary Question

The question did make reference to planning applications and/or consultations in Members' own wards. One of the advantages of being an independent Councillor is that one is not tied to a ruling party and the pressures that may come with that. This also, perhaps, explains why disgruntled residents contact me when they feel that they have

been let down by their elected Councillors. For example, Shinfield, where many of the residents have contacted me over Bridge Farm gravel extraction and the cement factory, 2,000 houses in Grazeley and continued problems with the Shinfield Bypass. Their biggest concerns relate to the fact that their elected Councillors did not reply or even acknowledge their concerns. Is there a message that Shinfield Councillors would like me to pass on to their residents when they get in touch with me?

Supplementary Answer provided by Councillor Charlotte Haitham Taylor

There are some very rare instances when Council Members may have declared an interest in a planning application, not on a consultation, in which instance it is appropriate within a ward, sometimes with one ward Member, for another Member to make comments or represent those residents. They can do that at a Planning Committee or at different dates through a consultation period. You are talking about gravel extraction so I will make a reference to that. I have consulted with Andrew Moulton (Monitoring Officer) about this particular issue and I have declared a non-prejudicial personal interest in it.

30.4 Philip Mirfin asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Many residents have for some long time complained about the, often, near misses that have occurred when walking on shared pavement areas with cyclists.

Indeed, in walking myself, along only a short stretch of Smiths Walk at Woosehill with my dog, I often encounter speeding cyclists who give the impression of owning that entire walkway and who cycle at high speeds with a total disregard for any unfortunate resident, young or old, that is also trying to share that space. These are mostly adult male cyclists but can also be school boys. Usually if it is suggested that they should respect other users and slow down you simply get a profanity in reply!

Despite all I have said, I am a big supporter of shared pedestrian cycle ways and this Council has invested millions in developing a network of them across our Borough for the enjoyment of all. This is being spoilt and lives are being put at risk from the rogue cycle users who bring shame on all cyclists, disrespect those walking and cycle at high speeds to and from work or school.

Indeed, despite there being a legal requirement that bikes should be sold with a bell or horn, few seem either to have them or at the very least wish to alert pedestrians of their presence.

So, what can the Council do to slow these cyclists down, educate them and ensure the safety of young and old pedestrians?

Answer

The Council carries out significant work to educate cyclists including the "Bikeability" training programme which is aimed at 10 to 11 year olds. Around 1,500 children are trained each year, before they go to secondary school. We aim to educate local cyclists to do the right thing from a young age. In the last 9 years we have educated over 11,300 children in Wokingham Borough.

Wokingham's Bikeability Team are recognised by DfT as being high achievers and are regularly cited as examples of best practice and asked to speak at national events on the effectiveness of the programme.

Cycling safety is also built into Wokingham's "My Journey" sustainable transport initiative, including travel planning advice given to new home owners in the Borough. Maps of cycle routes are provided as part of this initiative, which indicate the designated cycle routes across the Borough as we want our new residents to feel safe and to encourage transport behaviour change to include increased walking, cycling and use of public transport.

To compliment road safety education the Council has made best use of government grant and developer funding to deliver new cycle infrastructure, which is designed to encourage good transport behaviour, a recent example being the A329 cycle scheme.

The Council is also developing stronger partnership with Sustrans and, locally, the Reading Cycle Campaign. Both organisations do excellent work in promoting cycling and how to be safe while doing it. This includes being courteous to other road users.

A bell is not a legal requirement for cyclists. Some pedestrians think that cyclists using a bell are being rude or pushy demanding pedestrians get out of their way. There are many pages on the internet devoted to "bike bells" and how to use them; however as a Borough we do promote bell use for cyclists using shared facilities.

The message promoted by the Council for cyclists is to be safe, be courteous and to have respect for other highway users, and we hope as cycle use continues to grow in the Borough this will become universally embraced by all cyclists.

Supplementary Question

Are there any legal steps that can be taken by this Council against abusive speeding cyclists?

Supplementary Answer

In the case that you refer to, with the shared pedestrian cycleway facility, the safe operation is based on pedestrians and cyclists behaving in a considerate and courteous manner. It is a bit of a jump to go to legal action. You would need pretty strong evidence that a criminal offence had been committed in order to achieve fines and you would also require the Police to judge that it was criminal. Due to pressures on the police force I would suggest that any breach would need to be of a significant nature, with the necessary evidence or witnesses available in order to proceed.

30.5 Laura Blumenthal asked the Executive Member for Environment, Sports, Environmental Health, Leisure and Libraries the following question:

In light of survivors of the Grenfell Tower tragedy saying that they did not receive enough support directly after the disaster, how confident are we that our Council has a robust emergency plan to provide a significant number of residents with immediate shelter and support if needed?

Answer

Yes, we do have a plan. However, an emergency of that scale would test any single Local Authority, which is why Wokingham Borough Council has for over a decade annually reviewed and entered into formal and robust Mutual aid arrangements with the other five Berkshire Unitary Authorities.

I will give an overview of our arrangements for responding to a similar incident.

Wokingham Borough Council has an Emergency Response Team structured in such a way as to allow it to work alongside Emergency Service partners and a suite of emergency plans to cater for incidents such as Grenfell.

Our Rest Centre Plan is the plan we would activate to allow us to receive evacuees that have been made unintentionally homeless. Our largest single Rest Centre is Loddon Valley Sport Centre and this can cater for approximately 320 people (sleeping – seated capacity is nearer 1000). We have stocks of Evacuation equipment (airbeds, sleeping bags, pillows, toiletry kits) available to us sufficient to cater for approximately 100 in Wokingham, over 600 when combined with Reading Council's stocks and over 800 when combined with all the Council stocks across Berkshire.

The Council has robust numbers of trained staff at all levels. Further training in respect of Silver level is due to be delivered in September 2017 following the recent 21st Century Council appointments.

Wider ongoing support and aftercare for those affected by such an incident is the responsibility of individual Council services.

A reminder of the importance of planning to proactively support victims of such incidents is picked up regularly through the Council's Business Continuity Planning process.

Supplementary Question

Can you tell me how the emergency teams practice for the possibility of such events?

Supplementary Answer

This is done in a number of ways, such as table top exercises, live exercises and feedback/learning from real incidents. All of these are undertaken by single agencies and multi-agency working. A range of exercises and specific training programmes are arranged across these areas. The next table top exercise, for example, is to be held with the Fire and Rescue service hosting. That will provide an opportunity to address some of the issues relating to evacuees. The next major training exercise relevant to the Grenfell incident will be a multi-agency mass fatality training session, scheduled for September 2017.

30.6 Alison Swaddle asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

The Council has been running the pilot car parking charges scheme in Woodley for nearly a year. Can the Executive Member provide an update on when the results of the comparison against the Borough-wide system will be available?

Answer

The "Woodley Car Parking trial" has been running from September 2016 and is due to expire at the end of September 2017, when it would revert to the Sunday and Evening charging that operates elsewhere in the Borough.

Before making a permanent decision on car parking in Woodley it is essential the data from the trial has been available for a full year, to show seasonal variations. The data collection and analysis has a 2-3 month lag period. Therefore, this takes us to the end of 2017 before an informed decision could be made.

As you are aware Civil Parking Enforcement is programmed to "go live" across the

borough from October 2017. The associated improved parking enforcement will reduce congestion, improve road safety, and is likely to have an impact on the parking behaviour of Wokingham Borough's residents, commuters and shoppers. The impact of Civil Parking Enforcement is unlikely to be available until the end of 2018.

Due to the timescales above it is likely that the Council will look to extend the current Woodley car parking trial at the Executive committee in September until the end of 2018. That is a decision for the Executive, but I hope that my colleagues will agree with that assessment.

Supplementary Question

Can you assure me that the impact on Woodley car park revenues of the Traveller incursions, referred to by Councillor Baker when presenting the petition, will be taken into consideration?

Supplementary Answer

Yes, of course it will be. It would be an invalid comparison if we did not do that.

Due to time constraints, the following questions were not put and received written answers as set out below.

30.7 Alistair Auty asked the Executive Member for Business and Economic Development and Regeneration the following question:

Can the Executive Member provide an update on the regeneration works on Peach Street?

Answer

January 9th this year saw Dawnus Construction Limited start work on delivering Peach Place for the Council in line with the programme.

Since then work has continued to progress well and over the last six months we've complete the following

- Strip out the buildings across the site including the removal of asbestos and disconnection of utility services;
- Demolish the existing Peach Street buildings and undertake party wall works to the adjacent buildings, the Redan and Costa;
- Work closely with utility companies to achieve the re-routing and connection of power, water and telecoms services;
- Pour the foundations for the new Peach Street buildings;
- And, just last week, we've started erecting the steelwork of the buildings fronting Peach Street.

This has all been managed with minimum disruption to the town centre. We continue to set ourselves ambitious targets, such as getting the Peach Street lane restriction removed within 15 weeks and continuing to keep Rose Street open for two way traffic whilst works are carried out to services, and we continue to achieve them successfully.

We fully expect to achieve our target of Peach Place being completed ready for Christmas next year.

As can be seen from the hoardings around the site, Peach Place will be a great new destination for Wokingham.

We will be bringing great new retailers and restaurants to the town centre, improving the offer for local residents and visitors, with better variety and choice of shops and new places to relax with friends and family, away from traffic and benefitting from outdoor seating. We're in negotiations with some great companies which I know local residents will be excited to see come to Wokingham and I'm looking forward to sharing more in the coming months.

We're also creating the kind of outdoor space which will be perfect for expanding existing events like local markets and specialist markets along with the Fayres and Carnivals that bring so many people to town.

But it's not just about what we're doing to improve the experience of people coming to Wokingham. It's also about the other benefits the Peach Place scheme brings such as

- the creation of new jobs, with over 50 new construction jobs and over 100 new permanent jobs in the retail and restaurants at Peach Place alone
- New homes that will bring around £700k per year additional spend into the local economy and help create a safer and more vibrant location, as well as helping deliver the regeneration at no cost to the tax payer
- £358k in contributions towards local infrastructure such as schools and leisure
- Circa £1.5m a year in rental income which can be used to help fund projects and services for residents across the Borough for years to come

Benefits like these, and more, are echoed across our regeneration proposals. At Elms Field and Carnival too.

Personally, I can't wait for the scheme to be finished and am pleased to see so much progress on site.

This is about delivering the town centre Wokingham, its residents and its businesses deserve. A great future for a Wokingham that exceeds expectations rather than struggles to meet them.

30.8 Abdul Loyes asked the Executive Member for Adults' Services, Health, Wellbeing and Housing the following question:

Does the Executive Member support the Government's proposals to ban landlords and letting agents from forcing tenants to pay letting fees as a condition of their tenancy?

Answer

The Council welcomes the proposals to remove fees and cap the deposit payable by prospective tenants. Private rental accommodation in Wokingham Borough is limited in supply and expensive for tenants, so these measures should improve affordability. As a Council, we often have to assist our more vulnerable residents (for example, those facing homelessness) access private rented accommodation through the provision of interest-free loans to cover these upfront costs.

As with any new policy, we will monitor its impact locally when the measures take effect to see if there are any unintended consequences. For example, where supply is so

constrained, it is possible that landlords will try to pass the additional costs on through higher rents. With lower deposits, landlords may also become more risk adverse when selecting tenants, which could further restrict the supply of private rented homes available to those on benefits. We hope that this will not be the case in Wokingham Borough and these new measures will help residents access the private rented sector.

30.9 Malcolm Richards asked the Executive Member for Finance, 21st Century Council, Internal Services and Human Resources the following question:

Can the Executive Member explain what training, including use of the IT systems, will be available on 21st Century Council for Members and staff?

Answer

Staff within Phase One went through an extensive 6 week transition programme this included attending training (where relevant) on a number of new IT systems, a launch event and several meetings with their line manager.

In addition to this all budget managers are currently being trained on the new budget management software over the coming weeks

Floorwalkers were present during the first week of go live and a network of staff (Super users) have been given extra support and training to help people over the coming weeks/months. This approach will be replicated during Phase 2 of the programme.

Training for Councillors is being developed in conjunction with the relevant officer/councillor groups and will be ongoing over the life of the programme. Initially there is a round of briefing sessions for Councillors to better understand the programme and there will be a number of drop in sessions focussing on accessing Office365 (email, calendar and contacts) and the resident self-service portal on 20th and 26th July.

30.10 Clive Jones asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

What is the process used to decide which roads in the Borough are resurfaced, including how the work is scheduled, how these decisions are recorded and reported, and when this process was last updated?

Answer

As promoted by Government, and following the adoption at Executive of Wokingham's Highways Asset Management Policy and Strategy in 2016, roads for treatment are determined from technical highway assessment surveys and analysis, which produce an annual programme of roads for treatment on an annual basis.

The annual programme is designed to undertake sensitive roadworks during school holiday periods when there is reduced traffic; the remaining roads are programmed over the remainder of the year and agreed in advance with the Council's contractors to ensure resources are available.

As Executive Member for Highways and Transport I have sight of this programme before it is published; and support this technical approach which ensures the roads that are most in need are given the appropriate treatment; ensuring value for money for Wokingham's residents and businesses.

31. MINUTES OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS AND WARD MATTERS

31.1 Beth Rowland asked the Executive Member for Environment, Sports, Environmental Health, Leisure and Libraries

Question

My residents are asking about Bulmershe Pool. They would like to know what is happening?

Answer

The project is currently in the planned development stage.

31.2 Clive Jones asked the Executive Member for Environment, Sports, Environmental Health, Leisure and Libraries

Question

Earlier this year I asked several questions of the then Executive Member for Environment about Re3's charges for DIY waste. A resident in my ward has recently asked if these charges are still in operation. Two junior Ministers and a Cabinet Minister have stated that there should not be charges for DIY waste. Just before the previous Leader of the Council resigned he indicated in the press that he was willing to ask Officers to suspend these charges. Nothing has happened since the General Election. When will the charges be suspended?

Answer

A large number of people have expressed opinions on this issue including some members of the Government and MPs. The advice we are getting is that the situation is not clear. We are expecting the Government to publish a policy statement. Once we have that policy statement we will review our charging position. In the meantime the charges will continue.

31.3 Michael Firmager asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport

Question

In my ward, Hawkedon, most of the roads were built in the early 1980s and are now in need of repair. I read in the newspapers that there is a sum of £1bn to be handed over to Councils to upgrade crumbling roads. Unfortunately, I understand that this money will not be available until 2020. Would the Executive Member for Highways and Transport agree with me that an appropriate amount of this money be used to repair the roads in my ward?

Answer

Dividing up the roads programme on a ward by ward basis would be contrary to effective highways asset management, promoted by the Government and adopted by the Council's Executive in 2016. Not targeting investment where it is most needed across the Borough would not deliver value for money for Wokingham's residents and businesses.

Technical assessments, including road scanning machines combined with visual assessments by qualified engineers ensures parity in relation to the best use of the Council's overall maintenance resources. Any additional funding made available for road maintenance from Central Government would be gratefully received by Wokingham Borough Council.

In the meantime, I am happy to accompany Councillor Firmager and the other ward Members in looking at the roads in Hawkedon that are causing concern.

31.4 Anthony Pollock asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport Question

Reading University borrowed £28m from Central Government, as an advance against Section 106 contributions in the Shinfield SDL, in order to build the Eastern Relief Road for Shinfield village. The project is now over 12 months late and there has been a recent discovery of flooding in the new road, near the University bridge. Have the technical issues causing this flooding been resolved and when will remedial works start?

Answer

A solution to the groundwater problem has been agreed between the works promoter, Reading University, their agents, Hochtief, and the Council. The Council will take over the new road once it is finally completed. Works commenced at the beginning of June 2017.

Reading University have since communicated that the works will be completed in August 2017. Based on past performance, the Council lacks confidence that Reading University will deliver on this timeline. Only when the Council is satisfied with the condition of the entire relief road will an opening date be communicated by the University. Only then will the route be open and fit for purpose.

31.5 Imogen Shepherd-Dubey asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport Question

A cycle lane is being constructed on the Reading Road in Emmbrook. This is currently dangerous for cyclists and is causing concern amongst residents due to the ongoing building works which affect traffic going into and out of town. Can you update us on the date when the works will be finished?

Answer

The Reading Road Cycle Way scheme commenced on time as per the initial communication to Members, local businesses and residents. The scheme has fallen behind schedule. The bus shelter which had to be relocated had a Scottish and Southern Electric (SSE) board connection rather than a Council connection which would normally be expected to power a bus shelter. This unforeseen issue caused a three week delay while the Council waited for SSE to disconnect the shelter to enable its relocation. SSE were unwilling to attend the site earlier. This led to some modification of the programme to enable progress. However, the contractor fell behind the programme slightly. As the project proceeds the contractor is endeavouring to catch up with the original programme.

Affected businesses were informed well in advance of the works. Regrettably, to implement a large improvement scheme on the network, funded by Central Government in this case, local residents, businesses and motorists will have to deal with some disruption while the works are under way. I can confirm that the Council intends to keep disruption to a minimum as it does on all highways projects.

Yesterday, I had an update which is that the project is now on track and progressing as per the programme. There are still some parts of the scheme that require attention. The bus stop at Emmbrook is not finished due to a broken kerb stone. This is a large "Kessel" kerb used to bring the levels up to meet the entrance of a bus. We hope that these works can take place next week. After that Queensbury will install the shelter. I am not sure about your comments on safety so I would be grateful if you could let me have more details.

31.6 Keith Baker asked the Executive Member for Adults' Services, Health, Wellbeing and Housing

Question

For some time now the grant of £15k to Woodley Town Centre Management Initiative (TCMI) has been built into the base budget. Recently, the Town Centre Manager has been called in to explain how this money is invested and what return the town receives. Whilst he has done this before, and will do so again, he has not been required to do this for several years. In the last few months several additional millions have been committed through the Wokingham regeneration project at the same time as the grant to the TCMI appears to be questioned.

Can I ask the Executive Member to provide reassurance that this is merely a new process and that the £15k grant to the TCMI is not at risk?

Answer

The Woodley TCMI has been supported by Wokingham Borough Council to help maintain a successful town centre in Woodley, making it attractive for retailers, businesses, residents and the general public. The aspirations of the Woodley TCMI complement Wokingham Borough Council's Economic Development Strategy which aims to create a place where businesses thrive.

Wokingham Borough Council contributes £15k, as Councillor Baker has said, towards the cost of employing the Woodley Town Centre Manager. This is paid as part of the Economic Development budget. Wokingham Borough Council is a member of the Management Committee responsible for the policy and direction of the Woodley TCMI plan. The Committee oversees the expenditure of funds and the annual budgets. The Borough's Economic Development Officer also supports the Woodley Town Centre Manager in relation to various projects and initiatives. The Woodley TCMI and Town Centre Manager create a more dynamic town centre through various activities, events and markets. The Town Centre Manager ensures effective communication between traders, residents and other official bodies in the town centre.

The Woodley TCMI grant is reviewed annually, in line with other grants, and has to demonstrate value for money for Council Taxpayers. The Woodley grant will be reviewed in line with other grants. We do not foresee it changing at the present time, but it does need to deliver value for money and a return on our investment. That is why the Town Centre Manager was called in.

31.7 Laura Blumenthal asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement

Question
Residents on the Cala Homes development are deeply disappointed that a marketing suite has been built by Cala without planning permission where they had promised to build a play park. Please can you explain what the Council is doing to ensure that the planning procedure is followed and the play park does get built?

Answer

Once the issue of the construction of the marketing and sales suite by Cala Homes, without the benefit of planning permission, was brought to the Council's attention, Officers acted quickly to prevent further development and prevented it from being brought into use. A planning application was submitted and is currently under consideration. In view of the

earlier questions, I would encourage ward Members to comment on that application if they so wish. The marketing suite is to be located in an open area not intended for the play park equipment and it is to be landscaped as open space.

The Council has been advised that the play equipment was ordered at the beginning of July as requested by Council Officers. Cala will push for it to be delivered at the earliest possible time, hopefully before the eight week lead in time, but they are in the hands of the manufacturers. They will remove the unsightly hoarding between the open space and the proposed marketing suite and will also commence the preparation works for the play area prior to the delivery of the play equipment so that it can be installed as soon as it is delivered to the site.

31.8 Ian Pittock asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport Question

Many of my residents eagerly await the installation of a safe route to Bohunt School. Improvements under way to the footway down the Nine Mile Ride are welcomed by the wider community. Likewise the cycle route using the greenway under construction between my ward and Barkham is also welcome for a variety of purposes. However, many residents will not recognise this as a safe route to school given that it is a country route and increasingly looks like it will not be lit in the winter months.

Many children will cycle down the improved Nine Mile Ride footway rather than walk it. Will the Council address the issue of land illegally acquired by residents so that the improved Nine Mile Ride footway can be upgraded further to incorporate cycle usage? It will take a couple of years to be completed but, to date, it is a process that the Executive have been too frightened to start. For how long will the Executive put the assumed Tory votes along the Nine Mile Ride before the safety of the wider community's children?

Answer

The route down the Nine Mile Ride to the Bohunt School is a safe walking route to school. I appreciate the desire of some residents in Finchampstead to have a cycle route. That is still under consideration and, as you point out, there have been difficulties caused by residents' encroachment onto Nine Mile Ride.

31.9 Barrie Patman asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport Question

My question relates to the remodelling of the bus gate at Tabby Drive and Basingstoke Road in Three Mile Cross. Nothing seems to have started on this. It was scheduled to have been completed 15 months ago. Please can I have an update?

Answer

I am pleased to report that both the initial feasibility and detailed design work for this scheme have recently been completed by Officers. We are in discussion with our highways contractors, their traffic signal suppliers and the network management team to find a three week window to carry out the work. Due to the level of activity already booked on the highway network over coming months this is proving difficult. However, it is a priority and we hope to complete the scheme this calendar year.

31.10 Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport Question

Question

In relation to Simons Lane which runs from Winnersh into Emmbrook, when is it going to

be paved?

Answer

I will look into that and provide an answer outside the meeting.

31.11 David Chopping asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport Question

In the storms earlier this week one and a half inches of rain fell on Maiden Erlegh in under an hour. This caused major problems on local roads. Can you advise on the expenditure on the roads in Earley over the last five years and can you specify how much has been spent in Maiden Erlegh in that time?

Answer

In the last five years £2.1m has been spent in Earley town (the three wards) and £1.2m in Maiden Erlegh ward.

32. MOTIONS

32.1 Motion 397 submitted by Lindsay Ferris:

In accordance with Section 4.2.13.8 of the Constitution (Alteration of Motion) Lindsay Ferris requested that the Motion set out in the Agenda be altered to add the words highlighted below:

“This Council expresses its thanks to the Police, Ambulance and Fire Services for their professional and dedicated actions arising from the recent terrorist attacks and the terrible fire at Grenfell Tower in North Kensington.

The Council will lobby the Government, **where appropriate, and in consultation with the Fire Authority and other relevant Bodies**, to ensure these vital emergency services receive the necessary funding and resources, **and take on board any necessary changes to practice**, to meet their increased obligations arising from such events”.

Upon being put to the vote, the altered Motion was accepted and became the substantive Motion for debate.

The Motion was proposed by Councillor Ferris and seconded by Councillor Haitham Taylor.

During the debate Members commented on the outstanding bravery and professionalism demonstrated by the emergency services in a number of recent high profile incidents. The impact of public sector pay restraint, as discussed earlier in the meeting, was also highlighted in relation to recruitment and retention issues for key services.

Members noted that the specific areas for lobbying activity would become clearer once the initial findings of the Grenfell Inquiry were made public.

Following debate and upon being put to the vote, the substantive Motion was declared by the Mayor to be carried.

RESOLVED: This Council expresses its thanks to the Police, Ambulance and Fire Services for their professional and dedicated actions arising from the recent terrorist attacks and the terrible fire at Grenfell Tower in North Kensington.

The Council will lobby the Government, where appropriate, and in consultation with the Fire Authority and other relevant Bodies, to ensure these vital emergency services receive the necessary funding and resources, and take on board any necessary changes to practice, to meet their increased obligations arising from such events.

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